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Renegotiating the Heroine: Postfeminism on the Speculative Screen

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Abstract

This thesis examines postfeminism as a multi-faceted cultural phenomenon and considers its lasting impact on understandings of girlhood. Its particular focus is a discussion of speculative fiction texts (literature, television series and films) oriented towards young adults, pursuing the idea that, in the postfeminist context, girl heroes are ideally placed to imagine both the future and the past. Considering the striking popularity of speculative fiction centrally featuring girls, and often addressed to them, this thesis considers the central concerns of postfeminism as it has been conceived in feminist criticism since the 1990s from a contemporary perspective.

This thesis offers three key hypotheses: first, that speculative fiction offers a privileged space in which gender identity is interrogated, most often with a central focus on girls; second, that postfeminism marks a cultural shift in which some key elements of feminism are integrated with the culture industry and thus available to be consumed in forms that especially appeal to girls in a complex and at times problematic way; and third, that our contemporary understanding of girlhood as a concept and girls as a category also crucially changed during this period, heavily influenced by media representations of postfeminism. Built on these hypotheses is a thesis that discourse surrounding postfeminism is currently shifting, and issues traditionally associated with postfeminism are being reconsidered within contemporary media.

The thesis examines recent popular films such as the *Twilight* films and *The Hunger Games* and popular science fiction and fantasy television series, including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Orphan Black*, and *Once Upon a Time*. It also pays particular attention to current adaptations of texts key to girl culture, such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and Disney princess films, to reflect on differences in the way these texts understand both contemporary girlhood and the impact of feminism. It understands these texts as responding to, and producing a contemporary commentary on, crucial feminist issues that themselves centre on ideas about girlhood, including risk, sexuality and desire, and the 'postfeminist masquerade'. Discussion of contemporary popular culture enables this thesis to historicise feminist representation of girls relative to these issues during the 1980s and 90s. The primary objective of the thesis is to contextualize the popularity of speculative fiction within a changing popular discourse of girlhood and, more specifically, feminist girlhood.

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Introduction: The Postfeminist Fantasy

I'm not the pretty, fucking helpless princess in distress. I'm pretty fucking powerful, and ready for success!

–FCKH8.com, “Potty-Mouthed Princesses Drop F-Bombs for Feminism”

A popular BuzzFeed Column, published in December, 2014, lists “22 Powerful Moments That Made You Proud To Be A Feminist In 2014” (Heasley and Chirico). Among them are activist successes such as seventeen-year-old Pakistani girl Malala Yousafzai being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, viral media trends like the #YesAllWomen campaign, publications such as *Bad Feminist* (2014) by Roxane Gay, and the video featured above, in which little girls dressed as princesses delivered speeches laden with swear words about the stereotypes girls encounter today. But the overwhelming majority of these “powerful moments” are times when feminist principles were seen to leak into popular culture: Beyonce or Taylor Swift laying claim to the title of ‘feminist’; female gamers or science-fiction writers rising above institutional inequalities; and TV series transgressing gender norms. These moments happen on our screens, in our playlists, and in our gossip magazines, and together the assembled list suggests that Beyonce, Gay, and Yousafzai all exist, as feminist representatives, on the same continuum of visibility.

Many if not most accounts of political activism by girls would focus on the kind of exceptional impact on a public sphere exemplified by Yousafzai; moments that exceed the everyday, embodied feminism that scholarship and media culture suggests is also taking place across various forms of popular culture and within the everyday lives of its audience of girls as well as women. But such a BuzzFeed list doesn’t make this distinction, nor does it even offer a spectrum along which feminism becomes more political as it becomes less continuous with a public sphere. Thus, we might use this list to exemplify a now widely established integration of

certain elements of feminism, and certain kinds of feminist voices, into the broadly accessible field of mass produced popular culture. This recognition is key to the debates surrounding the concept of ‘postfeminism.’ The accomplishments of feminist scholars and politicians are undeniably important and influential, as feminist representations, in ways that popular culture cannot be. But it is equally clear that popular cultural productions—such as music, film, television, or novels—are powerful transmitters of political ideas, including feminist discourse. This thesis is interested in exploring the ways that popular culture shapes ideas about what it means, in the current cultural moment, to be a feminist; and, particularly, what it means to be a feminist *girl*. My investigation of popular texts is built on the premise that a range of specifically feminist concerns are being raised and discussed within popular culture today, and that the presumed audience for these representations clearly includes, and is even often centered on, girls. These are the connections and overlaps—between feminism and the media, between the media and girls—that I want to describe as ‘postfeminist.’

Decades of scholarship now attest to the difficulty of defining postfeminism. Considering the breadth of popular cultural texts available that represent ideas about gender that have been affected by the visible successes of feminism and by, just as clearly, the ongoing struggles of feminism, and considering also the ambiguities inherent in the word ‘feminism,’ it is necessary to define the terms of my inquiry more narrowly. I am specifically interested in discovering the ways in which feminism as a concept is made accessible to girls through popular cultural representations of postfeminist girlhood. Although it has been a widely debated concept, as I will discuss below, postfeminism is now most commonly used as a name for the often contradictory representations of feminist principles in mainstream popular culture. Most accounts of postfeminism, moreover, specifically link such representations to an audience of girls and young

women, and also centrally focus on how *girls are represented* within media culture. As a critical starting point for my thesis, then, postfeminism is a phenomenon informed and cultivated by popular media, and distributed for the consumption of girls in a way that previous ‘waves’ of feminism were not. This change is partly a product of technological shifts making popular media more widely accessible to girls, but is also a product of a widespread reimagining of girls as a target market (I will discuss the latter further below).

This introduction will specifically focus on the emergence of ideas about postfeminism in relation to representations associated with the ‘Girl Power’ movement in a period from the late 1980s to the early 2000s. I will look at a range of specific issues emphasized by feminist political activism in this period, including reproductive rights, consumer citizenship, and girls and women ‘at risk’—a term associated both with the threat of sexual violence and cycles of disadvantage—and discuss how they are being reinterpreted and renegotiated for (predominantly young and predominantly female) audiences in the early twenty-first century. I also want to further limit my analysis to one particular field of cultural texts: the contemporary trend towards speculative popular fiction, often aimed specifically at young adults and often specifically at girls.

The reasons for this emphasis require some discussion, and I will return to the usefulness of speculative fiction for a future-directed politics like feminism below, but some prefatory notes on the type of texts I will discuss in this thesis are warranted. Speculative fiction is a category which brings together many different kinds of ‘fantasy’ or non-realist popular fiction across different media, from imaginative stories designed for children to science fiction action dramas. All of the texts I discuss at length in this thesis are internationally distributed Anglophone fictions, and while my examples include texts from England, Canada and the United States, they are predominantly American in origin. This is, of course, also an assessment in itself of the kinds

of girlhood popularized by an international ‘Western’ market. The spectacular images of girls I discuss here are also consistently white, able-bodied, and either actively heterosexual or at least not actively homosexual or queer. This echoes a ubiquitous fantasy of ideal girlhood prevalent in mass-produced popular Western media, and the inherent problem of imagining girls in relation to such hegemonically ideal figures will be discussed further in later chapters. But the fact that the spectacular speculative girl hero does not represent *girls* as a whole does not make a critical examination of these texts unimportant. As I will discuss further below, popular speculative novels, films and television series make limited but important claims to represent the real world. These various forms of popular speculative media are often creative spaces in which current issues are approached in ways accessible to young audiences, and while the key characters may not physically resemble the diverse body of possible young female viewers and readers, broad anxieties about girlhood as it is experienced and understood outside the text are mapped onto them. The aim of this thesis is to examine how these texts may lay claim to, subvert, or even propagate certain postfeminist images of girlhood—and to consider what this might mean for the relationship between feminism and contemporary girlhood.

Interrogating Postfeminism

In order to flesh out this line of inquiry, and before introducing the speculative texts with which I will be working, it is first necessary to attempt a task that often seems impossible: defining postfeminism. Although I have ventured a broad contemporary consensus about this term above, it is unavoidably very general, and within that broad definition there remain many openings for sometimes heated disagreement. The term postfeminism is inconsistently and variously used to describe a scholarly line of study, a reaction against feminism, or a synonym for the ‘third wave’

of feminism. It is also used most literally to imagine the contemporary Western world as being one that comes after (*is post*) the emergence of feminism. Together these conceptions of postfeminism can all be further differentiated according to whether they understand feminism to be a completed or an ongoing project; whether they understand contemporary culture and society to be visibly shaped by the impact and presence of feminism; or whether they further contend that in contemporary culture and society all the central goals of feminism have been accomplished and feminist activism is no longer necessary. For my purposes in this thesis, postfeminism is centrally a media discourse and a popular cultural phenomenon, but it is one constantly engaged with many of these other propositions. I will therefore attempt to assemble my own history of the term and its employment in this introduction.

Before postfeminism emerged as a media discourse, it was used, as Andi Zeisler suggests, to distinguish a form of “feminist theory that was based largely on the idea of gender as a practice rather than an essential facet of one’s existence” (116). That is, postfeminism at this point named something like the questioning of gender identity that has come to be associated with Judith Butler’s idea of gender performativity. But when postfeminism appeared as a term within popular media and one used to describe popular media, it was quite a different concept. According to Zeisler, postfeminism was used in the media “not to talk about the continuing ways that feminism was a necessary and mobilizing force in women’s lives, but to brush off feminism as a movement that had outlived its usefulness” (116).

Across the 1990s a deluge of media discourse on postfeminism appeared, amounting to what Jennifer Pozner called “False Feminist Death Syndrome” (31). Magazine and newspaper articles, TV pundits and popular writers declared left and right that the feminist movement was over. While some identified this as a backlash against feminism (Faludi 1991), media

representations of the selfishness of the modern 'feminist' also proliferated. A now infamous 1998 *Time* cover story, "Is Feminism Dead?", featuring an image of fictional TV lawyer Ally McBeal, opened to an article entitled "It's All About Me." Author Ginia Bellafante describes the postfeminist characters of the late 1990s as, instead, "pseudo-feminist," epitomized by characters such as McBeal, as "flighty" and self-obsessed, with nothing more on her mind than self-promotion. Bellafante goes on to describe the contemporary feminist rhetoric around her as "so much spin" and to herald the death of the last true wave of feminism: Riot Grrrl (56).

Riot Grrrl merits separate discussion here, constituting a popular cultural manifestation of feminism for girls held, perhaps uniquely, to be credible by both girl culture and feminist politics. This aggressive, young intellectual feminist movement, anarchic and outspoken, was at its peak in the early 1990s. Riot Grrrl performers, writers, and poets had a distinctly politicized message that said feminism was very much alive for young women—and the fact that they identified themselves as girls was a central part of this political discourse. "We... seek to create revolution in our own lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit Christian capitalist way of doing things," stated Kathleen Hanna in her 1992 "Riot Grrrl Manifesto." Hanna called here for a "sense of community" among girls, for the growth of "girl scenes and girl artists of all kinds," and for a rebellion against "a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak" (395-96). Here was a feminism continued, built explicitly for and by girls. According to Marion Leonard, by 1993 there were over one hundred self-identified Riot Grrrl 'zine' publications aimed at supporting young women's autonomy and agency within their daily lives, and forty-seven new bands identifying as Riot Grrrl in 1993 alone (233). While *Ms.* Magazine had emerged as revolutionary in its time as the first "real" women's magazine, a triumphant outcome of second-wave mobilization, Riot Grrrl was using the media and pop

culture not as an end but as the central means to construct an activist community. In this and other ways Riot Grrrl laid a foundation for the later media adoption of the slogan ‘Girl Power’—a slogan at the time identified with Riot Grrrl even if few Riot Grrrls used it—and also for the association of postfeminism with an emphasis on girls’ individual choices. Leonard argues that Riot Grrrl politics was one “of personal achievement and empowerment rather than of solid movement policy and goals” (252).

Ironically, the Riot Grrrls’ rejection of particular kinds of mainstream media-friendly self-promotion seems to have finally undermined their revolution. Anna Feigenbaum writes that

As mainstream media got hold of Riot Grrrl the grrrls lost control of their words and actions. The grassroots movement became a spectacle, the focus quickly shifted from reports on the feminist content and production values espoused by Riot Grrrls to features on their punk fashion sensibilities (132-33).

In response, the Riot Grrrls, or at least the subsection of them centred on Hanna and her band Bikini Kill, called for a media blackout (Zeisler 107). Their refusal to continue publicly commenting on their politics, for themselves or on behalf of Riot Grrrl as a movement, facilitated their disappearance from popular media debates about contemporary feminism. While Leonard points out that their efforts to subvert any kind of institutionalization was also what allowed them to remain dynamic—and this, she claims, was a great strength of the movement—this refusal, paradoxically, makes Riot Grrrl a difficult subject for analysis or even periodization. “Riot Grrrls,” Leonard writes, “did not offer clear symbols which could be extracted, thus undermining their subcultural currency” (246). But the mainstream media, while struggling to categorize the Riot Grrrls, still managed to identify in the movement, as Bellafante put it, “an effort... to reclaim the brash, bratty sense of self-control that psychologists claim girls lose just

before puberty” (117). It is exactly this sentiment that resonates throughout the later Girl Power campaigns.

Somewhere from amid the extremes of media claims that ‘feminism is dead’ and the grass roots organization of the Riot Grrls came the Third Wave feminist movement. Building on the second wave tenet that ‘the personal is political,’ ‘Third Wave’ feminists politicized everyday lifestyle choices in ways that clearly departed from the unifying aims of ‘Second-Wave’ feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, often representing this previous movement as overbearingly opposed to the pleasures of women and girls and as fundamentally “unfeminine” (Douglas 103). In publications such as Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake’s *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (1997), young women who identified with the ‘Third Wave’ label often wanted to disassociate themselves from capital-F feminism, while still wanting to be represented as confident, independent, and liberated. The Third Wave, sometimes still with reference to its Riot Grrrl precursors and peers, also opened up a space for a new kind of feminism with a title that courted controversy within the feminist movement: *girlie* feminism.

Girlie (or girly) feminism was centered on reclaiming the pleasure of the feminine for feminists—insisting that it was now possible to enjoy core elements of feminized fashion and beauty culture, such as high heels and make-up, without the guilt once inscribed upon such commodified forms of femininity. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, representing this agenda in “Feminism and Femininity, or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong,” argue that “Second-wave feminists fought so hard for all women not to be *reduced* to a ‘girl’—they didn’t lay claim to the good in being a girl” (61). Therefore, they conclude, it is the duty of the Third Wave feminist to rise up and claim girliness as her right, along with health care, equal pay, and contraception. With Girlie culture came a reclamation of “prizing,

acknowledging, or valuing the ‘feminine,’ be it the domestic sphere, being a mom, or a talent for adornment” (65). Importantly, this shift within feminism made explicit a re-branding of the word ‘girl,’ so that it could denote both “the ten-year-old with skinned knees [and] the thirty-five-year-old with the vibrator” (67). While certainly ‘girl’ had long been used to denote single females well into adulthood, at this time ‘girls’ became, far more pervasively, a category attached less to age than to attitudes and lifestyle choices. This open interpretation of what it means to be a girl continues to inform our use of the terms ‘girl’ and ‘girlhood.’ It is important for my purposes here to demarcate the (often fine) line between ‘Third Wave’ and the postfeminist phenomenon which followed. While they have converged and impacted upon each other as concepts, Stephanie Genz (2006) is careful to stipulate that the Third Wave represented itself as “a political movement that depends on a close dialogue with second wave feminism and its organized opposition to women’s exclusion and oppression” (8) while postfeminism originated “in and from a number of contexts (academia, media and consumer culture) that have been influenced by feminist concerns and women’s social enfranchisement” (9). Its disassociation from any organized political movement or ideology is crucial to my definition of postfeminism as located within and produced by media culture. However, it is important to note that the centrality of the figure of the girl to some branches of the Third Wave undoubtedly influenced one of the major ‘tenets’ of postfeminism: Girl Power.

Girls: Risk and Power

Despite the differences evident between the ‘girly’ness of the Third Wave, the aggressive confidence of Riot Grrl, and the self-interested self-consciousness of the postfeminist media scapegoat, dominant forms of mass media prioritised a single motto to describe them all. ‘Girl

Power' now seems inextricable from our popular conception of postfeminism. Although the term originated in the era of Riot Grrrl, it entered the mainstream lexicon when it became the key concept of a 1996 U.S. Health and Human Services campaign to promote girl self-assurance. In an article about the program's launch, Melissa Lauber cites *Reviving Ophelia* (1994), Mary Pipher's influential book on girl adolescence, as "a handbook of the times" (par. 10). Lauber aligns Pipher's famous argument that pubescent girls are "saplings in a hurricane" (qtd. in Lauber par. 10) with a 1995 HHS study which supported the need for the campaign with statistics about the increasing likelihood of girls smoking cigarettes, trying marijuana and alcohol, experimenting with sex, and attempting suicide. She also quotes Donna E. Shalala, then secretary of HHS, on the serious portent of this study:

"Too many girls are taking dangerous chances with the only lives they will ever have. We hope to reach girls at this key transitional age when they are forming their values and attitudes. Our job as caring adults is to help girls build confidence and pursue opportunities," Shalala said.

Explaining the need for this program, Shalala cited reports that "nearly half of all American adolescents are at high or moderate risk of seriously damaging their life chances." (qtd. in Lauber par. 4-5)

It is clear, then, that Girl Power has, from the start, been inherently linked to a rhetoric of girls as objects at risk.

Sarah Projansky points to several sites of potential risk that are particularly important to debate over postfeminism and its relationship to girls. She lists "access to feminine sexuality, potential dangers of feminine sexuality, concern for women's health, work, and the very existence of gender difference" (53). Projansky notes that these issues are inherently feminist but

suggests that it's the *anxiety* about *girls* in particular facing them that is intrinsically "postfeminist." While it is important to reflect on at least a century and a half of discourse surrounding the vulnerability of the girl, Projansky's argument is enabled by the new conjunction of this vulnerability with a broad popular and public focus on girls' autonomy and individual choice, made possible by the more contemporary achievements of the women's movement. Projansky uses as an example a man decrying the state of the media today when seeing his five-year-old daughter dancing to a Britney Spears track:

While he avoided mentioning exactly what was wrong (was it his daughter's act of dancing, the emulation of a female pop star, the implication of sexuality...?) his example activated a girl as vulnerable, girl as innocent, girl as endangered, girl in need of protection trope that is quite common. Thus, this girl is in danger... *because she is a girl.*

(Projansky 52)

This girl is, interestingly, in danger *from* a media system that at the same time popularly positions her as 'at-risk.' And she is in danger because of the choices available to her. At the heart of the concern this example foregrounds is a view that girls are, in fact, endangered by the very advantage that feminism has brought them over time: more freedom. Girls are often implicated in their own imperilment by the opportunity to make (bad) choices that were previously coded as unavailable, or at least socially sanctioned—for example, the choice to have sex without emotional and social commitments, or to abuse drugs.

Among the key problems with the figure of the girl-at-risk are the ways in which it marginalizes some girls and enables government intervention in the lives and even identities of girls. Anita Harris discusses the state's tendency to classify and regulate girls around categories of 'risk-taking':

The concern with “risk” has contributed to a splitting of young women along class and race lines as suffering from delinquency, disengagement or disease (see Miller, 1996); the solution for which is close attention from the state and its agencies, or increasingly private corporations that have taken over state functions and seek to profit by them, for example, in employment, education, training, incarceration and health. (2003 41)

While the 1996 Girl Power campaign in the U.S. was less about regulating girls’ behavior directly and more about giving girls “positive messages and meaningful opportunities,” its emphasis on encouraging young women to become “productive adults” (Lauber par. 19) remains problematic in the terms outlined by Harris. The path to becoming a productive adult has become predominantly visible, as Harris points out, as proceeding through the “flexibility and self-invention” encouraged by Girl Power. Harris identifies these as “neoliberal” ideas that “make it difficult to articulate continuing inequity” (2010: 476). Girl Power, therefore, is a discourse that promotes a fantastic range of opportunity that obscures the limitations on girls’ choices actually posed by race, class, nationality, and other barriers.

Further complicating the message of empowerment evoked by Girl Power is its entrenched ties to consumerism. In the same year that the HHS campaign was launched, the Spice Girls became wildly popular as (perceived/marketted) representatives of the Girl Power concept. Listening to their music and embodying their style was imagined, at least in their marketing but apparently also by many girl fans, as empowerment by association. In the wake of their “Revolution Girl Style Now” (a liner note to their breakthrough album, see Driscoll 1999), the Spice Girls were linked to an ensuing trend of commercializing the Girl Power slogan into any number of formats, from fashion or makeup items to dolls and magazines. The Spice Girls thus rapidly became a prominent embodiment of Girl Power’s association with the already

problematic relationship between consumption and feminist practice. While its emergence as a popular concept marks the 1990s as a period in which feminism achieved a level of mainstream visibility often sought by its advocates, Girl Power at this time also came to name the way this achievement was anchored to commodification of girls' choices. Harris points out that, because Girl Power "teaches that rights and power, that is, citizenship, are best enacted through individual choices in the market," it positioned "female consumer citizenship as the last word in feminist success" (2004 *Future*: 167).

The debate about whether such commodification strips Girl Power of its usefulness to feminism is ongoing. Some, like Rebecca Hains, argue that

Commodity-based girl power is... a striking example of hegemony in action. It indicates a weakness inherent in power feminism, rooted in its willingness to compromise, work within the system, and use the master's tools. Girl power feminism can be stripped of its meaning, appropriated and reworked as a vehicle to reinforce dominant ideology—as a tool of the patriarchy that divides feminists in hopes of conquering the movement. (2009 90)

Other feminist critics are less certain. In her examination of the pleasures of enjoying the Spice Girls, Nicola Dibben writes of the paradox of finding messages of empowerment within otherwise patriarchal norms: "By working within the forms of the dominant ideology, compromised materials may allow listeners to situate themselves amid competing ideological forces in a way that reflects the tensions of lived experience" (172). Dibben's argument directly takes into account the potential for a critical reception of Girl Power by its assumed audience—the girl—or at least the potential for her active reinvention of what Girl Power means in feminist terms. The fact that girls can and do interact with the media in ways that are more than simply

receptive is an issue that I will return to later. But it will be useful first to further explore the perceived aftershocks of Girl Power as a discourse soon labelled ‘postfeminism.’

The Postfeminist Girl

In *The Aftermath of Feminism*, Angela McRobbie influentially positions the concept of postfeminism as naming the conflux of Girl Power, consumerism, and risk discourse. She has built on the concern surrounding girls at risk by considering how these influences together converge on the girl as their object. McRobbie regards the postfeminist girl—that is, the girl who grew up accepting Girl Power as the most accessible brand of feminism—as caught in a Catch-22. Because of the visibility of a new link between girliness and feminism in the 1990s, McRobbie argues that it’s become “difficult” for today’s young women “to function as a female subject without subjecting oneself to those technologies of self that are constitutive of the spectacularly feminine” (2009: 60). The “spectacular” element implies a visible imagery to be consumed, and indeed, Projansky argues that it is through media and celebrity culture that girls are “spectacularized”, both by being shown what kind of girlhood is acceptable and by being constructed as “visual object on display” (2014 5-8). McRobbie applies the label “post-feminist masquerade” to the apparent cultural imperative to perform femininity, and therefore quite literally to buy into consumerism through the commodification of identity, together with the necessity for femininity to appear non-threatening and therefore disassociated from feminism. The post-feminist masquerade is, McRobbie argues, a particular performance by young women designed to effectively negotiate a world that is still entrenched in patriarchy. While superficial achievements such as (presumed) equal pay or daycare centers now exist, McRobbie argues that

women are under powerful pressure to *perform* a mediated feminine identity that is sold to them as an act of feminist power (2009 67).

In this McRobbie is in agreement with earlier writers, who are themselves sometimes considered “postfeminist” writers in one of the more periodized senses I discussed above, including Naomi Wolf’s critique of the fashion/beauty “complex” as a constricting system used as “a political weapon against women’s advancement” (10). Other precursors to this line of thought have very different relations to postfeminism as a concept: Susan Douglas, for example, likened postfeminism to *Enlightened Sexism* (2010), while Ariel Levy explored a new, more aggressive kind of complicity with objectification in *Female Chauvinist Pigs* (2005). McRobbie, however, focuses on the values of a “new traditionalism” being promoted to young women by pop culture (2009 26). According to these and many other feminist texts published in and since the 1990s, it would seem that the media backlash seen in Bellafante’s *Time* article and Faludi’s so-titled book is now embedded in contemporary society and manifest in pervasively popular technologies for producing the (feminine) self (see De Lauretis 1987).

While Girl Power has its own roots in such worries about the vulnerability of girls, at the same time these earlier anxieties seem to have been eclipsed by an imperative aimed at young girls to do more, be more, want more in a postfeminist world where anything was possible for them (in a post-patriarchal fantasy world) and girls could *expect* a bigger, grander future than their mothers could. The girl-in-crisis was being encouraged to facilitate her own rescue via individual empowerment, and consumer citizenship (see Harris 2004 “Jamming” 163). The conflation of consumption and empowerment is a classic capitalist device, but the way in which this has, since the emergence of Girl Power rhetoric, been more aggressively pointed at girls has made girlhood a site for increased pressure: girls were now expected to save themselves through

their own empowered agency, and become what Anita Harris calls “can-do girls”, the ultimate goal of Girl Power (2004 *Future* 13).

Addressing this situation, McRobbie argues that “The meanings which converge around the figure of the girl or young woman, are more weighted towards capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation” (2009 57). As Harris has argued (as well as McRobbie), the girlhood solicited in this way is essentially white, heterosexual, and middle class. These are the girls who are perceived to have “unbounded opportunity,” and are thus the girls who are represented most in the media as “success stories,” but they are also subject to constant educational, sexual, and psychological intervention by the state in the hopes that nothing stands in the way of the success stories by which they will represent social progress (2004 *Future* 32-34). Meanwhile, “other” girls become “universally defined” by “poor personal choices” that are blamed for their status as “likely failures”—while actual disadvantages are ignored (Harris 2003 54).

These “other” girls are segregated from the successful “can-do” girls, who represent an important ongoing societal investment. Harris explains:

Young women’s fortunes are linked to the particular historical circumstances of their generation.... It is the features of current times that render young womanhood a site of either new possibilities or problems, that fill young women with confidence and optimism or, conversely, leave them alienated and self-destructive. The shifting labor market, the expansion of higher education, cultural and economic globalization, and changing notions of female identity, the family, citizenship, and the state create new choices for them. These opportunities and challenges are now available to enhance the life chances of those who can seize them. However, at the same time that young women’s

fortunes are equally interwoven with late modernity, the fortunes of late modernity are equally interwoven with young women. This intense interest in them, and, specifically, the new depictions of girls as either can-do or at-risk, suggests that what it means to prevail or lose out in these new times has become bound up with how we understand girlhood. Their public presence indicates that both actual young women and the symbolic value of girlhood have been deeply invested in and that they have come to stand for a number of hopes and concerns about late modernity. (2003 14)

It is clear that Girl Power rhetoric, and more broadly what we now call postfeminism, centers on specific ideas about what it means to be a 'successful' girl, an end to the means that is over a century of feminist activism. As feminist foremothers are thus such major investors in the success stories of late modern girls, it is important to examine how this postfeminist girl interprets feminism.

In 2007, Pomerantz et al conducted several interviews with high school-age girls to discern their attitudes toward their own subjectivity. Their findings reflect, among other things, an ambivalence towards feminism that they argue is the norm for girls who have grown up during the postfeminist era. In the following quotation, Pomerantz asks a girl, Pete, who identifies herself as an outsider, what Girl Power means to her:

Pete suggests that it makes her think of feminism and power for girls. However, she then goes on to exclaim that "sometimes feminism is brought a bit too far." Pete approves of the way that girl power, although a "bit Spice Girlish," makes her think of power for girls and, as a consequence, feminism. For Pete, feminism is acceptable when it advocates equal pay for women. However, she is quick to distance herself from feminism that is "outrageous," suggesting that feminists go too far if they actually challenge the sexual

division of the workforce “just for the sake of it.” Like many of the girls, Pete disassociates herself from the very discourse that makes her opposition to conventional femininity possible. In the final analysis, while Pete took up an alternative girlhood made available at least partly by feminism, she consciously positioned herself against the identity of “feminist.” (Pomerantz et al 384)

It seems evident from this exchange, and other similar ones in the study, that these girls have an understanding of feminist achievement and feminist values based almost entirely upon those espoused by Girl Power. Throughout Pomerantz’s interviews, girls seemed consistently aware that “girls have come a long way” or “we’re just as good as boys are,” all the while distancing themselves somewhat from feminism.

Writing in 2004 during conversations about the ‘Third Wave’, Jennifer Eisenhauer suggests that this attitude pervades girls’ peer relations and girl culture because girls are being positioned in feminist discourse as “young feminists,” to be taught and encouraged to carry on the “fight” that the “women” before them began. She compares them to “young recruits” for a military operation, in which the troops are being sent out in “waves” (with contemporary girls comprising the third wave). She proposes that this correlation of authoritative senior and impressionable junior roles has problematized the dialogue between older and younger generations of women, creating reactions of indifference or anger from “future feminists” expected to carry on an assumed “legacy,” saying that this approach “can ultimately result in situating the ‘young’ feminists’ critiques as abject, other, nonwave, and nonfeminist” (85). Placing the girl at the receiving end of feminism—making her its object—means that the woman/girl binary equates to “effective/ineffective, real/imaginary, agent/victim, and whole/divided” (Eisenhauer 87). ‘Woman’ is then privileged as the outcome when ‘girl’ has been

overcome. It could be argued that this creates a hierarchy by which feminism has disempowered its youthful (potential) proponents, thereby encouraging them to feel dissociated from feminism.

Perhaps it is this very separation between ‘girl’ and ‘woman’ within feminist discourse that fueled the postfeminist re-configuration of what it means to be a girl. In advocating for their “Girlie” brand of feminism, Baumgardener and Richards argued that the sense of “entitlement” perceived as characterizing contemporary young women, and which they see ‘second-wave’ feminists objecting to, is both enabling and confusing for young feminists (63). Girls, they suggest, see a world of possibilities open to them but feel they have been denied access to those feminine conventions that feminism has already rejected as elements of patriarchal control. For Baumgardener and Richards, girlie feminism is inevitable when lifestyle choices as small as wearing high heels or as large as becoming a housewife are seen as off-limits to girls trying to espouse feminist ideals. They claim that girls “often think of feminism as what they can’t do (Don’t be boy crazy! Don’t shave!), rather than a philosophy that shows them the potential for what they want to be” (66). From this perspective, traditional signifiers of femininity—here defined as intrinsic to being a girl—are seen as a valuable form of engagement that must be acknowledged and accommodated within feminist discourse. Defining oneself as a girl, from this point of view, constitutes a ‘Third Wave’ peace treaty, so to speak—a self-reflexive acknowledgement of the pleasures of femininity and its consumption within a feminist politics.

The weakness in Baumgardener and Richards’ argument is clearly the way in which their utilization of ‘girl’ culture infantilizes the world of the girl, characterizing it as liberated and innocent, and as an arena of gender performance rather than identity. This suggestion—which is in no way limited to these authors, or even to postfeminist writers in general—that the girl is a process of becoming, but not a subject whose actions are significant, disenfranchises the girl.

This recalls Eisenhauser's argument about the force of a binary distinction between girl and woman for feminism. Perhaps this cultural obsession with the girl, and the anxiety around what girls do and aspire to—an anxiety as old as women's suffrage—has in fact built an opposition between girls and women, focusing on the former as potentially vulnerable objects in need of care, and the latter as privileged agents and mentors, which is detrimental to both parties and to feminism as a whole.

That this obsession has manifested itself in the girl as the location of all of the concerns and hopes for a feminist future is, perhaps, not new. But that it has manifested itself so widely, through so many mediums and across a prominent range of public and popular discourses, is a defining condition of postfeminism. Projansky argues that "Postfeminism depends on girlness, is defined by it" (43). The Girl Power rhetoric seems to have developed from a need to construct and control the troubling girl subject, with the results being twofold: a distanced, skeptical engagement with feminism among girls today; and a new 'girl' culture not limited to the young. For better or for worse, we are now faced with an understanding of 'girlness' that reflects a specific version of feminine sexuality and appearance, a commercialization of feminist values, and a complex, contradictory relationship with the feminist 'legacy.' The girl has become a feminist problem, and the question of what that problem means and what impact it has depends as much on the girl's portrayal in popular culture as how she is treated within feminist discourse.

The Postfeminist 'Sensibility'

The complex relation between girls and popular culture—how it interacts with forms of representation and self-representation—necessarily forms the crux of any analysis of postfeminism. New media, for example, plays an ongoing important role. Books such as Sharon

Mazzarella's *Girl Wide Web* (2005) and *Girl Wide Web 2.0* (2010), for example, illustrate the ways in which girls are negotiating popular online media to explore their own identities as fangirls, as gamers, or as global citizens. Other girls studies scholars, such as Mary Celeste Kearney in her *Girls Make Media* (2013), stress girls' roles as cultural producers themselves rather than as consumers.

But girls' role as consumers is more important for my thesis, given that I am concerned with images of girlhood directed, partly or wholly, to a girl audience. Thus, even though I am not engaging in audience analysis in this thesis, I do need to give some consideration to scholarship on *how* girls consume, or are intended to consume, the media I take as my object of study. I have thus far attempted to historicize and analyze postfeminism as a set of sometimes contradictory theories engaged with sometimes conflicting modes of interpellating girls. Rosalind Gill argues, however, that postfeminism can only be defined as a "sensibility" found within media culture; a sensibility by which anti-feminist ideals are often couched in feminist rhetoric or framed by feminist imagery (2007 "Postfeminist" 147). Gill discusses the ways in which notions of self-policing and self-surveillance are intimately linked to the "neoliberal" celebration of choice associated with postfeminism (2008 436). She argues that it is impossible to extract "choice" from prevailing cultural influences and that postfeminist discourse addresses people, including girls, fully imbricated in a context that constrains and guides their choices, including pleasures and preferences. Girls, by this argument, are inextricably "entangled in the relation between culture and subjectivity" (Gill 2008: 443). Their enjoyment of the 'girlie', for example, will therefore never be a matter of individually chosen pleasure, however much it seems feminism should enable girls' free choice about what pleases them.

Gill is certainly not alone in suggesting that girls do not have the freedom to critically engage with popular texts amid the barrage of images they encounter on a daily basis which specifically limit desirable types of beauty, sexuality, or gendered behavior. But I am concerned about the possibility that such arguments may be read as painting a picture of girls as an audience which, like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's film viewers, radio listeners, and record buyers, receives messages transmitted by the culture industry without possibility of reflection on the relation between these and the conditions in which they live (see Horkheimer and Adorno 1944). In postfeminist discourse, and indeed in neoliberal discourse in general, it is in fact *girls* who often come to represent unthinking consumption, above any other group or figure, in the ongoing concern over what 'messages' they may receive.

In this context I want to recall Janice Radway's important intervention, in her study of romance readers (1983), which stressed that the pleasure of consumption didn't involve any fixed relation to a critical or an uncritical perspective on what was consumed. She has further argued elsewhere that it is much more useful to move away from an understanding of singular messages being distributed to singularly-minded readers, and to toward a consideration of "the dispersed, anonymous, unpredictable nature of the use of mass-produced, mass-mediated cultural forms" and the "ever-shifting kaleidoscope" of consumption (Radway 1988 361). This acknowledgement of the potential for a diverse and active audience should be read as a caveat to the arguments I make in this thesis pertaining to the representations of girl-targeted popular media. While it is, of course, possible for girls to consume films and television series that suggest patriarchal or anti-feminist ideologies without irony, it is likely that girls are much more reflexive than they are often credited with being by postfeminist discourse. I suspect that this criticism of girls as passive consumers is heavily influenced by the culture of concern and the

generationalism that has always inflected studies of postfeminism.

It is crucial to critics levelling charges of postfeminism against popular culture that many texts, as Gill argues, use irony to undercut anti-feminist statements or implications (2007 *Gender* 266). While much work has been devoted to deconstructing such texts and pointing out their potential dangers for girls, very little research has been done on girls' own understanding of such ironies. There are, as Allison Horbury suggests, still limited tools for analyzing the pleasures and desires of audiences, but this sets a particular limit on arguments about postfeminism. Horbury argues that approaching postfeminist representations of women often leaves scholars "seeking feminism, and finding it absent, and producing a value judgment on the progressive or negative image of 'the woman' therein" (221). While this thesis is also not focused on audience analysis and cannot draw conclusions about the actual opinions of 'real-life' girls, I will certainly attempt to avoid making judgments about the texts I discuss here which assume that girls are unaware of the contradictions defining the postfeminist 'sensibility,' or that they are simply receptacles for ideologies mediated by the culture industry.

Why Speculative Fiction?

The popular cultural forms that young women and girls interact with on a continual basis suggest the increasing popularity of speculative fiction. Most obviously, fantasy and science-fiction directed towards young adults, and often particularly girls, has proliferated in recent decades in literary, filmic and televisual forms. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* franchise (1997-2007) remains the highest-earning literary series of all time, while the film adaptations of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* topped the box office ratings with every film.¹ I want to argue that it is not coincidental

¹ There are five of these films based on Meyer's four novels (see Hardwicke 2008; Weitz 2009; Slade 2010; Condon 2011-2012).

that adolescents and young adults of the post-feminist era —and especially girls—are drawn to speculative fiction genres.

The success of popular speculative fiction is not an entirely new development. In *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), Bruno Bettelheim claims that, psychologically speaking, children relate to fairy tales because they allow them to construct an idea of how society is meant to function. Bettelheim argues that,

Just because his life is often bewildering to him, the child needs even more to be given the chance to understand himself in this complex world with which he must learn to cope. To be able to do so, the child must be helped to make some coherent sense out of the turmoil of his feelings. He needs ideas on how to bring his inner house into order, and on that basis be able to create order in his life. He needs—and this hardly requires emphasis at this moment in our history—a moral education which subtly, and by implication only, conveys to him the advantages of moral behavior, not through abstract ethical concepts but through that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaningful to him.

The child finds this kind of meaning through fairy tales. (Bettelheim 5)

Children, he is suggesting, and by implication young adults, turn to fantasy stories to help them imaginatively navigate the real world in which they have only begun learning how to take up social roles. Often these stories involve, as Bettelheim stresses, evil or danger being personified in one authority figure, often an evil parent or parent-like figure. That person comes to represent all potential threats to the main characters' freedom, love interests, or abilities.

It is the emancipatory potential of the fairy tale—such as the defeat of or escape from the Evil Queen or Stepmother I will discuss in chapter three—that Bettelheim believes appeals most

to the young mind. Within this emancipation lies a lesson:

Fairy tales intimate that a rewarding, good life is within one's reach despite adversity—but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity. These stories promise that if a child dares to engage in this fearsome and taxing search, benevolent powers will come to his aid, and he will succeed. The stories also warn that those who are too timorous and narrow-minded to risk themselves in finding themselves must settle down to a humdrum existence—if an even worse fate does not befall them. (Bettelheim 5)

From Bettelheim's psychoanalytic perspective—a perspective which has been influential on generations of psychologists, educationalists, and other experts—the young reader (or viewer) naturally feels that adversity is inherent in the world, and the fairy tale demonstrates ways of overcoming this and cathartic experiences of engaging with it. By confronting and going beyond their fears, these young readers define themselves by that success. And the essence of this message is *empowerment*.

This recognition is crucial to the way that postfeminist girlhood shares historical and cultural space with a new dominance for popular speculative fiction. Empowerment is at the very core of the postfeminist Girl Power maxim, and Girl Power as an answer to the girl-at-risk rhetoric has become a contemporary cornerstone for the construction of girlhood. Many of the narratives and images that appear consistently across speculative genres, from fairy tales to science fiction, fit quite neatly with an agenda that puts girlhood at the fore, inciting girls to do exactly what Bettelheim imagines is the goal of fairytale heroism: to “risk themselves in finding themselves”. As postfeminist girlhood embodies a nearly ageless bracket of females, defined more by their self-identification with the term ‘girl’ than questions of minority, contemporary

narratives of girl empowerment are designed to appeal across multiple age groups and in various forms.

An atypical but telling example might be *50 Shades of Grey* (2011), a *Twilight* fanfic that became a sensational success with a diverse audience of women (young and old). This is the story of a young woman's libidinally invested empowerment through submission to masculine authority, but at the same time it is a fairytale about the relations between personal and social power. The speculative genre allows space especially for the forwarding of *individual* rights—a crucial element of the forms of empowerment identified with postfeminism. In fantasy texts, Jane Tolmie argues, “the emphasis remains on the individual woman rising above a system that keeps her down. Triumphant over it, reversing expectations—rather than in cultural revolution or innovation” (157). In these fantasies, the personal is political—and perhaps this is the only politics the girl hero can aspire to.

In addition to fantasies of individual empowerment, speculative fiction offers opportunities to imagine alternative scenarios in which people can collectively surmount social obstacles and transcend limitations. To *speculate* on alternative worlds. Rosemary Jackson writes that,

Like any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it....

Fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss. (2)

While magic may express a desire to transcend physical limitations, and futuristic texts may

express optimism or cynicism regarding human progress, often gender roles are at the forefront of speculative texts, undoubtedly betraying perceived problems or opportunities in the known ‘real’ world it departs from.

Taking the example of *Star Trek*’s Lieutenant Uhura, Elyce Rae Helford notes that she was a very rare instance, at the time, of a strong, black, female character of relatively equal rank with the men on board the ship, who even engages in an interracial relationship. Uhura was a clearly feminist departure from the patriarchal politics of the time. Recently, however, strong female characters in speculative television series have multiplied dramatically. “By the sheer number of science fiction and fantasy series featuring women in primary roles in the ‘90s,” Helford argues, “we can conclude that tokenism of the past has given way to recognition of a significant and appreciative audience for speculative programming that includes images of strong, independent women” (5). Moreover, these women are often placed in roles traditionally occupied by men—warrior, commander, villain—and appear in those roles with few or no caveats, demonstrating a clear acceptance of the idea that they are capable of comprehending and exerting power in all these ways (Helford 5). The existing social limits established by gender are routinely questioned and even often stripped away by speculative fiction, at least for heroic figures. “Through its reliance on myth and metaphor,” writes Jes Batts, speculative fiction “also elides the biological and political contexts that such transitions always inflame” (2).

The possibilities opened up by girl heroes in science fiction and fantasy worlds bolster the idea of the can-do girl celebrated by Girl Power. But like Girl Power in general, commodification has also complicated the relationship between the audience and popular fantasy. Using Adorno and Horkheimer as a jumping-off point, Jack Zipes maps out a cyclical

form for the modern fairy tale:

Mass-mediated fairy tales have a technologically produced universal voice and image which impose themselves on the imagination of audiences. The fragmented experiences of atomized and alienated people are ordered and harmonized by turning the electric magic switch of the radio or TV or by paying admittance to the inner sanctum of a movie theater.... The inevitable outcome of most mass-mediated fairy tales is a happy reaffirmation of the system which produces them. (Zipes 20-21)The key, for Zipes, is to go back to the beginning:

In essence, the meaning of the fairy tales can only be fully grasped if the magic spell of commodity production is broken and if the politics and utopian impulse of the narratives are related to the socio-historical forces which distinguished them first as a pre-capitalist folk form. (Zipes 23)

Zipes makes this argument specifically about Disney fairy tales, which comprise a frequently discussed genre for postfeminist scholars, as I will discuss in later chapters. But his argument also reflects the argument made by critics of Girl Power, that commodification strips apparently positive images of any social usefulness. It is worth recalling here Dibben's argument that commodification does not necessarily entail the nullification of ideological critique, at the same time stressing that the extent to which scholars like McRobbie and Gill would disagree marks this as a crucially contentious point in defining the problem postfeminism tries to name. But in this context it is just as important that Zipes is suggesting that a return to foundational fantasy themes can allow for new modes of representation and identification.

Much of today's most popular speculative fiction is based directly on well-known myths and fairy tales or on familiar fantasy stories that many in the audience have heard many times: vampires and werewolves; Snow White and Cinderella; Alice in Wonderland. These figures and

types are so well-known to contemporary Anglophone popular culture that we recognize them as part of a collective cultural consciousness. These stories have certainly also changed over their history, however, and in the last fifty years many have been adapted (perhaps most famously by Angela Carter in her 1979 collection *The Bloody Chamber*) to reflect changing attitudes towards female subjectivity in keeping with advances made by feminism. This thesis is interested in how ideas like Girl Power and girl-at-risk discourse have inflected such new adaptations to create specifically postfeminist versions of these characters. Vampires have fallen at the hands of their female prey, princesses have become knights, and Alice has grown up into a seafaring adventurer. These transformations reflect a cultural moment in which the rhetoric of female empowerment has been popularized, if not normalized, by postfeminist discourse.

Referring to the “girl-power hero” of late 1990s television (with *Xena* and *Buffy* as prime examples) Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy discuss how these characters submitted to “gender conformity”, with respect to appearance and sexuality, in order to gain physical and mental prowess (5). The fact that these heroines were all beautiful, white, and athletic, and (arguably, in the case of *Xena*) visibly straight, meant that for Early and Kennedy they offered a very limited vision of empowerment. “Representing the new woman warrior as a solution to woman’s oppression,” they write, “reproduces the tired closed image of white middle-class heterosexuality as the desirable norm for authentic liberated women” (6). This is an issue that haunts any study of the kind of contemporary speculative heroines that have become so popular since the 1990s. The examples I discuss in this thesis might be thought to come together as a type which, much like the “can-do” girls produced by narratives of Girl Power, marginalize (when they don’t make invisible) girls of other races, abilities, and sexualities. While class, race and sexuality are, explicitly or implicitly, important to some of the texts I will be examining

here, the central heroines remain white and heterosexual. Class, however, is a traditional obstacle that heroines in many popular genre forms generically overcome, and it is by far the most important to differentiating some of these heroines from girls around them, and from each other. At the same time, speculative ‘young adult’ fiction—at least in its most popular mainstream forms—is largely silent on issues of ‘intersectionality’ (see Crenshaw 1989), in part because it deals with alternative worlds with different cultural codes but most of all because it prioritizes individually exceptional heroes.

Early and Kennedy argue that feminist ideals are subsumed in girl hero narratives—winked at or implied by the physical ‘empowerment’ of the character, rather than dealt with head-on—meaning that Girl Power rhetoric is “shorn of its political context” (4). Horbury claims that, nevertheless, feminist concerns “[exist] in the narrative in the form of a question regarding the heroine’s feminine identity” (215). Certainly this is a key question for postfeminism, if not its central question, and one that is also central to this thesis. It is finally also a question that is raised for Zipes by the commodification of fairy tales:

The familiar fairy tales must be made strange to us again if we are to respond to the unique images of our own imagination and the possible utopian elements they may contain. Otherwise the programmed fairy-tale images will continue to sway our sensibilities in TV advertisements such as the ones which have women transformed into Cinderellas by magically buying new dresses, paying money for beauty treatments in a health spa, using the proper beautifying cosmetics. (Zipes 118) Clearly, Zipes’ argument about commodified fairy tales is compatible with the incitement to consumer citizenship at the core of McRobbie’s “postfeminist masquerade” (59). While I may disagree with Zipes (and McRobbie) that girls are so easily swayed by the texts they engage with, Zipes’ comments also support my argument that

contemporary adaptations of fantasy narratives reflect postfeminist discourse. My concern, in this thesis, is how such narratives can also be adapted and/or reread to present a *renegotiation* of that discourse. If postfeminism necessarily involves an acceptance that the world has been changed by feminism and a negotiation of femininity and girlhood within that changed context, then we are now able to look reflexively at how postfeminism has changed such popular imagery, at the least leaving room for their ongoing reimagining. Moreover, I want to contend that speculative fiction, which has been so closely associated with youth, girlhood, and, in recent years, specifically postfeminism, is a particularly useful context for these renegotiations.

In the following chapters I will examine texts that I have chosen on the basis of their identification, dis-identification, misidentification, or re-identification with postfeminist discourse, and discuss the ways in which contemporary ideas about girlhood produced within or in relation to these texts interact reflexively with that discourse. My conjunction of textual and discourse analysis here understands these texts as engaged with the changes which the emergence and transformation of the idea of Girl Power and its relation to postfeminist discourse. While some of the texts I have selected, like postfeminism itself, offer contradictory messages (as does *Twilight*) when they do not depend on barely veiled capitalist appropriations of Girl Power (as does *Once Upon a Time*) or openly exploit fears of girlhood risk and vulnerability (as do the *Alice* films), all, I believe, offer an insight into how postfeminism is being ‘made strange’ in contemporary popular culture: deconstructed, denaturalized, questioned, and renegotiated.

In conclusion, this thesis aims to explore, through a critical textual and discourse analysis, the imagining of girlhood in popular cultural texts which presume a significant young female audience and centrally represent the significance of girlhood to the world they imagine.

Almost all of the texts I have chosen originated in the United States in the last five years, with some notable exceptions. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (first released in a film version in 1992) I take as an exemplary Girl Power text often cited in discussions of postfeminism. I also use *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) to discuss the emergence of modern conceptions of girlhood centered on problems of independence, knowledge and risk. In the case of Alice, these problems are made visible by the girl hero's interaction with another world and to such effect that the figure of Alice has been subject to continual reinvention, including adaptations marked, to varying degrees, by a feminist sensibility. Otherwise my texts are primarily contemporary texts representing, at a speculative remove, the situation of a contemporary girlhood.

That these texts are mostly American is not coincidental to the fact that much postfeminist discourse, whether in popular media, governmental discourse, or academic research and analysis, has its origins in the United States. There are also more practical reasons for this choice given that American television and film companies are more broadly distributed, including on an international scale, than those of other countries. These popular media texts are widely accessible in the Anglophone world and distributed by international companies to international markets, and for the purposes of this thesis I am going to allow them to stand for an internationally relevant set of phenomena.

In terms of the presumed audience for these texts, I have set out to make few assumptions. I have not attempted empirical audience research and I do not attempt to interpret the ways in which the texts I analyze are received. But I do presume that the target market for these texts centrally includes 'girls,' whether based on their marketing and distribution or based on their narrative integration of postfeminist discourse. This presumption depends on the expansive generational reach of the term 'girl' as we use it in common speech (and academic

circles) today. I would not limit the ‘girls’ I feel these texts target—and attempt to represent—to an age range as I do not limit them to a geographical location. The female protagonists depicted in the texts I have chosen range from young girls (*Alice*) to teenagers (*Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*) to women in their early thirties (*Once Upon a Time*, *Orphan Black*).

There is, however, as I have discussed above, another evident limitation to the ‘girls’ whose representation I am discussing here. It is a mark of the continued limitations of popular media representation (not only of women) that *all* of the central girl heroes in these successful popular texts are white, able-bodied, and heterosexual. While this certainly does not echo the diversity of the presumed audience of the texts, the lack of diversity in these central heroines with enough strength or authority to be relevant to a discussion of postfeminist heroines is notable. While my analysis does not explore this relative homogeneity comprehensively, later chapters will return to the hegemonic authority of this ideal girl as it is used in both postfeminist criticism and contemporary media culture.

Organisation and Methodology

While the texts I discuss here principally belong to a contemporary U.S.-centric media culture, I begin with the chapters that give a history to the spectacular significance of girlhood in this culture. In the first chapter I begin by examining *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* as texts that contemplate the vulnerability of the young girl and yet also focus on her capacities. Here I use Gilles Deleuze’s concept of *becoming-woman* to analyze how girlhood is defined in the late nineteenth century and extend this to contemporary adaptations of *Alice* to discuss the modern figure of the ‘girl-at-risk’ as seen through the lens of postfeminism. Alice is a particularly useful figure for this discussion because of the historical transformations her ongoing adaptation makes visible.

I begin the following chapter by examining a classically ‘postfeminist’ text—that is, a cultural production contemporary with the media appearance of the Girl Power phenomenon. While *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* offers me an opportunity to explore what kind of power girl power might involve, I also want to use this text to analyze what has come to be called ‘rape culture’ in an extension of the culture of concern built around the ‘girl-at-risk.’ I want to consider the impact of this conception of girls’ vulnerability in sexual education for contemporary Western girls and its connection to the current success of popular vampire figures, in the process comparing the girl power represented in *Buffy* to more recent texts like the *Twilight* books and films and the television series *True Blood*.

In chapter three, I consider girls’ relations to gender, generationalism and feminism through their relation to mothers and motherhood, considering how the mother-daughter relation—often used to symbolize the legacy handed down between ‘waves’ of feminism—is explored in the Disney-produced television series *Once Upon a Time*. This chapter engages with psychoanalytic accounts of gender, through the work of Luce Irigaray and Jacques Lacan, for example, to analyze the fragmented bonds between feminist generations both in this specific series and in postfeminist discourse. In addition, I use *Once Upon a Time* to consider the afterlife of girl power in new heroines for girl children, discussing the ways that the Disney corporation now capitalizes on what has become known as the ‘Princess Generation.’ This involves considering how Girl Power-style messages of empowerment have been used to promote Disney products and continue girls’ engagement with Disney-based fantasies.

I continue this line of enquiry in chapter four, which discusses reproductive rights by way of an analysis of the current series *Orphan Black*. Using Michel Foucault’s notion of biopower, I analyze the ongoing problems and possibilities created by access to reproductive technologies,

and the impact this has on the temporal narrative of the empowered girl in terms of fertility management. In this chapter I want to situate a science-fiction television series like *Orphan Black* in its social and political context, particularly with reference to its interpretation of what has been called the ‘War on Women’ in recent governmental debates in the United States.

In chapter five, I focus on the way that Katniss Everdeen, heroine of *The Hunger Games* series, is required to engage in a performance of excessive femininity, enacted partly through capitalist consumer citizenship and partly through heterosexual romance, in order to survive. Here, I use Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of “the forms of capital” and Louis Althusser’s concept of the Ideological State Apparatus to examine Katniss as a representation of the ways that consumption offers young women the opportunity to engage with—or reject—available modes of girlhood.

These chapters, structured around critical textual and discourse analysis, are brought together at the end of this thesis by a return to the themes of this introduction and a consideration of the real world implications of the issues and patterns I have identified in these popular speculative texts. I use the term ‘discourse analysis’ straightforwardly; I aim to employ the broadest possible spectrum of modes of cultural analysis that have been used to critique and/or construct the concept of postfeminist media culture. This will of course include feminist criticism, but will also extend to theories that engage with consumption, psychoanalysis, and class discourse, among others. The aim is to construct as complete a picture of the intersecting figures of postfeminist discourse, the girl, and speculative fiction as possible.

My definition of textual analysis requires further explanation, however. One of the ways in which speculative fiction is particularly useful for this purpose is in its capacity to offer two things cited by Matt Hills (2002) in the construction of a ‘cult’ text: the first he calls ‘endlessly

deferred narrative' (134), or the non-foreclosure of the narrative. This is particularly clear in, for example, the Buffy the Vampire series, which ends on a question: "What are we going to do now?" ("Chosen") The open-ended question or unfinished story is a figure of many speculative fiction series—Carroll never conclusively says whether Alice can or will return to Wonderland; at the end of *The Hunger Games*, the reader is left with remaining questions about the effectiveness of the regime change brought about by Katniss. The perpetual development hinted at in the unwritten continuation of the series invokes an 'unfinished and focused narrative expanse' (137) further enhanced by the second feature: 'hyperdiegesis: the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text' (137). Hills himself describes the endlessly franchised world of *Star Wars*, but any of the fantasy or dystopian worlds within my selected texts would also fit this description. For the fan, these elements make the 'cult' text a space in which to do symbolic work on 'projects of the self' (143), echoing Bettelheim's analysis of the faery tale. But as important is Hills connection of these features with the *intertextual*.

Hills points to the intertextual worlds created by both producers and consumer (through fanfic, for example) around central texts such as *Doctor Who*; an equally 'cult' example might be the multiple mediums across which the 'Buffyverse' spans: from film, to series, to comic books, to scholarly fan sites (Slayageonline.com), and more. *Buffy* is not found on television alone; rather, it, and multiple other texts here, slip across media lines. These 'hyperdiegetic' worlds that move especially across the page and onto the screen, may be understood as 'fluid texts' (Bryant 2002), constantly shifting and evolving from one form to another.

I contend that in the contemporary era, texts are, in this vein, more 'fluid' than ever, and speculative fiction perhaps more than any other genre. Books are serialized and constructed in

cinematic terms, films follow; faery tales offer endless opportunities for adaptation. Texts ‘flow’ between mediums freely, and in doing so construct a trans-media narrative that must be considered as a whole.

In conducting ‘textual analysis,’ then, I will be considering these intertextual bodies of work as such; I will consider books, films, and in some cases I will look at stories that span centuries of trans-media reworkings. In doing so, I do not intend to conflate, for example, a film version produced by one party with a book version created by another; as Bryant stipulates, invariably separate versions of the fluid text imply the ‘shifting intentions’ of their producers (9). In some cases, it is precisely these ‘shifting intentions’ that interest me: why do Burton (2012) and Fellows (2009) interpret Alice so differently from Carroll (1856), and indeed each other? In other cases, with film versions so closely following literary versions, and indeed so closely monitored by their writers (*True Blood*, *Twilight*, *The Hunger Games*) I will be taking these cross-media narratives as broader sets of textual signifiers representing or speaking to certain cultural implications. I am most interested in the ways that these fluid texts represent ‘the collaborative forces of individuals and the culture’ (Bryant 4) and, more specifically, the way that that ‘culture’ has been impacted by postfeminism.

While these texts may be fantastic in nature, it is my central argument that they engage with the problem of what girlhood is supposed to mean in the real world. By examining the ways in which postfeminism is being renegotiated in speculative texts, I hope to establish a sense of how popular cultural images of girls are being developed both *in response to* and *in exchange with* postfeminist media culture. Overall I want to suggest that the popular conception of girlhood has long been a fantasy, endlessly recalibrated to map current social anxieties—but also that feminism has now long been a crucial aspect of how girlhood is imagined in popular culture.

Contemporary girlhood is a product of an ongoing discourse that now includes a complex and contradictory rhetoric of empowerment and vulnerability, particularly visible in imaginings of what girls might be able to do in worlds other than the one they live in now.

Becoming-Alice: Changing Girlhoods

Feminine adolescence is an assemblage of disjunctions between girls and woman rather than any transition from one state to another. The transformation girl into woman is across a border which defines both of them—a border which might be named feminine adolescence, or Alice.

-Catherine Driscoll, “The Little

Girl”

When beginning a discussion of girls and their representations on-screen, the most obvious place to begin is ‘Alice’—the Alice of *Alice’s Adventure in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, certainly, but also, and more importantly for my purposes, the ‘Alice’ of public imagination. Alice is many things to many people. Linguists examine her engagement with nonsense poetry; mathematicians and game theorists analyse her every move; and historians of the Victorian period analyze her stories in terms of gender, class and politics. But the vast field of scholarship on Alice continues to be dominated by three approaches: psychoanalysis, feminist analysis (within which gender studies and girls studies would be included), and speculation about the relationship between author Lewis Carroll and his young real-life girl child-friends. These three approaches seem inextricably linked, and all of them draw from Carroll’s stories an image of girlhood as a problem. After nearly a century of suggestions of paedophilia, association of the Alice stories with psychedelic drugs, and countless books and articles delving into Alice’s world view in analyses that understand her as everything from a feminist icon to a sexual victim, the Alice figure now implies a problem and even conveys a certain darkness. Interpretations of the problem connoted by Alice all further imply that it is by virtue of being a girl—and, moreover, a *little* girl—that Alice is necessarily prone to violation, corruption, or *interruption*. Alice, through her many transformations, has become a question mark, and the question she punctuates is always about what being a girl means and, usually, what puts girls particularly at risk.

In this chapter I want to ask what we should make, in our present context, of the recent film adaptations of the Alice stories in which Alice appears as a teenager on a journey of self-discovery. I want to consider whether it is perhaps our postfeminist context, permeated by calls to both protect our girls and, simultaneously, to cultivate them, that keeps Alice so freshly recognisable as a cumulative text assembled across generations. The intersection of public and popular discourse on the protection of girls in the interests of protecting society as a whole is by no means unique to the contemporary era. But I want to note an increasing emphasis on cultivating Alice's independent self-hood as ongoing adaptations move into a historical context marked by what Rosalind Gill (2007) has called a "postfeminist sensibility" in popular culture.

Alice's self-assertive independence is presumed by, rather than developed within, the narrative of Carroll's stories. But Alice in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, significantly to our purposes here, centers narratives in which her "adventures" mold her character into a heroine representing ideals of independence and agency. This shift is, I argue, rooted in the ideas about girlhood summarized in the emergence of Girl Power rhetoric and the questions that surround it. These ideas have given rise to a perception of Alice different from the one Carroll devised but suited to postfeminist discourse. By examining recent Alice adaptations, I want to interrogate the way in which contemporary conceptions of girl subjectivity are constructed, tracing at the same time a range of important links between early ideas about modern girlhood and contemporary ones, and drawing some conclusions about the evolution of dominant discourses about girl identity in the context of postfeminism.

Defining the Girl-Child

The pervasive availability of popular cultural images of Alice is, no doubt, attributable in part to the ways in which she signifies a new articulation of girlhood. It is not that Carroll's texts, or the

reception of the Alice stories, defined any new ideas about girls and girlhood, but that she articulates an image of girlhood that had barely been represented before. This is perhaps especially true because it is the first highly visible instance of a genre of stories for girls about contemporary girl protagonists in command of a world both familiar and strange. More broadly, the girl protagonist whose highly individual identity was principally defined by her girlhood and yet visible as an independent agency also seems to have been new, presenting a figure of ‘the little girl’ that had previously been un-(or under-)defined.

Carina Garland points to the fact that “the legal and cultural understandings of ‘girl’ as a particular mode of subjectivity that first appeared in the Victorian era” (42). Garland goes on to discuss how, at the same time as sexual minority was being legally defined for both genders, a particular emphasis was being placed on laws that had previously positioned girls as a form of property defined by paternity or marriage. Debate surrounding these legislative changes inevitably represented, and in turn impacted, ideas about who girls might be and would normally be, but they continued to articulate the girl principally in relation to sex. Garland writes:

This period gave rise to new realms for managing and policing the girl, romanticizing her childhood in an attempt to obscure the fact she was sexualized by just the gaze of nineteenth-century patriarchy that policed her. This tendency to make sexual desire directed towards the girl less visible than her status as object of desire in the process of managing the sexual threat she represents places an onus on her to protect herself against danger. (47)

These developments locate the beginning of an acknowledged public and popular association of girlhood with inherent risk—a sense of risk that required an acknowledgement of some potential in girls that might be put at risk. These developments thus also underpin the calls for both

regulation of girls and the guidance of girls in appropriate self-policing that continue to be prevalent today. Nevertheless it seems clear that a different understanding of girl autonomy and individual choice that, as I suggested in the introduction, might be associated with postfeminism has redefined our understanding of the kinds of risk management appropriate to girlhood. I will address this shift later in the chapter but a further account of the history of spectacular girlhood brought into view by the figure of Alice will be useful here.

Embedded in the regulations that emerged with reference to the modern girl, and the popular discourse surrounding them, is the premise that girlhood itself requires some form of guiding *intervention*, be it governmental or parental. The implications of this requirement are twofold: that there is a knowable ‘correct’ mode of girlhood, and that this girlhood has a desirable and expected outcome. To address the first point, I turn to Catherine Driscoll’s account of the development of girl culture. With the establishment of a populous middle class and the concomitant introduction of the modern education system with expectations of literacy for (at least) middle class girls, girl “guidance manuals” soon followed:

Compulsory schooling for girls made the guidance manual genre tenable because it refers to a literate audience (en masse rather than as informed specialists). The girl of these guidance manuals was primarily responsible for the condition of her self, even if that imperative was often phrased as a duty to others. This is signified in the magazines’ titles—the girl’s own, the girl’s realm, the girl’s friend: her magazine, her culture, her self. (2002 39)

These precursors to the teen and women’s magazines of today offered advice on beauty, domestic tasks, relationships, and other practices of girlhood, much like the related publications of today. Driscoll references Foucault (1988) in her account of this development discussing the

guidance manuals as one mode of several “technologies of the self” introduced for girls in Victorian times that specifically set the girl apart from both male youths and adults of both genders, often explicitly by demarcating forms of bodily difference. She goes on to discuss ways in which these technologies have both enabled and delimited girl identity. “Dedication to self-improvement and the right to self-articulation,” writes Driscoll, “could fantastically transcend as well as underscore class identities in a sweeping conception of ‘the girl’ that remains relevant more than a century later” (2002 41).

Indeed, it is immediately clear that the postfeminist rhetoric of Girl Power and what Anita Harris (2003) refers to as the “can-do” girls described by Girl Power and related discourses echoes, although more hegemonically, the incitement to multiple forms of girls’ self-expression apparent in the popular culture and media of the Victorian era. While in the Victorian era there seemed to be an effort to define and delimit the ways in which it was possible to construct girlhood, usually as a set of choices between types of girls (Driscoll 2002: 39-41) that paradoxically remained permanently framed by a homogenous image of the kind of girl who would be involved in this self-production, in the present historical context it seems that ‘neoliberal’ ideals of success and autonomy among girls continue to conceal forms of difference and lines of inequity by an emphasis on self-production. Also, consumer citizenship continues to be, and more explicitly and pervasively so, a principle technology of the self—defined as one of many of self-representation and identification that “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” (Foucault 1988 18)—and, as such, a primary site of self-policing. For my purposes here it is crucial that this set of cultural practices, when produced for

and when practiced by girls, takes as a core reference point the existing achievements, historical visibility, and continued political contentiousness of the women's rights movement.

While this thesis makes no attempt to provide a comprehensive history of girlhood it is important to historically locate our contemporary conception of what it is to be a girl and do girl culture. While *Carroll's* Alice may not represent the postfeminist girl she is certainly understood to stand for the 'modern' girl, and the continuities and differences apparent between versions of the Alice story sketch the ways that the postfeminist figure of the girl has come to be visibly different from the modern girl more generally. The ways in which the Alice story is adapted, and especially the figure of Alice herself is adapted between these stories, are also ways of articulating significant changing—and unchanging—perceptions of girl identity.

Becoming-Woman

Considering the changes I refer to above, Christine Roth argues that the Victorian era became a “golden age of children's literature”: a period in which figures of childhood were given pride of place by adult authors. Childhood was “a protected/protective nostalgic space... closed off... to adult desires and experience” (23). Such “adult desires” are certainly at stake in the many arguments about Lewis Carroll's near-obsessive focus on, and romanticisation of, the girl-child. Many readings of the Alice stories see paedophiliac undertones in his frequent choice of little girls as literary and photographic subjects. Lindsay Smith, however, points out that such readings are overly simplistic—whether they accurately describe Carroll's desires or not—because they ignore the pervasive and important ways in which youth, and especially female youth, was at the time “inseparable from fantasies of childhood formulated in relation to Victorian concepts of majority and ‘the age of consent’” (369).

Also seeing childhood itself being categorically feminized at this time, and the young female body being more definitively differentiated from its adult counterpart, Roth suggests that the figure of the girl-child served Carroll as a “median category” (Said quoted in Roth 23). That is, the girl-child offered Carroll’s stories a nostalgic link to that “sequestered space” of childhood (23). Occupying and representing this in-between space, Roth argues, “Alice becomes literally spectral and intermediate—a man’s vision of a child who is telescoped into an arcadian space of nostalgic play” (30). Such a reading is supported by the way Alice in the Carroll stories abruptly transitions from one understanding of herself to another, as she does from one physical size to the next. Having transformed into a comparative giant within the confines of the White Rabbit’s small house, Alice equates such changes in size to the problematic of growing up:

“At least there’s no room to grow up any more *here*. But then,” thought Alice, “shall I *never* get any older than I am now? That’ll be a comfort, one way—never to be an old woman—but then—always to have lessons to learn! Oh, I shouldn’t like *that!*” (Carroll 48)

While in Wonderland or Looking-Glass World, Alice is caught perpetually running in place, growing up and down, going backwards and forwards, but never actually achieving any particular development or end. In this way Alice’s girlhood is coded as an infinite moving forward—with nowhere to go.

The significance of this dimension of Alice is explored in *The Logic of Sense*, where Gilles Deleuze’s philosophical account of how we do and don’t make meaning, including of ourselves, includes a detailed engagement with Alice. Deleuze theorizes that Alice’s adventures in Wonderland represent a state of “infinite identity” or “unlimited becoming” (3). He asserts that such a form of becoming is unique to the little girl in Carroll’s works: she only is capable of

traversing Wonderland because she is neither an adult, nor a little boy; boys “have too much depth” (10). “Alice would be rather like the individual,” writes Deleuze, “which discovers sense and has already a foreboding of nonsense, while climbing back up to the surface from a world into which she fell, but which is also enveloped in her” (117). This argument situates identity as something both without and within the person, and suggests that the little girl exists at the margins, never quite achieving integration into the world while constantly sliding along its borders.

But why is this position unique to the girl, unique to Alice? In her essay “The Little Girl” (1997), Driscoll integrates Deleuze’s discussion of Alice in *The Logic of Sense* and Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s discussion of the girl in *A Thousand Plateaus* to suggest that Alice’s becoming is a ‘becoming-woman.’ In this sense,

Alice has an identity without being relegated to the mature, coherent or consistent.

Alice’s movement is a ‘becoming’ not because she is a minority or deterritorialized, but because her identity is in a continual process of deterritorialisation—between the majority and the settlement of women’s identity into a minority position. (1997 88)

In this way Alice escapes the inevitability of becoming a Woman through her state of unlimited becoming. “It is because women never become the Subject which adulthood refers to,” Driscoll argues, “that becoming-woman produces an identity which is not an outcome of her process but is that process itself” (1997 95).

This girl-identity is unfinalized, but it does not determine her as an unfinished product. There is no future-Alice who will be finally complete. Postfeminist rhetoric generally represents girlhood and speaks to and about the girl as a future-something—future consumer, future mother,

future feminist. Carroll's engagement with the girl as a subject in her own right, independent of any value attached to a woman she will become, is, in Deleuzian terms, a respite from the constant pressures to finish becoming and actually BE this or that.

But embedded within Alice's infinite becoming is an anxiety about the rate at which she is literally, denotatively, physically growing up. Throughout *Wonderland*, Alice, and others around her, expresses discomfort with the size of her body, be it too small or too large:

"I wish you wouldn't squeeze so." said the Dormouse, who was sitting next to her. "I can hardly breathe."

"I can't help it," said Alice very meekly: "I'm growing."

"You've no right to grow here," said the Dormouse.

"Don't talk nonsense," said Alice more boldly: "you know you're growing too."

"Yes, but I grow at a reasonable pace," said the Dormouse: "not in that ridiculous fashion." (Carroll 120)

It is significant that Alice's body is a considerable cause for unease. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the girl "is defined by a relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness" (305). Certainly Alice oscillates between both personally embodied and socially embodied extremes: her body suddenly expands in one moment and shrinks in another, and she is sometimes hastened into tea parties or trials and sometimes left wandering aimlessly alone.

Alice might be thought to represent the "*haecceity*" that marks becoming as Deleuze and Guattari understand it (287). This is written explicitly on her body while, at the same time, Alice is subject to a multitude of outside influences and concerns. According to Deleuze and Guattari,

the “body is stolen first from the girl... the girl’s body is stolen first, in order to impose a history, a pre-history on her” (305). This history (or pre-history) is at least in part gender. And other approaches to Alice have also emphasised the way girlhood itself works as a field of contestation in these texts. It is certainly possible that Carroll’s own interest (and perhaps personal investment) in the concurrent debates over minority, and its implications for what we would now call embodied feminine adolescence and sexuality, are key to this. But, as Smith suggests, this isn’t necessary for Alice’s girlhood to articulate conflicting possibilities. Claudia Nelson and Lynne Vallone write that, in the Victorian era, “The girl existed as raw potential, for she could embody either virtue (as wife/mother or spinster/sister) or a kind of depraved independence and sexual freedom (as ‘fast girl’ or ‘New Woman’)” (2-3). But the ways in which government regulations and adult anxieties have in the past spoken and continue to speak for the girl, with her ‘stolen’ body, necessarily objectify her, requiring what Rosi Braidotti describes as “entry into a phallic regime of signification” and “the foreclosure of women’s subjectivity as a whole” (74).

Clearly, this is a central concept of the women’s liberation movement and has made Alice a useful problematic for many feminist scholars. Responding to Deleuze and Guattari and others, including psychoanalytic theories of femininity, Luce Irigaray imagines a slightly older Alice (part Carroll and part contemporary cinema) reflecting on the various desires of those around her, including her mother and her lover. She imagines Alice thinking: “Listen to them all talking about Alice... You’ve heard them dividing me up, in their own best interests. So either I don’t have any ‘self’, or else I have a multitude of ‘selves’ appropriated by them, for them, according to their needs or desires” (17). And Teresa De Lauretis also discusses Alice as a figure for this problem in *Alice Doesn’t*, comparing the ways in which Alice’s identity might be manipulated in *Wonderland* to the ways that discourse might manipulate women’s identity:

We too have been told we are all alike and should 'have left off at seven'; we too have been polite, as we were taught, and have paid compliments and tried to make conversation only to be told we 'have no more sense than a baby'; we too have been puzzled to see our simplest questions taken as riddles, and acquiesced to the answers given, 'not wishing to begin an argument.' We also know that language, of which we have no mastery, for it is indeed populated with the intentions of others, is finally much more than a game. (1984 2)

In some ways, Alice is an image of femininity bereft of agency. Alice certainly encounters the demand to interpellate herself discursively as this or that in her interactions with various creatures: as Maryann, the serving girl; as the tart thief; even, once, as something nameless when she is lost in the wood. But she escapes all of these moments demanding a finalized identity by reflexively identifying the illogical nature of her circumstances—for example, when she takes control of the trial over the tarts by saying “You’re nothing but a pack of cards,” effectively destroying Wonderland by waking from her dream (Carroll 129). But even when Alice has returned to the apparently real world, she has not finalized the truth of her relation to the world. At the end of *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), in recalling Looking-Glass World she is plagued by the question, “Who dreamed it?” (259). Did she construct her own (un)reality, she speculates, or was she simply (and maybe still) the subject of a predetermined plotline? It is Alice’s insistence on challenging and questioning the paths available to her, and her refusal to be finally defined by others’ interpretations of those paths or her choices, that has also made her useful as a feminist symbol. Rather than accept that the events around her are simple matters of fact, let alone the way things are meant to be, Alice pushes against the status quo and the places

offered to her within it—a classic element of the speculative fiction storyline previously discussed.

The story of Alice—much like the story of feminism—has no finalizing resolution. Unlike most girl heroines in Western *bildungsromans* influenced by postfeminist discourse, Alice does not complete her trials and tribulations to discover any particular moral lesson. Nor does she grow up—although the beginning and ending dreamily imply that she will. As Jennifer Geer writes,

Although her final assertion of power shatters the conventional mid-Victorian image of a loving, self-sacrificing girl, it does so by reasserting an ordinary domestic hierarchy in which girls do control inanimate objects such as playing cards. The chaotic trial scene thus encourages readers to hope that Alice will rebel against the King and Queen in order to reinstate order, a desire that Alice's waking ultimately fulfills. The abrupt shift from the trial to the closing scene, however, suggests that Wonderland's anarchy is less an outright reversal of contemporary idealizations of girlhood and domesticity than an exaggeration of tendencies already present within those ideals. (10)

It is this continued tension, between disorder and order, adventure and domesticity, and girlhood and growing up, that seems to place Alice in something like a state of frozen adolescence or in the state of endless becoming that Deleuze identifies. For the purposes of my argument, these interpretations overlap.

Thus far, I have established ways in which Alice can be read as a recognisable representation of female adolescence. Deleuze and Guattari state that ‘it is not the girl who becomes woman, it is the becoming-woman that produces the universal girl’ (305). As a clear

articulation of that becoming, I feel it is accurate to state that in Western society Alice has, since her creation, been understood, represented, and mis-represented, as that ‘universal girl’ in a variety of contexts. What this chapter is most interested in exploring, however, is the way in which this figure of Alice, translates—or rather, *mistranslates*, into our postfeminist context.

Disney, ‘Ozification,’ and Adaptation

For most girls growing up in the latter half of the twentieth century, their first encounter with Alice would have been with a very different girl than the one created by Carroll. Disney’s 1951 animated film delivered a characterization less concerned with girls who challenge the roles assigned to them and more interested in envisioning the girl’s place within domestic stability. While Will Brooker, for example, panned the Disney film’s depiction of Alice as “a sappy heroine in a blandly stereotyped English pastoral [with] crude slapstick cartoons” (207) there is nevertheless something to be learned from this film’s vision of girlhood for an understanding of the girlhood described by critics and advocates of postfeminism. As Frances Bonner and Jason Jacobs point out, rather than the “aloof observation” characteristic of Carroll’s Alice as she wanders through Wonderland pondering her situation, Disney’s Alice is often encouraged to “join in.” The Disney film conveys “The quality of sociability—the willingness to participate and contribute to groups and things beyond oneself” as a clearly desirable attribute of contemporary girlhood (43).

In the Disney adaptation Alice is given a quest, which was never the case in Carroll’s story even if she was motivated, in turn, by her own desires to find a beautiful garden, to make sense of things, or to escape the nonsense. The introduction of a quest in the 1951 film operates

on two levels. First, it conforms to audience expectations that the heroine of a children's story will achieve a goal and learn a moral lesson. This is an expectation no doubt also held by readers of the original books, and *Wonderland*, in particular, mocks the rote lessons of the Victorian era while both of Carroll's original stories disrupt the moralistic closure of children's stories at the time. Disney's Alice instead offers the young viewer a pedagogic tale of obedience and appreciation of home and family. In what Joel D. Chaston calls the "Ozification" of children's books in Hollywood film interpretations,

those aspects of the original stories that empower child protagonists, especially girls, and that seem to critique the adult world are transformed into a sentimental message that 'there is no place like home,' encouraging young viewers to conform to adult expectations. (13)

In the Disney animation, when Alice isn't singing or being sung to (or sometimes during those scenes), she spends much of her time feeling lonely, scared, and sad, and asking various characters how to get out of Wonderland. By contrast Carroll's Alice is alternately amazed and critical of the wonders she sees, and finally destroys Wonderland itself in frustration at its stupidity.

Chaston argues that "Any power or strength that Carroll gives Alice is stripped away" in the Disney story and that, "When she ultimately returns home, we are relieved. She is safe from the dangers that proliferate outside the home" (16). This adaptation certainly seems to encourage a compliant domesticity more appropriate to 1950s' social mores than the speculative nature of the original stories. Consequently Alice's becoming in the Disney film is anything but limitless and multiple. This is, instead, a linear narrative of increasing distress which is cut off abruptly when, quite unlike the original ending, she is awakened from her dream and harshly scolded by

her much older sister. The film offers less a story about the articulation of subjectivity (encompassing both identity and sociality) than a warning to girls: the real world is a scary place, so cultivate the private sphere where you're meant to remain—although the crankiness of her older sister perhaps suggests that being a *little* girl is also a privileged space with more freedom than being a grown-up girl. In the context of this thesis it remains worth asking about the resonance of this very different interpretation of Alice, more than sixty years later. While there were other film adaptations before the famous Disney animation, and there have been many since, in the contemporary media terrain Alice's visibility as a cultural icon draws heavily on this film. Alice costumes and images of Alice's expressions and demeanour are as likely, if not more likely, to draw on the 1951 film as on the Carroll texts. The legacy of the Disney animation neither precludes nor demands association with Carroll's original character. If the popular visibility of the Disney Alice iconography is undeniable, it is less clear that the compliant and vulnerable version of Alice from the Disney film has entirely overwhelmed the curious and assertive girl from the Carroll texts.

The Disney film's associations with psychedelia alone, which Brooker suggests may have been deliberately played up in the film and were definitely traded upon by Disney marketing in later years (208), are often as visible as any literary citation. But for our purposes it is more significant that the central storyline of almost every post-Disney interpretation of the Alice story is focused on the heroine's quest to find her way home again. Most later filmic interpretations of Alice have used elements of the Disney film—particularly its aesthetics—as part of the text they are adapting. The most obvious example might be the television series *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland* (2013-2014), also produced by Disney. I will discuss the way that Disney trades on nostalgic images of girlhood by *re*-adapting its princess and other female characters in later

chapters. But more notable than this short-lived series is the series of Alice films and programs that appeared between 1985 and 1999—which we might also think of as the time period from the formative years of Girl Power to its peak. These included a TV series entitled *Adventures in Wonderland* (1992-1995), in which a preteen Alice comes and goes from Wonderland, where her interactions with its inhabitants help her learn how to navigate friendships, school, and family relationships in the real world. This adaptation—*also* by Disney—conveyed, I believe, a distinctively Girl Power idea of what a girl could and should do and be. The Alice of this series was, in a different way to Carroll’s Alice but even more unlike the Alice of the 1951 animation, often the most grown-up character in Wonderland. Frequently giving advice and helping her friends through difficult situations, this Alice embodied the potential of the 1990s “can-do” girl.

Looking beyond the influence of Disney, another relevant influence on the connotations of Alice figures throughout the last century, came from the increasingly visible interpretations of the relationship between Carroll and the child-girl-friend to whom the Alice books were dedicated, Alice Liddell, as “not a pure one” (Bonner and Jacobs 45). Discussing Carroll’s frequent artistic attempts to capture girlhood on film, Jes Battis writes

Carroll’s numerous photographs of the Liddell sisters (clothed) and Alice alone (nude, or outrageously costumed) present contemporary viewers with a disorienting representation of child violability and childish performativity, leaving one in serious discomfort trapped between relays of exploitation, critique, and desire. (3)

Many of the scholars I have cited above would suggest that this discomfort is experienced out of the context in which the pictures were created, at a time when such images of children were both commonly made and consumed. Carol Mavor notes the tendency in the Victorian era to consider little girls as unsexed until menarche, and argues that “the photograph became for Carroll the

‘neuter’ medium to hold the girl as forever young in the looking glass” (174). While I make no attempt here to determine whether or not Carroll was guilty of any indecency, I believe that a better understanding of Victorian attitudes toward girlhood, and girls’ bodies, is essential to any discussion of the afterlife of images of Alice, as well as to any discussion of Carroll’s assumed paedophilia, which as it became more widely discussed clearly imbued images of Alice with a sense of immanent or potential violation.

Carroll’s Alice is, of course, in danger on many occasions. Threats to Alice are often explicitly voiced, from declarations that she should have her head cut off (thereby ending her too-fast growing once and for all, to instructions that she should be blown up by Bill the lizard-handyman. ‘Real’ situations threaten Alice at every turn. She also encounters a range of more or less clearly implied threats, as when Humpty Dumpty suggests that she could easily stop getting any older with some help, most of which she seems to ignore. But in discussions of Alice at risk in Wonderland the scene most often referred to is the one in which the White Knight walks with Alice in Looking Glass land. Many parallels have been drawn between this encounter and Lewis Carroll’s potentially romantic interest in Alice Liddell. Such interpretations have had a lasting impact. A 1985 musical adaptation of both novels to a television miniseries, titled *Alice in Wonderland*, explicitly romanticizes this encounter. The White Knight sings, “I hear the strings/My poor heart sings/And we are dancing” (Harris 1985). If in performance the actors do convey some sense of the ideas of chivalry that underpin the encounter in the book, the slightly sad nostalgia for an impossible romance is also clear.

This positioning of Alice as an impossible object of desire is integrated, in this 1985 adaptation, with a looming sense of the risks surrounding girlhood. In this respect it is notable that it was first broadcast, and then re-released as a long film, in the years leading up to key Girl

Power texts such as *Reviving Ophelia* (1994). A thwarted journey home (the Disneyfied goal of most Alice films) is only one of the risks conveyed in this film, as is perhaps most explicit in the Cheshire Cat's song to Alice, warning her that, in fact, now 'There's No Way Home'. The lyrics are as full of foreboding as Carroll's lyrical epigraph poems about passing time:

Somehow you've strayed and lost your way,

And now there'll be—no time to play.

No time for joy, no time for friends;

Not even time to make amends.

You are too naive

If you do believe

Life is innocent laughter and fun.

There are things to fear—

So you see my dear, —

Your adventures have only begun. (Harris 1985)

Wonderland, here a name for adolescence, is a place where innocence ("joy," "friends") ends and "things to fear" begin.

The many film, television, and other media interpretations of the Alice stories (including games and derived fiction, and surely also popular costumery) have continued to multiply what Alice's adventures mean. With reference to the film interpretations, Brooker writes that

These *Alices* do more than simply express a single director's individual interpretation; they seem to channel a broader way of seeing and responding to the book and its central character. The film versions... all draw on the cultural understandings of Alice as a dark fable, innocent children's fantasy, Freudian dreamwork, English heritage treasure, or drug hallucination—often incorporating more than one reading in the same film, despite the fact that some seem mutually exclusive. (202)

Across these varied interpretations, in the twentieth century Alice was transformed from an icon of girlish curiosity into a set of meanings that don't necessarily originate from the books themselves. This set of changed meanings is firmly grounded in the interplay of girls-at-risk and girls' self-articulation that informed both Victorian public and popular culture and, echoing the interplay between public and popular discourse on girlhood, also informs postfeminist media culture.

Burton's Alice and Fellows' Malice

It seems especially useful then to return to Disney with its most recent film adaptation of Alice: *Alice in Wonderland* (2011), directed by Tim Burton. Our first sign that this Alice is different again from the one Carroll devised is that Alice in Burton's film is not a *little* girl at all, but rather a teenager on the verge of being affianced to a comically unlikeable suitor. But the now predominantly "Ozified" Disney storyline is somewhat subverted. Alice's home in Victorian England, full of complications related to class, gender and wealth but mundane in other respects, is not particularly a place that she is eager to return to. Her literal escape from social

convention—falling down the rabbit hole—is a more contemporary version of Carroll’s subtler digs at the formalized suppression of girlish curiosity in the Victorian era.

As Bonner and Jacobs point out, far from the often cheerful world of tea parties and croquet that was Disney’s first Wonderland, Burton’s “Underland” is a “landscape of... isolation and apprehension” (46) and the plot is less about navigating a path back to reality (as has been the case in so many versions since 1951) and more about conflict in both worlds. Alice is given a quest, but rather than ensuring personal safety by finding a way home, this quest is for the will to act in order to preserve society. Underland, under the rule of the oppressive Red Queen, is threatened with the coming of the Jabberwock, which only Alice can defeat. The implication is, of course, that Underland was once the relatively carefree Wonderland nostalgically remembered by viewers of the 1951 film, and that this Alice is the same Alice that once visited as a child. However, in burgeoning adulthood Alice has disassociated herself from those memories. This plot element is in keeping with Disney’s 2013 television series *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland*, in which the adult Alice has been placed in a mental hospital for insisting that her experience of Wonderland was real. But in Burton’s adaptation the fact that Alice really is in wonderland is something her mostly grown-up common sense resists, and her struggle is to remind herself of the fantasy-Alice that once existed before it is too late to save Underland.

Outside this fantastic world in which she is a mythical hero, questioned only by herself, the choices Alice makes in what is represented as the real world are more personal ones. They are nevertheless world-challenging: home again in (presumably) Victorian England, Alice abandons her domestic life and, rescuing the spirit of her late father’s dream, she sails to China in pursuit of a career as a merchant explorer.

On the surface, Burton's *Alice* could not be more different from Simon Fellows' film adaptation *Malice in Wonderland* (2009). Set in a hectic, crime-ridden vision of urban England, the Fellows version of Wonderland is full of prostitutes and druglords who all want a piece of Alice. Alice herself spends most of her time in a haze, being taxied about by a cabbie named Whitey (an interpretation of the White Rabbit) on a kind of double quest. Alice's primary goal is to recover her identity after she develops amnesia, and then to find her mother once she's remembered who she is. On this journey, Alice becomes a prostitute (accidentally), kills several people (not accidentally), and falls in love.

Although these tales seem to be different in every respect, there are important similarities between the Burton and Fellows films and the questions they raise about Alice. In the remainder of this chapter I want to consider what about the current cultural moment has made these interpretations of Alice viable and explore how they are informed by contemporary understandings of girlhood and the postfeminist context.

The first thing these films have in common, and my first point of interest here, is their 'unlittling' of Alice. While Carroll's Alice was quite specifically "seven and a half" in the second book, Disney's Alice became evidently pubescent (although not specifically given an age), and these more current Alices are, respectively, nineteen and twenty. One way of understanding this is as a disenfranchisement of the little girl, a denial of any subjectivity, or even value as a character, that a little girl might possess. Chaston's argument suggests that this aging-up is necessitated by Hollywood pragmatism:

Another consequence of melding classical Hollywood narration and children's fantasy manifests itself in the apparently limited goals available to child protagonists. Adult heroes participate in stories whose narrative progress ranges from a restoration of the

status quo ante to the development of a completely new order of things, frequently coupled with a second plot trajectory that works toward the fulfilment of heterosexual romance. The options available to child protagonists are necessarily more limited. (14)

In other words, even films aimed at young audiences are interested in characters with more perceived agency than is credibly available to young people. This adaptation to a context in which the agency Carroll's Alice has doesn't match popular filmic conventions for adventure obscures the questions of agency raised by Carroll—or, rather, by Alice—which were based on her in-between identity as a girl-child. The little girl who feels that “being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing” (56) but can also impetuously say to an adult (of sorts) “I've a right to think!” (99) is replaced by a girl who has already grown up and knows very well what her rights are. Alice is now a “can-do” girl—one of a group defined by Harris as “identifiable by their commitment to exceptional careers and career planning, their belief in their capacity to invent themselves and succeed, and their display of a consumer lifestyle” (2004 *Future* 14). In this can-do context, Alice's journey is no longer simply one of experimentation but rather one directed towards a crucially important destination—one that implies an end to adolescence.

Such filmic reinterpretations do seem to ignore the similarity between how Lewis Carroll (and perhaps also Charles Dodgson) viewed the little girl, and the ways in which we view girls and ‘young’ women today. As I discussed above, and Smith details, Dodgson was active in the debates surrounding the introduction of legislation setting a specific legal age of sexual majority and consent. These debates belong to the complex Victorian understanding of the sexuality of children, discussed by writers such as Smith and Mavor. While often contradictory, these ideas suggest that girls of Alice's age might be seen as burgeoning young adults. “While the little girl and woman were held to be discrete” at this time, according to Driscoll, “the point at which one

becomes the other remained slippery, constituting a period of ambiguity” (2002 43). If, as Driscoll suggests, “these unstable terms constitute girlhood as the impossible inverse of majority and citizenship,” then perhaps we can establish a correlation between today’s idea that majority begins in late adolescence and the fact that so many of our popular contemporary heroines are of that same age. Legalities aside, postfeminist media culture has also been responsible for redefining girl culture as accessible to an age range that is not given a specific beginning and end, meaning that the role of girl protagonist is now more defined by the personal qualities and narrative trajectory of the character than by issues of minority and majority. Indeed, this is *the* postfeminist subject; while postfeminism accounts for ‘tweens’ and young adults, *women* ‘who cannot be recuperated into one of these life-stage paradigms generally lose representability within a popular culture landscape dominated by postfeminist definitions of femininity’ (Negra 2009 47); while Alice is ‘unlittled’, women are ‘girded’ as youthful potential becomes the only available narrative. Taking this into account, we can read these late adolescent or young adult characters not as little girls, and not as women, but quite specifically as people in between, a liminal figure that Deleuze would align with the idea of becoming.

Certainly every rendition of the Alice story involves a confusion about identity and what it means—that’s clearly part of the attraction of the Alice story and a reason for its longevity. In both Burton’s *Alice* and Fellows’ *Malice*, amnesia—a small part of the original Alice in Wonderland narrative—is a driving force behind Alice’s central quest. In the original Wonderland, Alice briefly wanders into a wood where she forgets her identity entirely and encounters a fawn who has forgotten his. They walk along together for a while until they find their way out and, upon remembering who they are, the fawn runs off as it realizes it’s not supposed to be fraternizing with humans. Terry Otten suggests that this brief lapse into childlike

innocence exposes Alice's post-lapsarian "emerging state of being" because she clearly snaps back to the harsher 'real' world in which she and the fawn cannot be friends (57). While this moment of forgetting suggests an entirely other world in which she isn't burdened by who she is, this moment is quickly displaced by others, suggesting that this amnesia is simply the inevitable result of the constant contradictions implied by "'infinite identity'" (Deleuze 2-3).

While this loss of memory is only temporary for little-girl Alice, it's what's centrally at stake in both of these newer adaptations. In Burton's film, Alice has repressed memories of her first experience in Wonderland as a child and is not convinced that she is *the* Alice that the bizarre residents of Underland seem to believe will be their savior. She is questioned throughout, sometimes accused of being an imposter and, alternately, of not knowing who she is. Much as in Carroll's story she is scolded by the Caterpillar whom she asks for help because as he says, "I can't help you if you don't know who you are, you stupid girl" (Burton). This problem is much more acute in the apparently 'real' world of *Malice in Wonderland*, where Alice is struggling to recall who she is through a haze of sedatives masked as "anti-amnesia" medication. Meeting "Caterpillar," a drug dealer, Alice asks, "But how can I be who I wanna be when I am who I am?" The Caterpillar replies, "When memories come back, some you keep, and some you trash in the can" (Fellows). It seems that Alice in these film is being asked, much like the figure of the girl within the postfeminist context, to self-determine in a world of various and often conflicting messages about who she could or should be. (The need to forget in order to move forward also signals the concept of intergenerational matrophobia within feminism that I will discuss in Chapter Three.)

Amnesia is clearly being used here as a metaphor for, or perhaps a tool in, the search for and construction of identity, including the pressures the social places on viable and permissible

identities. Alice is encouraged in both these films to remember her identity by abandoning the past and moving towards a changed future. With reference to the original Carroll texts, Driscoll argues that if Alice “knows all the things she used to then she will be who she is. But at the same time, remembering who she is leaves her subject to all the things she knows” (1997 84). For both of these newer film Alices, memory loss allows them to enter Wonderland in a state of semi-innocence and maintain a certain attachment to childhood that allows the wonder that makes participation in fantasy possible. Their remembering means they have to confront obstacles (the Jabberwock, family conflict, potential marriage, romance). This forgetting and remembering, unlike in the Carroll stories, opens these Alices up for real life changes, which means they re-enter the real world with an inevitable forward momentum, whereas Carroll’s Alice re-enters her normal world more or less the same person—unfinished and open to wonder—that left it. In a sense, these more contemporary Alices are expected to stop becoming-woman, and to *be* women: to participate in heterosexual romance, or to begin careers, but in some way to achieve the ends of the perceived “temporal continuity” intended for young people (Edelman 177). Deleuze and Guattari argue that “Knowing how to age does not mean remaining young; it means extracting from one’s age the particles, the speeds and slownesses, the flows that constitute the youth of *that age*” (306). Clearly, for both of these Alices, they need to “extract” Wonderland somehow from their beings in order to successfully complete adolescence, and to “extract” from Wonderland what will make the completion of their identities possible.

I feel that this is a distinctly postfeminist turn in adaptations of the figure of Alice in that, rather than contemplating the contradictions and liminality of girlhood, as the original texts seem to do, these films posit a girlhood that seems a foregone conclusion rather than a becoming. Success, encompassing seemingly correct sexual choices as well as rising above the challenges

set forth by the experiences of growing up are the tenets of Girl Power, and this set of outcomes should be available to the beautiful, white, rich Alices appropriate to the postfeminist context. As in Girl Power rhetoric, the primary obstacle for these Alices is, importantly, psychological—amnesia as an analogy for an underdeveloped sense of identity or self-worth. If Alice, in either of these storylines, can simply *realize* that she is capable of achieving everything she must achieve, then she will, quite certainly, achieve it.

Such postfeminist renditions of Alice remain subject to the risk culture surrounding contemporary figures of girlhood. The potential for reading possible paedophilic intentions within the original Alice texts is here translated to explicit sexual predation. In Burton's film, Alice is essentially assaulted by the Knave and then charged by *him* with "unlawful seduction." Much of the rivalry between Alice and the Red Queen, which in Carroll was nonsense, now situates the young girl as a sexual rival, threatening the Red Queen's relationship and thereby her vitality (another nod toward generational tensions, see Chapter Three). This seems to speak to the interplay of contemporary conceptions of girls as both potential victims and as responsible for putting themselves at risk, as discussed in my introduction. It is also reminiscent of the anxiety surrounding Victorian girls and sex.

Garland argues that the Victorian girl "is invested and disinvested with sex, is idealized yet seen as a problem" (50). The 'problem' of girl sexuality, which will continue as a key theme throughout this thesis, is thus both old and new, and in postfeminist discourse it is very often interpreted as a problem of choice. Postfeminist constructions of girlhood see girls as invested with an unprecedented level of independence and with all of the potential for risk associated with independence. The risk of sexual violence faced by girls on their own is explicit in Fellows' *Malice*, where Alice wakes up from a drug-induced nap as a new worker in a brothel. Despite her

protestations, she is immediately chosen by a client who then imprisons and attempts to rape her, and she only escapes by killing him. Sexual violence isn't the only danger that these two Alices face, but its gravity is clearly foregrounded as an important obstacle to their development even as the navigation of unwanted sexual advances is positioned as a necessary part of the girl's adolescent process. Carroll's Alice dealt with sexuality only implicitly, at most tangentially. But today's Alices are asked to traverse a Wonderland in which sexual risk is explicitly associated with the processes of feminine adolescence.

But what does this mean for a postfeminist Alice's becoming? Unlike Carroll's infinitely-becoming Alice, these postfeminist Alices move toward a destiny and resolve their quest—but what, in the end, have they become? Both films have double endings: one in Wonderland, and another in the real world. Burton's Alice slays the Jabberwock and then goes on, in true Girl Power style, to reject the conventions of marriage and domesticity and even, finally, England itself, sailing off in the final scene on an exploratory voyage in the direction of China. In *Malice*, Alice saves Whitey from the Red Queen (a gay druglord in this film) and then, as a couple, they re-enter the expected normal world and re-establish contact with her long-lost mother. This is a more conventional ending than that of Burton's film, but Fellows' Alice also rejects the privilege and status of her wealthy adoptive family. In both films, then, Alice finally becomes the hero of the piece and makes decisions that alter the course of her life, as well as the lives of others. In line with Deleuze's Alice, they explored the unlimited identity available to them in Wonderland. But unlike Deleuze's Alice, or indeed Carroll's, these recent film-Alices have looked at those Alices-that-could-be, and made a choice.

It is worth noting here that the choice Burton's Alice makes is to accept that she is *the* Alice: the Alice who is destined to fight the Jabberwock and save Underland. This choice is both

empowering and disenfranchising—in committing to being the subject of her own story, she is also acknowledging that her ‘choice’ is predetermined. Frida Beckman writes:

By representing the inevitable victory of the Hollywood hero, Burton’s *Alice* helps elucidate different modes of agency or... the difference between playing a hand that is already given and the freedom that comes with rejecting the cards altogether (‘you’re nothing,’ as Carroll’s Alice says, ‘but a pack of cards’). We have already seen how Carroll’s Alice embodies the virtuosity of freedom in her embracing and acting on the present without being able to link it to the past or the future. This virtuosity can be sharply contrasted with free will as it emerges through Burton’s (and ultimately Hollywood’s) predictability. Burton’s *Alice in Wonderland* plays out the implications of free will only to reveal their lack of freedom. (17)

While *Malice in Wonderland* allows Alice to move outside of the linearity of time to alter future events, and thus directly opposes Deleuze’s reading of Alice as the girl’s “abstract line” of becoming, Burton’s Alice must instead accept that she *cannot change* the future in order to move forward. Perhaps, in this way, Burton’s rendition is more reconciled with the absurdity of Carroll’s Wonderland.

While in Burton’s film Alice’s Wonderland fate is decided, she also refuses to accept that the same is true of her home-world reality. On her return she overturns all of the traditional fates awaiting Victorian girls by exposing the hypocrisies of her social circle and taking over her father’s company. This interesting juxtaposition perhaps suggests that Wonderland *is* in fact a place of becoming while reality is more inflexible. For Carroll’s Alice, Wonderland is a never-ending possibility which she can dip in and out of between play and lessons. While her older sister can only imagine real-world, inevitably grown-up Alice someday perpetuating her fantasy

world by recounting stories to her children, it isn't clear that Alice's access to Wonderland will end, despite the melancholy poems with which Carroll frames his stories. Our modern Alices seem to leave Wonderland behind, their presence there nothing more than a brief but important, perhaps even transformative, suspension of forward trajectory to adult subjectivity. The conclusions of both these later stories, in which all problems in Wonderland (or Underland) are solved by Alice's actions, and everything is tied up in a neatly triumphant closure, offer a clear distinction between Carroll's stories and our more recent adaptations: rather than a story of becoming, Wonderland in the postfeminist context becomes the place where these Alices *became* older, wiser, subjects. If they didn't become adults, completely, Wonderland is still the place where these Alices remembered and embraced their identities, and therefore abandoned their childhoods. (While this transition in Alice is definitive, Burton's film seems more ambivalent on this count, given that Alice has been to Underland before this latest adventure, and the appearance of a blue butterfly in the final scene that might (or might not) be Absolem, the blue Caterpillar, suggests that the film hasn't closed the possibility of further movement between these worlds. But the very fact that Absolem was forming his cocoon in the penultimate scenes in Underland when Alice was trying to decide to be *the* Alice suggests the transformation is not reversible.)

This does not necessarily mean, however, that these transformed Alices are no longer *girls*. While these films seem to demarcate childhood from not-childhood as they do fantasy from reality, the postfeminist category of *girl* is broader than any equation with childhood, or even *adolescence*. While these stories of becoming-Alice are finished, the story for the postfeminist figure of the girl is, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, one of infinitely becoming. In the postfeminist context, I would suggest, the reason for this is no longer because *woman* is not

considered a sufficiently functional or complete subject. Rather, the recategorization of the *girl* has coincided with a renegotiation of the temporality of youth. In the neoliberal context, youthful identities are celebrated in ways that extend over a very broad age range and define, at the same time as they are defined by, life narratives of self-discovery. It is, I believe, a result of the Girl Power rhetoric that subjects who follow these trajectories take the name of *girl*. At the end of Burton's film, as Alice embarks on her new and adventurous career and encounters the butterfly flying to an equally unspecified destination she is clearly still inhabiting that liminal position that identifies her as a girl. The question of where this identification between girls and becoming leaves *women* locates one of the problems underlying postfeminism, and I will return to this problem when discussing generational relationships and reproduction in later chapters. But what is clear is that the concept of postfeminist girlhood is firmly fixed to an ongoing project of the self.

Conclusions

It is clear that our perception of Alice has, informed by more than a century of discourse on girls, changed irrevocably. Alice is no longer the little girl Carroll envisioned. She is, rather, a symbol of girlhood—of its frailties, its struggles, its tensions, but also its potential and openness to transformation. The Alice we see on our movie screens in the twenty-first century is a different person altogether to the Alice of Victorian times, and the form of her *becoming* is necessarily different. She is, importantly, an older girl, fulfilling the trials of her Hollywood *bildungsroman* to its inevitably heroic conclusion. She is a manager of (specifically sexual) risk and a girl who can overcome the obstacles of her own self-doubt; she is the writer of her destiny. This is an evolution, I would suggest, not only of the Alice story, but of our perceptions of girlhood and our

need to both valorize and protect girlhood in the wake of the (ongoing and thus far incomplete) achievements of the feminist movement.

With or without end, Alice's story of becoming is, perhaps, what makes her so enduring. In our adaptations *and* in the original, the girl who enters Wonderland is still the girl who represents a liminal subjectivity. In this she is a girl with as yet infinite possibilities ahead of her and thus especially characteristic of postfeminist constructions of girlhood. Whether Alice simply wakes from her dream or follows a Hollywood narrative to its heroic conclusion, Wonderland is still a place where her trials and opportunities for becoming can be explored. Our constant reinvention of Alice reinstates the importance of girlhood as an object of disorientation, concern, and desire, just as it was in Carroll's day. But our postfeminist readings of Alice also offer an insight into a newer mode of girlhood: the Girl Power hero. This type of speculative fiction protagonist, most dramatically popularized in the 1990s (as I will discuss in the following chapter), is now clearly a mainstream character—indeed, what could be more mainstream than a Disney film for children? Thus Burton's film in particular suggests how Girl Power rhetoric, and postfeminist conceptions of girlhood entangled in this rhetoric, have been internalized and even normalized by popular media; have become a popular cultural currency. In the end, postfeminist Alice stories establish only one possible set of meanings generated by this phenomenon. The following chapters will set forth other ways in which girlhood is 'done' by contemporary speculative fiction.

Vampires and Virgins:

Girl Sexuality and Desire in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Twilight*, and *True Blood*

“Every vampire age embraces the vampire it needs.”

—Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*

The last chapter touched on some ways in which sexuality is exteriorized in popular film as a threat to girlhood—as something that puts girls ‘at risk’. This chapter centers on analysis of contemporary girl-centered vampire fiction. Vampire fiction is a genre of speculative fiction that has always been grounded in discourses of sexuality and representations of desire and which often finds focus on anxiety over female virginity. These emphases are no less true of vampire fiction centered on girls in the postfeminist context, and changes to this subgenre in the years following the emergence of postfeminist discourse indicate some of its key concerns.

Since Bram Stoker first published *Dracula* (1897), sex—especially *gendered* sexuality—has remained at the forefront of vampire mythology. Stoker’s *Dracula* has been read as a xenophobic metaphor for the protection of white, British, female virginity (see Wood 1996, among others). In what became the traditional vampire story after Stoker, a hypervirile male, consumed by lust (for blood), seeks out the purest, most innocent specimens to fulfill his wanton desires, and only a (male) hero can stop this depravity. The immense popularity of this vampire story across all forms of popular media since Stoker means that it was thus a cultural shift of some significance when popular retellings of this story began to feature a reversal that featured those innocent specimens themselves becoming the heroes. While there is already an extensive literature on the ongoing renovation of the vampire myth, my particular interest here is in the girl hero of vampire stories—a girl who is usually, and certainly at the beginning, a potential vampire

victim. This reinvented version of the vampire story came to prominence with the appearance of the postfeminist context I am discussing in this thesis, centered on a reversal of the traditional story's gendered and generationalized sexuality. I want to ask here what can be learned about the postfeminist focus on girlhood from the girls who slay, or the girls who love, or (perhaps especially) the girls who *become* vampires.

As this thesis considers the reverberations of postfeminism, it is useful to pinpoint the first real 'vampire girl'—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Kuzui 1992; Whedon 1997-2003)—as belonging to postfeminist media culture at its height. The two other girls on whom I want to focus in this chapter—Bella, the heroine of the *Twilight* books and films (Meyer 2005-2008; Hardwicke 2008; Weitz 2009; Slade 2010; Condon 2011-2012), and *True Blood*'s Sookie (Harris 2001-2013; Ball 2008-2014)—are both much more contemporary. These later heroines also, I argue, reflect a generational reflexivity that is strongly influenced by the concerns of postfeminism. They are, effectively—as are many of the characters discussed in this thesis—the daughters of postfeminism, aftershocks of the media storm called Girl Power and the risk discourse from which it emerged. In this vein, Bella and Sookie seem particularly useful in examining what now seem to be the 'givens' of girl culture, including what girls have consumed from several decades of commodified feminism. And, because of their placement in a history of vampire mythology, Bella and Sookie are also particularly relevant to understanding one specific element of its intersection with postfeminism: contemporary popular ideas about girl sexuality. In this chapter, I will discuss how *Buffy*, *Twilight*, and *True Blood* deal with the girl as a sexual subject, and consider how our culture of concern around young female sexuality has impacted the girl heroes of popular speculative fiction.

Sex, Love, and Vampires

The link between vampirism and sexuality is fairly obvious: the physical closeness, the exchange of fluids, the thrall of the victim, all draw clear comparisons between the bite of a vampire and a sexual encounter. “The physiology of vampire sexuality literalizes a connection between sex and eating that, for human beings, operates metaphorically,” writes John Allen Stevenson. “Not only do vampires combine feeding with reproduction, they collapse the distinction... in an extraordinarily condensed procedure in which penetration, intercourse, conception, gestation, and parturition represent, not discrete stages, but one differentiated action” (143). The vampire bite in popular fiction after Stoker is almost always centrally performed by males before the 1990s. There are female vampire associates, including some in Stoker, but there are only a few notable exceptions in which the central vampire is female: Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmila* (1871) and Angela Carter’s “Lady of the House of Love” (1969) being two of the most famous.

Nevertheless, a reversal of the traditional sex act as framed by patriarchy was perhaps always a key part of the horror experienced by viewers and readers of vampire fiction. Linda Williams writes that

The vampiric act of sucking blood, sapping the life fluid of a victim so that the victim in turn becomes a vampire, is similar to the female role of milking the sperm of the male during intercourse. What the vampire seems to represent then is a sexual power whose threat lies in its difference from a phallic ‘norm.’ (96)

Williams consequently suggests that the act of direct procreation in ‘making’ new vampires in their image threatens the patriarchal virility of the male. It might also be argued that the victim’s enthralled gaze on the vampire can transcend the traditional male patriarchal gaze without and

within the cinematic scope (Mulvey 1975), in that it acts as “a recognition of their similar status as potent threats to a vulnerable male power” (Williams 97).

Whether the gaze operates in this way in today’s girl-centered novels, films and series is a question I will explore further below. But Ken Gelder argues that the traditional trope of the vampire centered on the male-predator’s dominance over the female-victim remains intact despite these points of ambivalence. He sees this played out most memorably in the famous scene from *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (Coppolla 1992) in which Mina is sucking blood from the titular vampire’s breast in yet another startling role reversal which paradoxically cannot represent a ‘queering’ of sexual politics. “By showing the scene to be deviant,” Gelder writes, “a dominant mode of sexuality, heterosexuality, is left intact—in spite of the claims for this scene as ‘transgressive’” (57). In other words, by clearly separating the *abnormal* from the norm, traditional vampire tropes reinforce heteronormativity. But, he continues,

One can only comprehend ‘deviancy’ through the discourses of ‘normal’ sexual practices. Since late Victorian vampire fiction is so densely populated with ‘paternal figures’, these discourses tend to prevail and ‘deviancy’ is thus registered as shocking; but we need not surrender to this narrativised response in our own readings. If these ‘queer’ scenes are undercoded, then part of the pleasure of reading lies in retrieving those codes and giving the scenes a ‘significance’ they do not appear to have in the text itself. (58)

Citing the interplay between patriarchal norms and subversion, Gelder leaves it to the audience to ‘make strange’ the norms and further examine the subversions (Shklovsky 1917). In this, Gelder is clearly citing Janice Radway’s theory of the pleasures of reading romance (1991), and coding the reader as an active audience participating in the meaning-making of the texts. This thesis, while not engaging with audience analysis, understands postfeminist discourse as an

interactive process in which girls' active consumption plays a major part. This consumption is taken to imply at least some of the reflexivity that Gelder credits the audiences of vampire fiction with, and indeed allows room for the ability to 'make strange' with which Radway credits her romance readers.

It is at the confluence of the romance and the vampire genres that we find the presumed audience for the contemporary girl-centered stories I am interested in here. The contemporary vampire romance is certainly a long way from *Dracula*, although certainly the exotic allure built into the vampire, his powerful thrall, and the way in which otherwise virtuous, virginal young women fall at his feet continues in the glamorization of the romantic vampire circulating today. Among the elements of vampire fiction that seem to have remained constant into present texts are the virginity of the love interest/intended victim, the coding of vampirism as a form of transgressive or violent sexuality and, in some texts, the retrenchment of heteronormative patriarchal norms of sexuality and romance as reassuringly appropriate for girls. It is, therefore, perhaps in these texts more than many others that the ability of the audience to "retrieve the codes" of the text is most essential, because these texts are suffused with ongoing debates about what is often considered most problematic about the legacy of postfeminism.

Buffy, Slaying, and Rape Culture

As discussed above, the vampire has long been understood as emblematic of sexual aggression, with the act of drinking blood routinely understood as an allegory for non-consensual sex. It is well established that the perpetrators of this sexualized violence—from *Dracula* to Bill Compton in *True Blood*—are traditionally male, and their intended victims female, speaking to the power

of the stereotype of male-over-female domination. It certainly seems tenable to suggest that the work of the feminist movement, particularly in the 1970s, in publicly speaking out against rape and making rape a visible social concern, as well as the emergence of rape crisis centers and women's 'self-defense' classes, directly impacted on these changes to popular cultural representations of vampires and their victims. This association between feminist activism and the rewriting of vampire stories is worth remembering for a discussion of what is usually referred to as the first postfeminist girl power version of this revision: *Buffy*.

The 1992 film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (directed by Fran Kuzui but, more famously, written by Joss Whedon) saw, for the first time, a girl 'taking back the night' from her potential (and overwhelmingly male) aggressors. But the 1997-2003 television series that followed (created and partly written and directed by Whedon) presented a much more complex gender dynamic between slayer and vampire. Some of the central vampire characters (and other villainous monsters) are female—and some of the male vampires are more victim than predator. Over the course of the series, some vampires become friends of the humans they nominally prey on, some friends become evil, and the line between safety and risk for the central girl character and her friends (mostly also girls) is blurred directly alongside the line between love and sex. The ambiguities depicted in *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* on television point to many of the same ambiguities highlighted by the postfeminist construction of girls and girl sexuality. While ostensibly enabling girls to recognize themselves as sexual subjects, both this series and the postfeminist discourse on girl sexuality were often contradictory, interacting with a greater culture of concern about male sexual predation that at the same time offered girls salutary lessons in not putting themselves at risk by sexual expression.

Not only are vampires not always the threats they are supposed to be in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but Buffy is often hurt more, both physically and emotionally, by the human men in her life. And when vampires are a threat to Buffy, it is sometimes because she has made herself vulnerable to their sexual interest in her, rather than because they are inhuman monsters who want to murder her. At the same time, rape, or at least attempted rape, figures many times in the series, and almost always the predators are people who are or had been loved and trusted, rather than simply faceless monsters. Clearly girls are now meant to understand two contradictory things—sexual predation is an ever-present threat and girls need to protect themselves; and expressing feminine sexual desire is crucial for a fully expressed female identity but will lead to emotional, if not physical harm.

The first lesson is a reminder of a traditional and heavily patriarchal binary. A postfeminist discourse of sexual risk reinforces the paradigms of the early vampire novels, presuming that women, and especially girls and virginal young women, are by default potential victims of male violation, and that female sexuality must be protected. As Catherine Driscoll writes,

The pivotal rhetorical move of this field of courses, pamphlets, books, and posters positions the girl's body as intrinsically vulnerable. It defines the girl by a sexualized embodiment founded on threat, rhetoric all the more troubling for employing a language of empowerment. Girls are surrounded by ideas about their own fragility, and self-defense for women is premised on this sexualized vulnerability, encoding the feminine body as an eminently violable vessel. Self-defense scenarios are often rape scenarios, and within them rape is often construed as the preeminent threat to girls and as almost equal to death.... The other staple element of this self-defense is the modification of an attitude

presumed to be proper to girls—a timidity, passivity, and incapacity for violence—which reinforces the normative image it transgresses in a good cause. (2002 256)

It is exactly in her capacity as self-protector that Buffy emerges as a girl hero. She is certainly neither timid nor passive, and she always wins the fight, taking the punches in stride. But the anxieties that led to the construction of this crusader whose enemies are so often skewed as sexual predators convey an ambivalence about what place female sexuality, and especially adolescent female sexuality, can have in our society—and this is a question that remains unresolved by the series. Female sexual choices are overwhelmingly coded as ‘bad’ or ‘good’ primarily based on their connection to love and romance. While Buffy makes complex but mostly ‘good’ decisions, her bad-girl foil Faith’s purely physical desire is almost always viewed critically, often leading to her own or someone else’s downfall. Buffy’s own sexual desire is largely concealed and is often punished when it reveals itself—often subtly in her critique of her own desires, more explicitly in her self-castigation over her mostly loveless relationship with the vampire Spike, and most directly when one night with Buffy turns the vampire-with-a-soul, Angel, into the evil Angelus. Although this is the most dramatic shift, Angel is not the only man who changes the day after Buffy has sex with him. Parker, an unremarkable college student with whom Buffy has a one night stand, seems to serve to disambiguate the message of the Angel-Angelus metaphor. Girl desire is construed as dangerous and potentially masochistic, and the series suggests that girls must consider their responsibility for guarding themselves against the wrong sexual partners. Parker and Buffy “are the cliché,” writes Justine Larbelestier. “Sex is important to a woman because of who she is fucking, for the tenderness and love that will result; sex is everything to the man—that narrative goes—it doesn’t matter who it’s with” (208). While Buffy is apparently ‘free’ to desire as she will and make choices about her sexuality, these

choices are overshadowed by the guilt and shame that might accompany them for girls, and the assumptions made about boys as potential predators.

This message is particularly troubling in the way it works against other ‘Young Adult’ (or YA) tropes. As Driscoll points out, the virginity of the girl in question is essential to the arc of self-discovery at the heart of many of the storylines directed at the audience book publishers designate as ‘Young Adult.’ Driscoll argues that

Virginity is a particularly important narrative device of this type in teen film, tracing the sexualized form of a supposedly linear trajectory even while operating as an in no way inevitable point of adolescent transformation. Virginity represents both the expert licensing of maturity—a transformation officially permitted only at a certain point—and that licensing system’s representational sleight of hand (95).

Teen film, and related popular media forms like television that have a presumed adolescent audience, although they are certainly not watched only by teens, often posit sex-with-love as the ‘ethical’ alternative to sex-without-love. Driscoll argues that “The sex of teen film turns on a dialectical relation between sex and romance—terms tied together as opposing but complementary social forces that together expose a fraught contradiction in the meaning of both for adolescent development” and that “Gender is a way of naming this contradiction not because girls want romance and boys want sex, although this is another cliché teen film both embraces and ridicules. The relation between sex and romance in teen film is primarily an ethical distinction” (96). If the decision regarding how and to whom the girl will lose her virginity is a central decision in much girl and young adult-directed media, when these popular cultural forms meet vampire mythology it becomes even more important.

The violation of the virgin's body by an undeserving creature is a core trope of the traditional vampire genre, and in the vampire 'teen' film (or series) this violation becomes a key metaphor for postfeminist ideas about girl sexuality. The postfeminist story about girl sexuality remains a contradictory tale of romance (with the possibility of sex) compatible with a more traditional mythos dependent on the sacredness of—and therefore need to defend—virginal young women. Caroline E. Jones explains that “dominant social discourses, including those in popular media, instruct young girls to be sexy and yet expect that they will regulate their own expressions of sexuality as well as the response of others to them” (65). She goes on to argue that, particularly in the United States, where the contemporary texts referred to in this chapter originate, “virginity in teen women is valued, even revered,” and thus that the series of “unpleasant consequences” to Buffy's sexual activity—also apparent in many other girl characters in young adult television series—should be seen as particularly disturbing.

One of the most troubling things about *Buffy* viewed from this perspective, and despite its clear Girl Power credentials, is that sex-with-love has the same result as sex-without-love: Buffy's partner turns on her, describing her in demeaning terms and rejecting her in a particularly painful way. While the evil Angelus sarcastically refers to her as a “pro” when she expresses anxiety that her inadequacy as a lover is responsible for his changed attitude to her (“Innocence”), the entirely human Parker laughs about her with his friends, calling her a “bunny in the sack” but too “clingy” (“The Initiative”). Buffy is in fact punished *more* for giving in to sexual desire with Angel, with whom she has shared a classic Young Adult romance, and whom she has *chosen* as the person to whom she will ‘give’ her virginity. The stories about her supernatural struggles are paralleled to, and entwined with, her human relationship problems. Although Buffy eventually finds a more stable (but still temporary) sexual and romantic

relationship with human super-soldier Riley, she struggles with expressing commitment to this. Her relationship with another vampire, Spike, is a later foil, with sex here less clearly connected to any expression of love and accompanied by self-loathing. Buffy's character thus seems to be very clearly affected by the early lessons she learns about expressing sexual desire. Gwyn Simonds writes:

Buffy is a victim of wanting to be a 'good' girl sexually. She thinks it is appropriate to express her sexuality but only if she expresses it within certain parameters.... It is not surprising that Buffy seeks out the same sense of danger in her love life that she finds empowering in her role as Slayer. Buffy finds aggression erotic but she is not, here, the sexually sophisticated young woman at ease with her sexuality that is ideologically stereotyped in today's magazines for young women. She is trying to reconcile a range of social expectations about the kind of young woman she should be sexually. (par. 22)

In this way, Buffy can be seen to represent a sexual ideology grounded in post-feminist discourse, embroiled in concerns for bodily safety and 'correct' choices while at the same time struggling for the promise of empowerment through sexual self-expression.

These conflicting ideals are also very present in youth sexuality education. Anastasia Powell offers this succinct summary of sex education policy in Australia:

Where policymakers and educators have intervened, strategies to promote youth sexual health and prevent violence have often had explicit and implicit moral overtones about men, women and sex. For example, there is a consistent assumption that young men's sexuality is 'uncontrollable', which has resulted in a focus on policing young women's sexuality (23, citing Tolman).

As Powell's reference to Deborah Tolman's work in the U.S. here suggests, this is hardly particular to Australia. In a 'western' culture heavily impacted by (often but not exclusively feminist) concerns about male-to-female sexual assault, young women have been taught that the custodianship of their sexuality requires constant vigilance, and protection against the inevitable aggression of male sexuality.

Male rather than female virginity is seen in quite a different light, just as, in *Buffy*, Xander's first experiences of sexuality are quite different to Buffy's. Larbelestier argues that,

At 16, Xander's virginity is an embarrassment...[it] is not only risible, it's dangerous: it makes him prey for a mantis-demon who eats male virgins in 'Teacher's Pet' (1.4). The demon 'knows' who's a virgin and who's not. This conceit is not confined to the Buffyverse. There is an expectation that a boy will be transformed by having penetrative sex for the first time.... When Xander becomes a 'man' it is with Faith, who seduces him while hardly seeming to register who he is.... After Faith throws him out, his confusion about what's happened, how he's supposed to react is plain: he's bewildered. Should he swagger? Punch the air? Be hurt? He doesn't know what he's feeling. (204)

While the aftereffects for Xander of sex-without-love are dubious at worst and a positive transformation at best, the punishment for Buffy is clear, love or not. She has failed to maintain her guard, and what follows after remains a salutary lesson for girls in general.

However, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as a series is self-consciously aware of the likely girl culture reception of this message. When Buffy confesses to her mentor and father-figure, Giles, that it was sex with her that gave Angel his moment of 'true happiness' and transformed him into the evil Angelus, she finishes by saying, "You must be so disappointed in me." Giles responds,

“I know you loved him. And he has proven more than once that he loved you. . . . If it’s guilt you’re looking for, I’m not your man” (“Innocence”). Buffy, as girl representative in this scene, reflects the broad cultural anxiety surrounding girl sexuality, looking here to a (male) parent figure for either validation or punishment. But, while she *is* punished for such choices, the support given by her circle of friends and mentors conveys some ambiguity about the inherent wrong-ness of those choices. *Buffy*, like postfeminist media culture more broadly, never resolves the contradictions between the rightness of sexual expression and the need for constant vigilance in the face of ever-present danger. The series stops short of actively critiquing the culture of concern that asks girls to be on their guard and protect themselves from sexual risk; instead it is of a piece with postfeminism that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is visibly aware of the contradictions this involves and remains open to its critique. I would argue that in this ambivalence *Buffy* anticipates the centrality of sex to the more contemporary vampire girl stories that have followed it.

The ambivalent sexual coding of girlhood in the postfeminist context is not confined to sexual activity, and is in fact one of the narrative premises of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The series often represents an awareness of the fraught messages concerning sexual availability (or lack thereof) presumed to be reflected in the clothing options available to girls, and indeed the over-coding of clothing choice as itself a representation of sexuality. In episode one, as Buffy stands in front of the mirror trying to decide which first impression she wants to make on her new school acquaintances, she holds up a sexy black dress. “Hi, I’m an enormous slut,” she says. Holding up a conservative, flowery dress, she asks, “Hello, would you like a copy of *The Watchtower*?” (“Welcome to the Hellmouth”) The juxtaposition of these extremes—the overtly provocative versus the demure—represents Buffy, at fifteen, as already aware of the importance

of the beauty-fashion complex in determining the messages she sends about her position as an object of sexual desire or as a sexual agent.

Kate Gleeson suggests how important this representation of choice is in representing Buffy's moment relative to the history of feminism. She argues that "Ambiguity in clothing gives young women opportunities to negotiate just exactly how 'mature' and/or 'sexual' they want to appear in particular situations and in relation to particular people, and to renegotiate these when necessary," and "It should come as no surprise that young women find negotiating a sartorial identity simultaneously a source of anxiety and pleasure, given the close interconnections among clothing, femininity, and sexuality" (112). Buffy illustrates this clearly as she agonizes over which version of herself is appropriate for that important introductory situation in a scene in which the image management that girls are clearly obliged to engage in borders on self-policing.

I want to take up a common thread in feminist criticism here by arguing that the origins of this need to police one's self-presentation speaks to the ubiquity of the "male gaze." Here I am referencing Laura Mulvey's well-known and much-debated 1970s thesis on *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), and I take postfeminist discourse as demonstrating how relevant Mulvey's argument remains. Mulvey asserts that "the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure", and, thereby, through the fantastical association of the spectator with the traditional male protagonist, patriarchy exerts control over femininity and over women's appearance in film as, in essence, present only through her "to-be-looked-at-ness" (17). This gaze is often represented through the look of men on screen but just as often by the perspective of the camera aligned with a social gaze. This gaze is, according to Mulvey, dependent on a dynamic she aligns with the Lacanian theoretic dynamic of phallus and lack in which the 'man'

is endowed with the phallus, and thus with activity and domination, while the 'woman' lacks the phallus (6). This means that the woman is present either to be conquered or put on a pedestal—in any case, she is passive and submissive.

This theory was largely applied at the time, in Mulvey's own work and in work indebted to this landmark essay, to 'classical Hollywood cinema' such as Alfred Hitchcock films. Debate in subsequent decades has questioned the relevance of this model to other forms of representation. But feminist theorists such as Angela McRobbie, addressing the postfeminist context of contemporary popular media, have asserted that the male gaze is now even more prevalent in images (such as fashion photography and advertising) directed towards young women (2009 16-17). Following this line of thought, critics like McRobbie argue that girls learn, through reading popular magazines and related texts, to carefully construct an image of themselves through the internalized 'male gaze'—in other words, as an object of desire—from an early age. Given that I have argued that the audience takes and makes meaning from popular culture in its own reflexive ways, I would suggest that the representation of women in film may now perhaps reflect that gaze differently, but it seems to me that the premise of Mulvey's male gaze theory is still relevant in perhaps more subtle ways. This might also be supported by Buffy's self-conscious association of clothing choices with her potential to be perceived as a sexual object. I will come back to the gaze in later parts of this chapter.

I would argue that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* should be read as a postfeminist text. While celebrating girls' potential power and success and critiquing some versions of misogyny and patriarchal bias it is also conflicted, defensive, and riddled with anxiety about who girls should be and how they should act. Sexuality is particularly important to this ambivalence. *Buffy* presents girl's sexual desire and sexual agency as facts, but presents both as fraught with

physical, social and emotional risk. I would argue that *Buffy* exemplifies the beginning of the postfeminist sensibility in popular media, a trend that is particularly visible within vampire fiction as the renegotiation of what sex means to girl culture. I will turn now to two more contemporary texts—the *Twilight* and *True Blood* series—for a clearer picture of where those negotiations stand today.

Bella, Desire, and the Loss of Virginity

With its overtly moralistic tone, *Twilight* (Meyer 2005; Hardwicke 2008) at first glance could be cast aside as one more example of what McRobbie calls “the new traditionalism” (2009 30-34). In *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009), this is McRobbie’s term for a return to patriarchal norms, as forewarned by Susan Faludi’s *Backlash* (1991), which pervasively informs media culture while being laughed off as “ironic” (2009 20-23). (Her central example is Bridget Jones, the title character from Helen Fielding’s novels and their film adaptations, whom McRobbie reads as a pseudofeminist character longing for domesticity.) But *Twilight* is not quite as simplistic as it might seem. Protagonist Bella’s desire for domestic bliss with her vampire beau, Edward, is complicated by her frequently referenced desire for the premarital sexual consummation of this relationship. The symbol of Bella’s virginity is made problematic by her very vocal desire to experience sexual physicality. This section explores what Bella’s relationship to feminine sexuality suggests about the place of sex and sexuality within girl culture today.

Buffy’s self-conscious choices concerning visually-coded femininity are integral to the *Buffy* series, juxtaposing her polished femininity with her superhuman strength to construct the ironic, self-reflexive tone of the series. Bella, however, is seen to eschew a construction of

appearance influenced by the male gaze. According to Driscoll, Bella “seems innately—rather than politically—opposed to the cornucopia of things usually represented as girl culture. She needs no prom dresses, flashy cars, or even the latest music, fashion, and movies to sustain her engagement with the world or to be attractive” (2012 11). Alongside this conscious disavowal of femininity, Bella is also explicitly coded as uncomfortable in her body: clumsy, awkward, and weak. Anthea Taylor argues that

This exaggerated sense of her somatic limitations can also be seen as a product of how she is positioned as a teenage female body, hyper-visible and subject to the male gaze. It is the weak female body and its associated vulnerability that is coded desirable in the Meyer-verse (35-36).

Bella seems, then, to be explicitly coded as the antithesis of the postfeminist can-do girl: as disengaged from consumer citizenship and its mobilization of girl culture and femininity as she is from the discourse of girl empowerment.

But despite Bella’s inappropriateness as a representative of postfeminist empowerment, there is nevertheless one important gender role shift in the *Twilight* texts that underscores the importance of sexual desire to Bella’s characterization: the displacement of the gaze. While Edward obsessively covets Bella, it is Bella’s gaze on Edward which is emphasized throughout the text; and that gaze is desirous in a way that is rare in young adult texts. Bella’s desiring gaze is, moreover, not only focused on Edward—not only a matter of her destiny in monogamous commitment. This gendered, sexualized gaze—this female gaze—is also turned on Jacob, Bella’s other suitor, and the way the text (or the camera) lingers on male beauty in representing Bella’s point of view merits further consideration.

Bella's lust for Edward is certainly tied inextricably to her romantic love for him. As previously discussed, love and sex, especially within the young adult genre, are bound up with responsibility for the girl, as the choice concerning whom she 'gives' her body to is a question of ethics. Therefore, the object of a girl's sexual desire, in mainstream girl culture, must embody masculinity in a non-threatening way. Gayle Wald, among others, discusses a similar neutralization of the threat of male sexuality in girl culture with reference to popular music. Wald's focus is on boy bands of the 90s:

The sexual and racial 'innocence' of the Backstreet Boys, although seemingly less objectifying of female sexuality than the performance of groups who make such objectification explicit, tenders a form of romantic instruction that has the potential to be a powerful source of the domestication of female sexual desire. For example, in addressing themselves to conventionally feminized fantasies of romantic intimacy, songs bearing titles such as 'As Long as You Love Me' and 'Anywhere For You' envision women's and girl's social agency primarily in terms of their ability to break boys' hearts—a dubious power that hinges on their ongoing definition as objects of male desire.

(14)

Wald's argument, emphasizing the period in which Girl Power rose to cultural prominence, also references work on 'Teenybop' by Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie (1978) and on 'Beatlemania' by Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess, and Gloria Jacobs. It is particularly useful to note that Ehrenreich et al. argue that this attraction to 'non-threatening' pop-idol masculinity was itself a resistance to the marginalization of girl sexuality: "Publicly to advertise this hopeless love was to protest the calculated, pragmatic sexual repression of teenage life" (97). While the discourse on young sexuality has changed since, the importance of 'sexual repression' for girls

seemingly remains intact if we look to the fields of sex education and the discourse surrounding girl virginity. To suggest that Bella's desire for Edward is new is misinformed; to suggest that it disrupts the conventions of mainstream young adult fiction for girls is certainly tenable.

Edward's beauty is, like the boy band performers discussed above, portrayed as girlish and non-threatening, unlike *Buffy's* Angel or especially Spike. The carnivorous nature of the vampire is played down in *Twilight* except in the context of controlling it, such as when Edward and other vampires remark on how good Bella smells. Instead, Edward reveals his vampiric nature to Bella by allowing her to see how he sparkles in the sun, placing Bella in the position of the gazer, rather than the one who is to be looked at (*Twilight*). As Driscoll puts it, "Edward's 'supermodel' beauty (e.g., *Twilight* 253, 358) and glamorous poses and entrances help split both the distinction between agency and desire and the receptive glamour of the sexual object between Edward and Bella" (2012 5). In other words, through Bella's romanticized desire for Edward, and his protective desire for her, both are turned into objects of spectatorship.

While Edward carefully controls his desire for Bella, Bella's desire for him threatens to (literally) consume her. While current trends in sex education maintain the postfeminist notion that girls are responsible for protecting their sexuality from potential aggressors, Bella is the one who tries to force the issue in her relationship with Edward, and he is the one to exercise caution (*Eclipse, Breaking Dawn*). While some may see this as ceding sexual power to him, Jackie C. Horne argues that this dynamic is in fact "a relief" for girl readers:

No longer having to worry that her sexuality may take her to a dangerous place, the young reader, by projecting herself into Bella, can express her sexual feelings without reserve, can feel their power and pleasure without the inhibitions that the role of sexual police officer cannot help imposing. While perhaps not a tactic to rely on in real life,

ceding responsibility for policing sexual boundaries clearly speaks to a deeply important fantasy... for girls, exploring their sexuality without self-imposed inhibition. (32).

It is clear that the sense of safety Edward's resolve and reserve provide is still a 'fantasy' for girls in terms of being compatible with their own desires. In a culture in which the need for girls to protect themselves is the norm, Bella's departure from this is significant, and may represent an attempt at renegotiating the limits of desire within contemporary girl culture.

While Bella may seem like a pioneer in terms of representing an assertive girl sexuality for girls, this seeming empowerment is complicated by the ways in which virginity and its loss are tied into marriage and motherhood in the series. Traditional archetypes of morality are embedded in the question of when and how Bella will lose her virginity, with multiple people, including Bella's other suitor Jacob, weighing in on this question (*Breaking Dawn*). The main concern is whether Bella will survive sex with Edward while still in human form: an unwilling concession he makes upon her agreeing to marry him before consummation. But Bella insists upon this, although it threatens her life, as do many things in the series. Indeed, one popular reading of their relationship (and indeed the same could be said for all of the girl-vampire relationships discussed in this chapter—Buffy-Angelus, Buffy-Spike, Sookie-Bill, Sookie-Eric) is that it glamorizes domestic abuse, coding it as a necessary sacrifice for romantic happiness. Referring to the physical pain Bella willingly endures during their first, bruising sexual encounter, and the ongoing psychological control exerted by Edward, Jessica Taylor argues that “the *Twilight Saga*, rather than conforming to public discourses that state domestic violence is wrong and one assault is too many, can be interpreted as suggesting that violence in relationships, if not expected, is culturally acceptable under specific circumstances” (390).

Taylor's account of classic abusive behavior within the *Twilight* books is convincing. She points particularly to Edward's "regime of surveillance" as he follows Bella, reads the thoughts of her friends, and watches her from a distance (392). She also describes the way in which Jacob's violent passion for Bella—especially in a scene in which he kisses her against her will (*Eclipse*)—is romanticized on the premise that "it suggests a depth and intensity that proves Jacob's love for Bella is not merely an adolescent infatuation" (396). Certainly this is a distinct turn away from *Buffy*'s representation of all forms of domestic violence, which was met at the very least with anxiety and most often with violence in return. "Beauty and the Beast" [3.4] explicitly deals with domestic violence, as Buffy helps a victim overcome her self-doubt and confront her abuser, and in a far more complex late-series plot line, Buffy's own growing tendency to blend violence with sex in her relationship with Spike signals a pivotal ethical crisis from which both, in different ways, have to be rescued. By contrast violence, aggression, and domination are naturalized within the *Twilight* universe. Taylor posits

that the inclusion of the supernatural allows the depiction of an aggressive, even monstrous, masculinity—a masculinity that feminism forbade for the ordinary human male. This otherworldliness offers a justification for behaviour that is not only unacceptable for human males to exhibit, but also unacceptable for women to desire in a society that has been influenced by feminist critique of male violence. (393)

As I have previously argued, speculative fiction opens the door to possibilities outside of the realm of contemporary real world cultural discourse. That in doing so it should create a space in which seemingly outdated modes of aggressive masculinity and feminine fragility are eroticized raises important questions about the postfeminist context in which it emerges.

Much of what McRobbie might call the “neotraditionalism” of the text can perhaps be attributed to creator Stephenie Meyer’s own conservative religious Mormon values. Meyer herself has cited a feminism that believes in the right to “choose,” and explicitly codes choices such as family and marriage, viewed, she feels, as “anti-feminist,” as made feminist by the act of choosing—choosing things that go against a perceived dominant rhetoric of empowerment (Meyer 2010, qtd in Petersen 54). This rhetoric of choice is a distinct element of the “postfeminist sensibility” which Rosalind Gill detects in contemporary media discourse:

Notions of choice, of being oneself and pleasing oneself, are central to the postfeminist sensibility that suffuses contemporary western media culture. They resonate powerfully with the emphasis upon empowerment and taking control that can be seen in talk shows, advertising, and makeover shows. A grammar of individualism underpins all these notions, such that even experiences of racism, homophobia, or domestic violence are framed in exclusively personal terms in a way that turns the idea of the personal as political on its head. (2007 “Postfeminist” 155)

The fact that Bella (or indeed Meyer) *can* choose to align herself with traditional, patriarchal values can thus be viewed as empowering in itself. But I would argue that the idea that these are ‘anti-feminist’ choices, an idea conveyed by Meyer in defensive tones, suggests more about the tendency to generationalize and historicize feminism in ways that often misunderstand, misrepresent, or oversimplify the ongoing project of women’s rights. Choices that are seen as outside of this project are often used against a pervasive conception of feminism as opposed to traditional feminine values. See, for example, the 2014 #WomenAgainstFeminism viral campaign (Chang 2014), which was reminiscent in some respects of trends such as ‘Girlie’ and Third Wave feminism of the 1990s-2000s, but also directed against feminist criticism more

generally. Meyer's comments, and indeed much of Bella's storyline, might also be understood as inhabiting a terrain of known feminist achievements but is far less able to explicitly acknowledge them.

However, Bella's alignment with conservative morality also serves an important purpose within the text: it legitimates her sexual desires. Bella's "begging Edward to have sex with her is not now incompatible with being a good girl (in love)," writes Driscoll; "But his requirement that they marry first is disconcerting because it gives her full and utter commitment to him a name that is inappropriate to her context" (2012 13). Bella's central conflict lies in the way in which her *choice* forecloses all possibility of her reconciliation with a contemporary postfeminist idea of girlhood. In *Breaking Dawn*, Bella contemplates this choice:

In that moment, as the minister said his part, my world, which had been upside down for so long now, seemed to settle into its proper position. I saw just how silly I'd been for fearing this – as if it were an unwanted birthday gift or an embarrassing exhibition, like the prom. I looked into Edward's shining, triumphant eyes and knew that I was winning, too. Because nothing else mattered but that I could stay with him. (49)

By marrying Edward and joining the Cullens' timeless existence, Bella confirms that the 'right' choice does not lie within the reality shaped by feminism, which makes her and others question the decision to marry young, and even postfeminism, which seems critically represented here in the 'embarrassing exhibitions' like prom that align with the spectacular figure of the girl). Rather it lies in a space outside of such a reality, where a romantic love that ensures domestic bliss is paramount. Although this fantasy world may be a convenient way to subvert potential accusations concerning what McRobbie would call "patriarchal reentrenchment" (2009 55), Bella's story from the beginning is quite clearly one of "empowerment through carefully chosen

submissions to tradition” (Driscoll 2012 13). These submissions grant Bella the ability to navigate the world in clearly empowered ways. As Anthea Taylor argues,

Undeath for Bella, then, correlates with the transference of multiple, overlapping forms of capital—economic, cultural, sexual and physical. What Bella covets is not simply an eternity as a vampire but the power it conveys, including the physical strength and prowess she is seen to so sorely lack as a human. She chooses not just Edward, but an identity and a lifestyle that has been throughout glamorized, marked by consumer capitalism (complete with prestige cars, the details of which are painstakingly laid out for the reader) and unlimited cash-flow. (41)

Ironically it is through these choices that Bella is enabled to be the successful, “can-do” girl constructed by Girl Power rhetoric. She becomes not only a beautiful antithesis of her former awkward self, describing her vampire body as ‘fluid,’ ‘flawless,’ ‘smooth,’ and ‘strong’ (*Breaking Dawn* 371), but naturally skilled at performing her new vampire identity: ‘I had found my true place in the world, the place I fit, the place I shined’ (485). She has transformed into the imagined neoliberal figure of the girl; *Twilight* could thus be consumed as a fable of alternative, conservative, paths to the postfeminist end-goal of accumulation of capital of all kinds through individual choice.

To return to the question of Bella’s virginity: it is significant that Bella chooses, despite the apparent danger, to remain a real, human *girl* when she experiences sex for the first time—locating her experience of consummation specifically within the domain of *girl* sexuality. During their honeymoon, Bella is a willing but fragile sexual partner, bruised by Edward’s superhuman strength and ultimately impregnated with a fetus that threatens to end her life as well. Having gone through this experience, Bella finally becomes the vampire she always intended to

become—an official member of her chosen society. But her human fragility, her girlish vulnerability, is an important part of this sequence of events. As Driscoll argues, “paying close attention to teen film suggests the value of this vulnerability lies in openness to reconfiguration; or, we might say, impressionability” (2013 103). Bella chooses this path in order to open herself to this transformation, and ultimately, she is indeed transformed—by motherhood as much as vampirism.

While I address the renegotiations of the postfeminist girl’s relations to motherhood in another chapter, a brief discussion of some key points is important when discussing Bella’s transformation from girl to vampire. In the end, because Edward has always resisted the idea of Bella becoming a vampire, the very necessity of “turning” Bella lies in the birth of her daughter Renesmee. As the fetus grows within her, threatening to destroy Bella’s body in the process, Bella transfers her willingness to ‘die for love’ (‘If your life was all you had to give your beloved, how could you not give it? [*Breaking Dawn* 1]) from Edward to the baby which, as it is a part of Edward, presents no conflict. But in surviving the birth through becoming a vampire, Bella must surrender her central role as the fragile, protected girl archetype to her daughter. “Becoming like the mother, as girls do, will probably mean the sacrifice of independent subjectivity or selfhood,” writes Jessica Benjamin. “It will mean subordination to others and their needs...—merging at the expense of individuality” (148). Indeed, Renesmee’s new identity merges with Bella’s now rejected human identity in more ways than one. Just as Renesmee now becomes the focus of a vampire conflict over whether she should be allowed to exist, Jacob’s love also transfers to Renesmee through “imprinting.” Driscoll suggests that Renesmee

rewrites Bella’s past, present, and future, verifying her romantic predestination as loving Edward by absorbing the Jacob-Bella-Edward love triangle into a familial model. She

incorporates Bella into a generational model as she obliterates Bella's role as the point of identification for romantic drama. Jacob's obsessive love for Bella, which fuels rivalries organizing the "Twilight" fandom (Team Edward vs. Team Jacob), is rewritten as his love for Renesmee. (2012 25)

Bella's daughter is destined to an eternal late adolescence, in which, presumably, in her super-human state, she will be able to procreate with Jacob. Bella, now a vampire—and therefore now barren—is bereft of both her youthful fertility and her position as romantic subject. Her love story, now concluded, is replaced by the promise of future love between Renesmee and Jacob. Driscoll identifies the message at the heart of this succession: in the *Twilight saga*, the loss of virginity "represents a rite of passage in which adolescence and humanity will be simultaneously overcome—Bella cannot have sex with Edward and remain a girl" (2012 9).

Bella's choice to put herself through a dangerous pregnancy despite the risks to herself is, of course, also a thinly veiled anti-abortion stance. Anna Silver notes that:

Bella's pregnancy in *Breaking Dawn* dramatizes a woman who resists what is essentially a late-term abortion (since Renesmee grows at an accelerated pace) that risks destroying her life. The pregnancy saps Bella's strength, breaks her ribs, and leads to the rupture of the placenta and projectile vomiting of blood. Yet, despite the risks, Meyer proves Bella correct. Meyer grants the fetus consciousness and emotion; she fictionalizes the key anti-abortion argument that personhood occurs before birth. And, because the initially wary Edward comes around to this position, Meyer prods the reader to come to that conclusion, as well.... Meyer's diction is so clearly drawn from contemporary rhetoric about abortion that one would have to be obtuse not to draw those symbolic connections. (131)

Meyer's pro-life stance is part of a larger, conservative, morally inflected (and perhaps typically American) argument for patriarchal values that I will return to in later chapters. The fact that it is present within an extremely popular fantasy series overwhelmingly directed at girls is certainly significant, and in line with arguments about the postfeminist ideologies being materialized within the media (McRobbie, Gill). But for Silver, it is less these more dramatic crises that face Bella, and more her struggle to find her identity amidst the chaos that may appeal to young readers. "Girls might not have to ponder whether or not to give up their mortal existences," she writes, "but they frequently have to make decisions about who they are and what they are willing to do: with which social group will I ally myself in the cafeteria? is this behavior acceptable or too risky? to what extent must I change my sense of self in order to date this person?" (17) So, while Bella becomes a young mother and eschews contemporary postfeminist culture, readers may (following Bettelheim) be more intrigued by her literal and symbolic rites of passage than her choice to follow that 'traditional' life course.

Bella is thus a complicated figure for any consideration of contemporary girl sexuality. While the act of sex itself is fraught with danger for her, desire is forthrightly dealt with between the main protagonists, which is an element of Edward's representation as a non-threatening partner as important as his willingness to police both his and Bella's desires. Despite overtones of abuse, the male-as-aggressor vampire archetype is much more ambiguous here than in *Buffy*. There is a great deal of violence directed against Bella across the series—mostly in supernatural form—but explicitly *sexual* aggression is only implied, and never dealt with outright. Anne Morey observes that "after intensive social campaigns against rape in every imaginable situation, especially those such as date rape, that formerly appeared to some observers to be quasi-consensual, the rape motif is clearly off limits in young adult romances" (20). Meanwhile, the

injuries sustained by Bella in the dangerous pregnancy that results from her very first sexual experience seem to point to an implicit warning about the gravity of sexual activity, as does her irreversible transformation by which her humanity (and therefore girlhood) is taken from her. Edward's insistence on their marriage before this transformation lends this message a moralistic tone. Morey points out that the contrast between overt physical desire and traditional mores is what makes the series 'radical' in its context, referring to "the yoking of premarital sexual restraint to a frank acknowledgement of physical desire, a combination itself opposed to dominant representations of sexuality" (17).

While the girl's sexual desire is represented more directly in Bella than in Buffy, the strong link between the loss of female virginity and the complete transformation of the self still reflects long-held anxieties surrounding feminine sexuality. While Buffy remains a 'girl' by maintaining her humanity throughout (and despite her aging across the series), Bella's careful transformation through concessions to tradition finally marks her as 'adult' while freezing her in a girl's body. Driscoll points to this irony: "While Buffy is strongly identified with girl culture, even after she seems to have lost access to it under the burden of adult and super-adult responsibilities, Bella is both permanently within and yet overwhelmingly identified against girl culture" (9). This, I would argue, is significant because it turns on the role of girl sexuality in these texts. The construction of 'right' choices regarding sexuality is set against the influences of girl culture, idealizing a certain set of mores—premarital abstinence, early marriage, early motherhood—set within a glamorous fantasy world which girls are defined against. In effect, this juxtaposition actively ignores the political realities of girls' lives and also media discourse on girls, all the while romanticizing patriarchal traditions which these are imagined to be entirely outside.

Sookie, Sex, and the Single Girl

The *True Blood* television series (Ball 2008-2014)—and its source text, the series of novels by Charlaine Harris (2001-2013)—differ first from *Twilight* and *Buffy* in that the female protagonist is significantly older. Sookie Stackhouse is ten years older than Bella and Buffy when they first appear, to be precise, although the aging of both these girls across their respective series is narratively important. At twenty-six, Sookie is not an adolescent, by any usual definition. For narrative purposes, however, Sookie is certainly still a ‘girl’: living with her grandmother, working a part-time job, and (most importantly) still a virgin at the beginning of her story. She is also referred to as a girl, by herself and by those around her.

As with Bella, Sookie’s sexuality holds the key to identifying the woman she will eventually become. But unlike Bella, Sookie lives in a world surrounded by sex, and vampires are at the epicenter of a sexual revolution that is pivotal to her story. In fact, the vampires that enter Sookie’s town of Bon Temps at the beginning of the series operate as a metaphor for marginalized sexualities. At the outset their existence has recently been revealed, and as they come out of a long closeted existence, they are met with “vamp-shaming,” hate crimes against them, and threats posed by the desirability of a drug (“V”) based on their own blood. Although the violence “V” leads to is very different from the HIV which it allegorically represents in some respects, vampires in the *Southern Vampire Mysteries* of Harris and the *True Blood* series clearly speak to the cultural consciousness surrounding homosexuality. Further, most vampires in this story are pansexual and have voracious appetites for sex as well as blood. Soon it becomes clear that not only being a vampire, but also *loving* one, involves a process of coming ‘out,’ in the latter case as a vampire lover. Even more clearly in the television series than in the books,

eventually most characters must navigate this process and come out as vampire lovers. Sookie is not only the first character to notice, and welcome, a vampire in Bon Temps, but she is the first to become a vampire lover in this story and the one whom we are meant to identify with as our ‘girl’ hero.

Although Sookie is in her twenties, the same tropes of young adult romance are tied up in the loss of her virginity as with Bella, further marking her as ‘girl’ and complicating the question of sexual agency. Sookie is depicted quite clearly as a girl in waiting—waiting to be rescued from a virginity enforced by her ability to read people’s thoughts and therefore her inability to establish trust and find intimacy. When the vampire Bill Compton appears in the diner where Sookie works, and she cannot read his thoughts, she falls in love with him, believing he is the fantastic fulfilment of all her desires. When their sexual relationship enables the mythical transformation associated with the loss of virginity, her story can finally begin. Whereas the *Twilight* series is a story of the granting of “girls’ maturity as something gifted by men” (Driscoll 2013 141), *True Blood* is instead a story that begins with this transformation and, interestingly, ends with Sookie gifting Bill with the “true death.”

As with Bella, Sookie’s smell is irresistible to all vampires, but the first she meets is the much older, much more experienced Bill. Through a long process of courtship, Sookie eventually falls in love and surrenders her body to him in a graphic scene (in both the books and the television series) that involves his drinking her blood along with ‘taking’ her virginity. That she bears the marks of the violation of her body publicly with this bite—and therefore bears also the shame that goes along with being a “fanger” (a vampire lover)—extends the metaphor of the corruption of feminine purity, central to *Dracula*, to a modern context. As with Bella again, multiple people weigh in on the manner by which Sookie surrenders her virginity. But, unlike

Bella, with Sookie they do so after the fact. While everyone seems to lay the blame on Edward in *Twilight*, in *True Blood* the blame is squarely, and constantly, laid on Sookie. The condemnation addressed to her for having sex with a vampire resembles what is sometimes called 'slut-shaming.' Considering the double-entanglement of postfeminist femininity, Gill argues that "on one hand women are presented as active, desiring social subjects, yet on the other they are subject to a level of scrutiny and hostile surveillance that has no historical precedent" (2007 Gender 42). "Hostile surveillance" is what Sookie is subjected to, and what she and all vampire-lovers—especially female ones—are held hostage to throughout the series. In season one, it is worth noting, the main plot line hinges on an obsessive serial killer stalking and murdering female "fangbangers." Presumably, the reaction of the conservative town of Bon Temps to these transgressively-coded relationships is intentionally given overtones of homophobia. Meanwhile, however, it is also reminiscent of Linda Williams' and Ken Gelder's discussions of the vampire as a threat to (conservative, traditional) male virility, especially among the hyper-virile, ageless vampires of *True Blood*.

Still, the public's reaction to the loss of Sookie's virginity (and her choice of lover) is significant in the context of a presumably liberated demographic. As a girl born into a world influenced by postfeminist discourse, Sookie is positioned as an example of McRobbie's "phallic girl" (2009 84). She is (somewhat) financially independent, and both virtually free but secretly prisoner to the anxiety of finding a husband. But the phallic girl is mainly determined by her ability to enjoy sex without the fear of societal repercussions. "As long as she does not procreate while enjoying casual and recreational sex," writes McRobbie, "the young woman is entitled to pursue sexual desire seemingly without punishment" (2009 85). But, McRobbie warns, this new-found "freedom" can in fact lead to the reconstruction of traditional gender roles: "a kind of strategic

endowment to young women, a means of attributing to them degrees of capacity but with strict conditions which ultimately ensure gender re-stabilisation” (2009 84). As in Buffy’s and Bella’s narrative trajectories, we see a rhetoric of *choice*, and if there is a coding of correct and incorrect sexual choices, this is less important than the reinforcement that the girl herself chooses. For Buffy and Bella, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ meant different things: Buffy’s choices are made based on an ethics of responsibility for others as well as for the self, while Bella’s are centered more on an idea of traditional sexual ethics in which the girl’s choice of sex for the love of a man is the consummation of her journey to self-hood. But while the loss of Sookie’s virginity bears the same narrative and ethical weight as that of these other two protagonists, Sookie’s available choices thereafter are more complex, most probably because she is an older, outwardly self-sufficient subject. But she nevertheless seems beholden to the sex-with-love trope dominating young adult romance.

While Sookie discovers pleasure in her own sexuality, including with men other than Bill following their breakup, the line between her sexual agency and her positioning as sexual object is blurred by the graphic visibility of her body onscreen. The books include a constant narration of Sookie’s wardrobe choices, with close attention paid to the lingerie she chooses for date nights. This is reflected in the series as the camera seems to obsess over every angle of Sookie’s body while she gets dressed (or undressed). Mulvey references ‘old-school’ Hollywood glamour to talk about the ‘show girl’ aspect of the on-screen female character, noting that viewing the woman’s body on screen gives her “the quality of a cut-out or icon,” essentially robbing her of depth and reducing her to a recipient of the male character’s erotic gaze (13). Sookie is certainly the focus of a spectatorial gaze, and the way in which her body is paraded on screen in quickly changing costumes certainly gives her the paper-doll-like quality Mulvey discusses. But while

Sookie is given the lion's share of camera attention, the way in which she is ogled by the camera (and presumably the viewers) is matched by the way the naked torsos of the male characters are glamorized. Bill, his rival for Sookie's love, Eric, and also Sookie's brother Jason are all put on display for the viewing pleasure of the audience in a way reminiscent of the Bella-centred gaze on Edward and Jacob, but much more overtly, which is to be expected given that the presumed age of the audiences is split between PG-13 for Buffy and Bella and a late night 'cable' MA for Sookie.

Sharyn Pearce claims that girls' magazines and mainstream teen films like *American Pie* are partly responsible for an expectation of such eroticization of the male body. She argues that "the male body is now docile to female command while the female gaze, not at all repressed, looks actively and erotically, but in a nonthreatening and nonaggressive manner, controlling but also celebrating rather than criticizing what it is viewing" (72). But the nature of these erotic gazes is, in the beginning, essentially very different. While Sookie is portrayed as a delicate 'consumable,' the main male protagonists that are also subject to the gaze in these texts are most often represented as dominant figures, their virility and musculature on show. Indeed, male vampires are clearly the primary 'consumers' of Sookie. Their sexual relationships are often unburdened by romantic storylines, whereas Sookie has no sexual relationships without them. Sookie may, perhaps, gaze upon these male bodies lustfully, but the lust seems to be a desire to *be conquered* rather than *conquer*, maintaining her initial position as the object or receiver of the action, rather than the agent.

In fact Sookie's positioning as a passive player in a male-dominated world is further played out as she explores her place among the vampires. Both Bill and Eric lay claim to the 'ownership' of Sookie: within the fantasy realm of the series, a vampire claiming a human as his

(or hers) allows that human protection, status, and certain luxuries, such as, in Sookie's case, financial support. The fact that Sookie sometimes agrees to and sometimes rebuffs Bill and Eric's claims does not obscure the fact that she essentially relies on them for support and protection. If there is any reciprocity in these relationships, the few times that Sookie actively helps their cause are definitively overshadowed by their predatory sexual relationships with her, which almost always involve the consumption of her blood during coitus. Sookie's blood is, we eventually learn, an aphrodisiac to all vampires because she has, in part, fairy blood. This is the source of her telepathy and her other superpower—the ability, when threatened, to shock attackers with an electric current from her hands. Both telepathy and her power to defensively stun, while seeming to empower Sookie, in fact reinforce her status as perpetually receptive and responsive, if not passive, and thus as perpetually more likely to be a victim than an aggressor.

Over seven seasons, *True Blood* develops the dynamic relationships between its central characters, both in the way the gaze and other representations of power and desire appear, and in the way the relationships play out. One clear example is the plot turn by which the previously vampire-phobic Jason, Sookie's brother, is nearly devoured by a group of starving female vampires, but protected in the end by one of them laying 'claim' to him. Her protection comes at the price of his submission to her sexual whims, which in turn are limited by the condition that the only sexual contact they have is through his orally pleasuring her—until he is 'ready.' While at first this seems to reverse traditionally gendered sex roles, Jason's 'readiness' is finally proven when, fed up with his own sexual dissatisfaction, he essentially forces himself on her, thus proving that he is, in her own words, 'a warrior.' *She*, therefore, submits to *him*. Later when Jason suggests they start a family, she emasculates him, calling him a 'girl' and therefore signaling that her desire for him does not extend past his ability to dominate her ("Fire in the

Hole”). She thus relegates him to a subordinate status while at the same time validating the traditional, heteronormative role of macho man.

While *True Blood* pushes and complicates the boundaries of representing sexual desire—portraying both male and female bisexuality and homosexuality—it often reverts to, or at least makes an important amount of room for, conservative norms in the masculine and feminine sexual roles among its central protagonists, choosing instead to represent them in a neo-traditional light. In questioning the relationship between heteronormativity and *True Blood*, as a popular television series, Jessica Murrell and Hannah Stark argue that “it may well be that this limitation is illustrative of a broader conundrum: whether *any* televisual product marketed to an audience of millions could ever fully depart from or destabilize representational conventions” (125). Indeed, this raises one of the questions at the heart of this thesis, and at the heart of postfeminist media discourse, because it suggests that an interrogation of how postfeminist rhetoric has largely played out in popular media must include a consideration of how is it being continually reassessed, or even reinvented.

Within *True Blood*, one clear transgression against patriarchal standards of relationship-building is the way in which kinship is constructed. From the very beginning, polyamorous vampire ‘nests’ are shown as one viable mode of managing a social existence that amounts to domestic life. Throughout, an emphasis is placed on alternate family structures, as Sookie, an orphan, is raised by her Gran, alongside her brother and (unofficially) her friend Tara. Eric’s at times sexual, generally platonic, and deeply familial mutual love for Pam, whom he long ago made a vampire, is given more focus as the seasons go on. In fact, their enduring loyalty and willingness to sacrifice themselves for one another is represented in a way that far more closely resembles the tragically romantic relationship between Edward and Bella than the relationship

between Bill and Sookie. The sense of kinship through community, rather than through romantic relations, is a general feature of the series. While Murrell and Stark argue that *True Blood's* “excessive heterosexuality” and “eroticized violence” (125) negates the usefulness of any apparently transgressive representations of family and relationships in other respects, I would argue that the later death of the central male love interest and the final scene, in which Sookie is shown taking up a position as matriarchal leader of a diverse community of people (and ‘supes’) marginalized by traditional society, does indeed bring the series to a conclusion that speaks less of patriarchal norms and more of alternative social structures.

Murrell and Stark are indeed correct to be concerned with the way in which the series “represents control of women’s bodies as a site of anxiety” (124). It is important to note that the sexual choices Sookie makes are extremely heavy matters to her (and those around her). Nevertheless, the series gratuitously shows every detail of her sexual encounters, even details of her sexual fantasies, thus allowing her character to explore sex in ways unassociated with the key romantic storyline. This more explicit representation of Sookie’s desire compared to Buffy’s, or even Bella’s, is at least in part possible because she signifies womanhood as much as girlhood and that the actress, Anna Paquin, does not raise the additional controversy that an adolescent would even on HBO.) But the need for Sookie to remain faithful to her lover throughout is necessitated by her positioning as a girl.

This conflict of interests between the clear desire of the series producers to glorify the characters’ sexuality and the necessity to follow traditional tropes of girl romance is clearly situated in postfeminist discourse. Emilie Zaslow sums up this dilemma:

As a commodified social movement, girl power media culture takes the third-wave desire for power through sexuality and combines it with the capitalist ‘sex sells’ imperative to

produce a discourse in which sexuality equals power over men, as well as large revenues for sex-positive performers and those who profit from their public display of sexuality.... While these images of sexual power offer a different narrative to girls—one that stresses desire, self-determination, and sexual agency—this narrative is missing a complex understanding of exactly which women are entitled to sexual agency and power, the anxieties that revolve around positioning the body as an instrument of power, and the social, psychological, and economic requirements of this revised body narrative. (62)

In this context, *True Blood* leaves us with more questions than answers about sexual agency. Is Sookie more entitled to “a public display of sexuality” than Bella or Buffy because of her age? Because of her status as no-longer-a-virgin? What is the impact of this performance on her identity? On her perception of her sexuality? The rhetoric surrounding Sookie’s sexual choices, until perhaps the very end of the series, remains centered on who will have the right to ‘ownership’ of her—who will keep her safe and secure. All of her suitors promise protection in a number of ways, and her eventual acceptance of their suits, in each case, generally cedes much of her independence to them, in one way or another. Like Bella, the question for Sookie seems still to be one of who to *give* her body to—in other words, who she should surrender power and control to. Her story is finally less one of sexual agency than sexual submission.

The controversial end to the series, in which Bill chooses to end his life and asks Sookie to participate in assisted suicide (“Thank You”), could be seen simply as Sookie’s rejection of the dangerous sexual liberation implicit in participation in vampire society. She chooses instead to live a ‘normal’ life as a spouse and mother to a human family, and could thus be seen to choose, like Bella in *Twilight*, a moralistic, conservative ideology. However, while indeed Sookie in the end realizes what, incidentally, has *always* been her eventual dream of having a

husband and a family, her final two scenes can, perhaps, be read in a different way. First, Bill's gruesome, visceral death—a massive bloodletting, caused by Sookie driving a stake through his heart at an agonizingly slow rate—is, of course, reminiscent of the way Buffy, in slaying vampires, subverted the penetrative sex act, placing Sookie, like Buffy, squarely in the powerful, dominant phallic position. In fact, Sookie *chooses* this end, traumatic for both of them, over using the last of her fairy powers to give him a painless death. She essentially maintains the integrity of her body and metaphorically reverses her own, more or less submissive, blood loss to Bill in this painful act of self-sacrifice.

The series ends with Sookie serving dinner at her house—once her Gran's house—to a table full of the people she has formed relationships, of various kinds, with over the years. Around the table are fairies, vampires, werewolves, homosexual couples, heterosexual couples, and various offspring. A pregnant Sookie embraces her male partner, whose face we never see, and then sits next to him at the head of the table, raising a glass to her friends before they begin their meal. While initiation into a community has been pointed to as a common characteristic of neo-Gothic narratives in general (see Moruzi 2012), I would argue that the diversity of this final group, centered on Sookie and coupled with the anonymity of her choice of partner, implies that kinship here is *more important* to the narrative than the traditional heteronormative romantic tropes that previously dominated *True Blood* in earlier seasons. This is, indeed, a transgressive construction of sociality, and while outwardly it has less to do with gender or girlhood than it does with gay rights, for example, this final rejection of the romantic relation in favor of community—in an text otherwise coded with expected rhetoric about girlhood identity and girl success in relationships—suggests, possibly, that new modes of kinship as well as desire are included in the renegotiation of postfeminist discourse.

Conclusions

My discussion in this chapter has considered both the transformation of and limitations on girl sexuality and girl identity in popular vampire films and series. Certainly, the increased sexual freedom often represented for girls and the popular celebration of feminine desire that informs these popular fictions is encouraging from a feminist perspective, especially as part of a movement away from rape-centered storylines or rape allegories. But the negative consequences of these girls acting on their apparent desires, and/or the seemingly inevitable termination of relationships, as in Sookie's and Bella's stories, in marriage and motherhood, reflect a wider culture of concern about the expression of girl sexuality. While cultural producers are to some extent clearly accountable for the representations they disseminate, the wide appeal of all the stories I have discussed here, especially to girls, suggests a broader set of concerns. And it is perhaps even more urgent, considering the limitations of these apparently liberating popular stories about girl sexuality, to call upon sexual education systems to improve the way in which girls (and boys) are informed, particularly in order to move away from entrenched harmful binary understandings of male and female sexuality as dominant-submissive and subject-object.

In the light of these comments, *Buffy* clearly seems to offer the more innovative or 'progressive' understanding of girl sexuality. The *Buffy* story is still being continued more than a decade later in the form of comic books (Whedon 2007—). In this comic series Buffy is the leader of a girl army in the ongoing fight against evil, generally forgoing romance, but occasionally giving in to her own sexual desires. Those desires include fantasies involving multiple (male) lovers, and several encounters with a female lover as well. Buffy's departure from the heterosexual matrix is notable, although the *Buffy* television series already famously

included a central (and then a follow-up) lesbian couple. Nevertheless, it is more worthwhile, perhaps, to observe the way comic-book *Buffy* confronts these desires with neither shame nor remorse, and without any foregone conclusions about future domestic bliss. Surely this is *Buffy* updated for a cultural moment that might move beyond obsessing over girl virginity, sexual surveillance, and coding girls as victims/objects. This is a cultural moment that we have yet to arrive at, perhaps, but it is apparently one that we can optimistically anticipate—a moment that can, perhaps, be accessed through speculative fiction.

“A Mother Knows Her Daughter”: Motherhood, Legacy, and Disney

“You're already big, I'm still little. But I came out of you, and here, in front of your very eyes, I am another living you.”

-Luce Irigaray, “And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other”

Thus far, this thesis has considered modern adaptations of stories about little girls, and contemporary narratives about female adolescents, young women who are importantly figured as potentially vulnerable virgins. In this chapter I want to deal with stories about princesses; stories that are in some ways much older, and in some ways much more contemporary. The fairy tale as we know it today has its roots in much older folk tales, adapted earlier in modernity to popular publication. Famous examples include *Cinderella* by Charles Perrault (1628-1703), *Snow White* by the Grimm brothers (1785-1863; 1786-1859) and *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen (1805-75). However, the narratives that most people today associate with these princesses are not those by these writers, but rather, are Disney animated feature films. And in their Disney forms, these fairy tales—and their associated merchandising—seem especially directed at young girls (and their parents).

For many scholars, the now almost ubiquitous canon of Disney princess films represents first and foremost an Americanization of the fairy tale. The pseudo-medieval kingdoms of the early Princess films, *Snow White* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), are understood, from this perspective, to represent nostalgia for an uncomplicated, deracialized, edenic prehistory that, of course, erased America's colonial past and its violent national history. The Disney fairy tale, like all speculative fictions, opened a door—but this door was not to a possible alternate present or future but to a possible alternate history in which the scars of

American history, including those of racial genocide and from participation in both internal and World Wars, could be washed away, restoring the innocence of a mythical national childhood: “an imaginary time in an imaginary past” (Tavin and Anderson 22). Beyond this, Naomi Wood argues, “Disney’s work presupposes a normative standard of American-style ‘civilité’—a standard that values reason and realism over mystery and irrationality, sentiment over calculation, the morally right over the temporally powerful” (26). And the “morally right” within these early fairy tales is often presented in heavy-handed, gendered terms.

Of course, much of what was available to be adapted from earlier stories had to be altered for a more ‘sensitive’ audience and with, of course, an eye toward successful marketing. For example, rather than committing suicide when she is unsuccessful in finding true love with her beau, as in the Andersen story, the Disneyfied *Little Mermaid* marries the prince and they live happily ever after. Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty* is not raped in her sleep by a wandering king, as in the Grimms’ much earlier story. Instead, a prince wakes her from her cursed sleep with true love’s kiss. While such exercise of poetic license certainly enables the G-rating required for a child-friendly family film and appeals to a broader range of viewers, the storyline that remains at the center of these fairy tale adaptations is one in which the princess must find true love in order to escape the dangers or hopelessness of her present situation.

This emphasis on romance as rescue is, according to Wood, a classic marker of Disney Americanization. In general, across these adaptations, anthropomorphic characters are less mystical and more slapstick; parents are less royal and more middle-class, and also less overbearing and more interested in their children’s future happiness; and the magic becomes more closely integrated with technology (29). But the most distinctive quality of the Disney fairy tale adaptation is the way in which the domestic sphere is specifically gendered and the cheerful

acceptance of such tasks as housekeeping, care of the self, and care of others, along with clearly associated virtues of patience and tolerance, is rewarded. Discussing *Cinderella* as exemplary, in this respect, of the Disney early princess films, Wood writes:

Mirroring other aspects of American ideology, Disney's *Cinderella* offers the quasi-religious reassurance that hard work, clean living, self-control, and adherence to the ideal will produce the desired result, in this case, appropriate to the American Dream for Girls: rich and handsome Mr. Right (34).

By such adjustments patriarchal gender norms are strictly adhered to in the scope of Disney's conservative, American framework for the fairy tale.

In the context of my thesis as a whole, it is significant that much of the 'second wave' women's movement took place between the eras of the first three Disney princesses (1937-1959) and the fourth—*The Little Mermaid* (1989). Ariel and her followers should therefore be very different princesses; but are they, and in what way? Dawn Elizabeth England, Lara Descartes and Melissa A Collier-Meek conducted a 2011 quantitative study of gender roles throughout the Disney princess films and found that, after the 1990s, while domesticity was no longer a primary marker of princess-hood,

The strongly gendered messages present in the resolutions of the movies help to reinforce the desirability of traditional gender conformity. Whereas the later princesses performed more active roles in the final rescues of the movies, the princes still performed most of the climactic rescues... Over time, the princesses' roles have changed, however, from being completely passive or even asleep during the final rescues in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, to assisting the prince in *Pocahontas*

and *Mulan*. The princess always won the love of the prince by the end of the Disney Princess films, and this portrayal of romance provides a strongly gendered message.

(565)

I will consider below how far films made after 2011 have begun to diverge from this trend, but nearly a century of these storylines in-built with hegemonic gender roles has certainly made an impact on the way fairy tales are understood today.

Annalee R. Ward claims that “The Walt Disney Company has become the ‘Stories R Us’ store, particularly for children,” and that “as such, it provides many of the first narratives children use to learn about the world” (1). Fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes points to this “Disneyfication” as a source of unrealistic expectations and the imposition of a heteronormative, patriarchal structure on children’s early perceptions of society. In the Disney fairy tale

The disenfranchised or oppressed heroine *must* be rescued by a daring prince.

Heterosexual happiness and marriage are always the ultimate goals of the story. There is no character development because all characters must be recognizable as types that remain unchanged throughout the film. Good cannot become evil, nor can evil become good (93).

Whether or not this one-dimensional narrative has changed in recent years, the princess storyline is perhaps one of the most enduring and pervasive archetypes made available to girls today, and some of the most popular Disney versions of this genre, including *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Mulan* (1998), were released during the rise to popular visibility of the Girl Power ideal. This chapter aims to examine the ways in which princess culture has impacted perceptions of girlhood in the

postfeminist context, and what relevance Girl Power rhetoric, and postfeminism more broadly, has for understanding revisions of and limitations to the princess paradigm over these years. In considering the impact of Disney on changing popular gender constructions, I will then attempt to frame my argument in a broader discourse on mother-daughter generationalism within the feminist movement, which I want to suggest is crucial to understanding the continuing significance of Disney images of girlhood.

Precisely because the ‘Cinderella Complex’ is understood as a psychological issue, and the mother-daughter relation so often associated with the theories of Freud, Lacan, Irigaray, Kristeva, and others who use the psychoanalytic approach, I will depart slightly from my broader framework of applied cultural theory, and use psychoanalysis to knit together the generational issues inherent within postfeminist discourse with those at the heart of the faery tale. While this does represent a slight methodological divergence, psychoanalysis is deeply rooted in postfeminist discourse, with Girl Power’s roots in *Reviving Ophelia* and Health and Human Services directives. It is critical, then, that any overview of postfeminist issues, text-based or otherwise, delves, however briefly, into this very important subgenre of critical theory.

The Princess Problem

Considering the implications of the longevity of the simplistic ‘Princess’ storyline, in 1993 Jeanne Dubino alluded to a “Cinderella Complex,” which drives young women to cultivate domesticity and beauty above all else in the hopes of achieving future romantic bliss, and encourages a broad cultural belief that this is a valid life goal for young women. Years earlier, in 1981, Colette Dowling had argued that this complex becomes a problem for a young woman

“when—after she has begun to move out, to expand, to raise her sights—she discovers that the rules have changed and she will no longer be rewarded for her compliance, as she has been, systematically, since she was a little girl” (41).

The timing here is important. In the early 1980s, with young women finally able to take advantage of changes put in place by second-wave feminism, some distinct generational differences in terms of opportunity and capacity for lifestyle choices became apparent. Dowling, and the experts she interviewed, saw this as partly responsible for the confusion that seemed to be widely felt by contemporary girls:

I think we underestimate the amount of conflict today’s women experience as a result of having mothers who, more often than not, have led far less independent—indeed, quite submissive—lives. For the woman who has ostensibly turned her back on the life her mother represents, there can be true grief, an inner flailing. The dilemma is no less affecting for being largely unconscious. (41)

Here Dowling flags the figure of Cinderella—and, as the arguments above have made clear, *Disney’s* Cinderella, specifically—as representing an identity that existed before the advances made by women’s rights. She is placing Cinderella (and, thereby, Snow White and Aurora too) in the same cultural space as the foremothers of the second wave. These early Disney princesses, and their cheerful passivity, represent for Dowling the ingrained and continuing glamour of patriarchal gender roles within her mother’s life, and therefore, by default, her own culture.

This problem does not, however, seem to have been rectified with new generations of girls—or princesses. Rebecca Hains has recently attacked a broader, more integrated “Princess Culture” which moves beyond the scope of the films and into the marketing and merchandising

of popular culture, mostly for young girls. Hains argues that this “Princess Culture” is a continuing and prolific source of “psychologically unhealthy” and “economically detrimental” attitudes. “Stories about princesses,” Hains writes, “have long underscored the presumed weakness of females and implied that helplessness is romantically desirable. These tales reflected the way our society encourages girls to learn dependency and helplessness, believing that a man will someday take care of them” (161).

Disney’s reach as a media and merchandising conglomerate is more extensive today than at any of the other pinnacles of its popularity: around the early princess films, at the height of Mickey Mouse’s cinema or television careers, or when the original Disneyland opened. Much of today’s media production and merchandising is directed particularly at girls. Girls can wear authentic princess dresses licensed by Disney, dream of one day actually being married in Cinderella’s castle at Disneyworld (Wood 42), play with princess dolls distributed with McDonald’s happy meals, watch princess-themed television programming on the Disney Channel, or play princess games at the Disney website. As Tavin and Anderson point out,

Disney’s corporate holdings allow it to wield an enormous amount of power through the construction and regulation of the nation’s media-cultural space (Shiller, 1994). Within this space, Disney promotes itself through spirals of referentiality. In this sense, Disney refers back to itself through its own media outlets and subsidiaries in an effort to advertise and advance its own cause. (23)

Disney has constructed a media empire, and the princesses are the jewels in its crown. Disney Princesses© is now a franchise in and of itself, with new princesses being introduced to its canon with every film.

The romantic idealization of girlish passivity is not the only problem feminist critics have identified with this franchise. In recent decades critics have often suggested that Disney princesses further an implicit white privilege in their lack of diversity. Even the pointedly ‘ethnic’ Disney princesses, such as Mulan and Pocahontas, rarely feature in the corporate ‘lineup’ used in marketing Disney Princess products. The ostensible reason is that their attire is less ‘princessy’ (Orenstein qtd. in Sweeney 69). But, as Hains and others point out, the lesser visibility of the ‘non-white’ princesses within the Disney Princess franchise, both on screen and in toys and other merchandising, associates beauty and desirability with the skin colors, hair types, and clothing styles of upper class whiteness throughout history, thereby sending a message to girls that these are the only standards they should aspire to (Hains 208).

In addition, these token ‘ethnic’ princesses have very different narratives from those of the white Disney princesses. The white princesses are typically coded as ‘good’ simply by expressing attractive personality traits in accordance with dominant contemporary models of femininity and, of course, by being beautiful. But it seems the ‘ethnic’ princesses must work harder for their goodness. Pocahontas’s virtue is expressed through her mystical association with nature, exoticized in a way quite different to Aurora or Snow White’s abilities to communicate with woodland creatures. And Tiana, for example, in *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), is ‘good’ because of her willingness to work hard in order to succeed in running her own restaurant (Hains 229). While Tiana has to struggle to make ends meet, *all* of the varied Caucasian princesses are born into privilege. While Cinderella loses her privilege as a young girl when her father dies, the manner by which she regains it through marriage suggests that it was her right all along, and that her period of intensive housework was an undeserved trial. It is interesting to note that Tiana’s story is the first after *Cinderella* in which housework resurfaces; however, as

England, Descartes and Meek-Collier point out, “the princess learned to cook from her father and she was shown teaching the prince how to help in the kitchen” (564). While the domestic sphere isn’t particularly gendered here, as it was in the early princess films, this relative equity seems to depend on its racialization.

If, as Hains and so many others suggest, “Princess Culture” is coded with traditional patriarchal values, white privilege, and unrealistic standards of beauty at the forefront, what is to be made of the princess craze reaching a new peak during the era of Girl Power? Princesses like Ariel (*The Little Mermaid*) and Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*) were certainly coded as ‘modern’ women because of their feisty attitudes and rejection of some societal norms. Ariel, for example, likes humans more than her own sea-creature people; Belle likes books more than boys. But in the end their stories are tales of self-sacrifice in the interest of heterosexual love. Laura Sells calls *The Little Mermaid* “a bourgeois feminist success story in which access [to the patriarchal world] is achieved with minimal cost” (181). Certainly much more attention was paid in the Disney films of this period to the personal goals of the heroines, alongside the inevitable dreams of true love also apparent in the early princess films. Ariel wants to experience the human world; Belle specifically states her desire for ‘adventure’; and Jasmine wants more independence. However, these goals are finally achieved *through* the heterosexual romances at the heart of these stories.

It is particularly notable, then, that the later princesses of this period, Mulan and Pocahontas, are driven by concerns that are less individualistic or even less familial, including their commitment to tribe, nation, or environment. Their storylines also require much more agency on their part to achieve their goals. Pocahontas even eventually rejects her possible romance for her family—a no less traditional ending, perhaps, but still markedly different. While

I suggested above that their more personal quests tell stories that differentiate them from the natural virtue of the ‘white’ princesses, I would also argue that these two princesses represent Anita Harris’ “can-do” girl of the Girl Power era. Their difference from the unnegotiated Disney princess idea allows them to come closer to the ideal proposed by postfeminism that is only hinted at by the earlier princesses of this period. It’s therefore significant, and consistent with the ambivalence critics note in the postfeminist girl idea, that the personal quests of these princesses are closely entangled with heterosexual romance that refers the story back to ideals of female beauty and virtue. They are perhaps less girls that can have it all than girls that must do it all. Their individual heroism as well as their ‘diversity’ contributes to the way these characters are often played down by the corporate “Princess” franchise.

Despite some of the more progressive characteristics of these new princesses, the very successful merchandise—dolls, games, clothes, toys, and so on—based on these films is “almost always about beauty and romance, to the exclusion of all other attributes” (Hains 177). Karen Wohlwend points out that, rather than promoting the narratives themselves, these products are centered on an “emphasized femininity,” which “legitimizes the construction of girls as objects of display” (65). In this respect too, Princess Culture was well-placed to align with—and profit from—the changing perception of girls as empowered consumers. Princess products, like the Spice Girls or any other franchise marketing to girls at the time, sold a watered down notion of Girl Power that traded on the perceived pleasures of embodied femininity. In the construction of Princess Culture as we know and experience it today, Disney was very much in dialogue with postfeminist discourse.

It is not surprising, then, that girlhood is opposed, in the Disney films, to both masculinity and older women. While the villain is often an overbearing male, attempting to

smother (Frollo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) or possess (Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*) the girl protagonist, the force of evil in these narratives is also very often a villainess who regards herself or her kin as a sexual rival for the girl. Often that villainess is some version of a matriarch. And while the princess is accorded the qualities of emphasized femininity explored above, her competitors are portrayed as possessing alternative physical traits and qualities coded as bad. Evil characters such as the Stepmother from *Cinderella* or Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* are given dark skin and short or tightly pulled back hair. Ursula is plump and buxom—a trait emphasized grotesquely to suggest sexual *over*-availability—while the stepmother’s features are sharp and pinched, and the way in which she pushes her daughters on the prince suggests desperation. Compared to the pale, shapely, virginal young heroines, these female figures are clearly meant to present an image of ‘bad’ femininity: femininity lost with age, femininity oversexualized, femininity gone wrong. Meanwhile, often orphaned and friendless, Disney princesses are rarely if ever given female allies, and when they are, as Tavin and Anderson point out, these “are frequently represented as non-sexualized magical beings such as wise grandmothers and fairy godmothers. These characters often comfort the traumatized love-stricken young heroines and sacrifice themselves to ensure heterosexual normalization” (24). Hains argues that Princess Culture “presents girls not just as waiting for a prince, but as waiting alone—isolated—without the support of maternal figures or female friends” (12), and certainly it is only in the most recent Disney films, *Brave* (2012), *Frozen* (2014), and the part live-action part-CGI-animation *Maleficent* (2014) that princesses have been given a female support system.

I want to argue that the Disney films of the 1990s offer an insight into the way in which girlhood was being singled out as an object of postfeminist discourse, and what are currently referred to as the successive ‘waves’ of feminism were being conceptualized as generations.

Postfeminism, that is, bound changing ideas about girls to ideas about ‘daughters’ in a mother-daughter relationship, ideas which, I believe, are again being renegotiated now—even within Disney princess films themselves. As I suggested above, the newest princess features, *Brave* and *Frozen*, forego the traditional romance narrative in favor of stories of female familial bonding. While *Brave* sees Merida struggling to appreciate the traditional, protective values of her mother (and vice versa), *Frozen*’s princess Elsa must mend her relationship with her sister, Anna, after years spent hiding a dangerous secret. *Frozen* is, in itself, remarkable for actively critiquing the traditional romance narrative of past Disney princess films by mocking the idea of love-at-first-sight and turning the traditional prince figure into a villain (echoing shades of *Buffy*’s Angelus). In the end, *true love* in *Frozen* is recoded as sisterly love, and in the great rescue scene the sisters save each other. This Disney film—the second, after *Brave*, to be directed by a woman—essentially subverts the entire set of tropes the Disney franchise is based on. If Disney can be made a site for subversion, then perhaps the traditionalist gender roles encoded therein can be broken down within the franchise as well.

But *Brave* is also doing other important work for our purposes here. Not only does it reject the romantic princess plotline, it actually excludes romance altogether, with Merida successfully refusing the courtship and marriage plotline set out for her, not in order to choose someone else but in order to choose to be herself. The plot focus is instead on Merida’s quest to reconcile with (and thereby rescue) her mother. This film begins by stressing the opposition between these two generations, not specifically because Merida and her mother have different social values—although they do, and must reach a shared middle ground in the end—but because they are unable to acknowledge each other’s separate identities. Their failures in communication spark the crisis that necessitates their quest, and this problem is what must be resolved in order

for normality to be restored. In the end, they learn to understand each other, and through their new rapport, Merida is allowed to express her individuality in ways that her mother was unable to as a girl. This is a plotline that clearly takes into account generational tensions and anxieties surrounding girlhood which have now long been informed by postfeminist discourse.

Nevertheless, in the context of Princess Culture, many of these new approaches to the Disney princess narrative were subsumed in the marketing furor surrounding the products based on their films. As Hains and others have noted, Merida's famously wild hair and more realistic waistline were reined in prior to her 'coronation' as an official Disney princess. This decision was later reversed after fierce controversy (Hains 180), in an interesting development that suggests a certain reflexivity within the assumed market of girl-and-parent consumers; an unwillingness to allow 'hyperfemininity' to overshadow the new attributes of these princess stories. However, one thing is clear: the marketing behemoth of the Disney princess line is not shying away from patriarchal norms just yet. As Hains puts it,

Within the brand, old-fashioned, classic princesses like Snow White and Cinderella are on equal (or superior!) footing compared with princesses like Tiana, Rapunzel, Merida, Anna and Elsa, who bring more modern values to the franchise. So when little girls love princesses, they become exposed to the princess behavior and attitudes that hearken back to the social norms of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. And in the princess toys and other products that exist beyond the confines of the screen, princess culture's dial is still set firmly on the 'pretty and passive' setting—even for the newest of princesses. (165)

It is therefore clear that consideration of the impact of Disney princesses is as relevant today as it was during the rise of Girl Power or the generations before, if not more so, given the continuously growing scope of Disney's empire.

What I find most problematic is that Disney princess marketing *dehistoricizes* texts that otherwise, taken together, might be seen to offer a timeline of changing hegemonic American notions of girlhood, however problematic or incomplete their feminist potential at any point. The Disney Princess line limits girls' opportunities to be engaged in the necessary meaning-making processes of watching the films contextually. Instead, it presents all princesses, as Hains says, "on equal footing," thereby robbing the presumed audience of otherwise clear shifts away from the pre-second-wave visions of girlhood in the early Disney princess films and even away from those partly shaped by the emergence of postfeminist discourse.

This cycle is also perpetuated by the way in which Disney now trades (as it has for generations) on the nostalgic identification of girls of the 1990s—now often mothers of girls themselves. In addition to bringing their own daughters into the fantasy world of their youth, these 'grown-up girls' are also being marketed to themselves. Meghan Sweeney points out that

In recent years, Disney has extended the reach of its Princess line by developing new products geared to adult consumers: as the blurb on one book states: "Every little girl has a favorite Disney Princess—and for that matter, every grown-up girl, too!" (The Art). The idea is that the princess archetype, given its contours by Disney, offers the possibility of romance and transformation for females of all ages. Most notable, perhaps, is the variety of wedding options Disney offers to grown-up Princess enthusiasts, including wedding rides in Cinderella's coach and designer wedding gowns that echo those of the Princesses. By donning glamorous (trademarked) frills—by playing a grown-up game of dress-up—a consumer can literally transform herself into something worthy of a Disney dreamscape. (Sweeney 7).

Both the narratives being explored by Disney and the products being offered by the company reflect an interest in the ‘grown-up girl’ who was a child during the Disney Princess boom of the 1990s. What Hains describes as Princess Culture, intended to introduce young girls to Disney consumerism, is also always operating at a level where it is designed to appeal to already adult fans who have already been seduced by Disney’s charms. The wedding gowns, expensive jewelry, and ball-themed outings available for older girls and women are extensions of the princess dresses, toy jewelry, and trips to Disneyworld that are part of that continual process of seduction, and, by association, part of imagining, and, of course, selling, a universal girlhood that can continually be accessed again via consumption. The fact that some grown-up girls are still ‘playing’ Cinderella nearly a century after her clearly patriarchal tale of romance was first a hit Disney film speaks not only to the business acumen of the Disney corporation but to the prevalence of the Disney Princess narrative’s association with both ‘innocent’ fun and the consummation of feminine identity.

It therefore seems useful to turn, in this context, to a contemporary, live-action, ‘grown-up’ version of *all* of these princesses as represented in the Disney-produced television series *Once Upon a Time* (2012—). *Once Upon a Time* epitomizes Disney’s contemporary multifaceted relationship with its multi-generational presumed girl audience—and its awareness of contemporary discourse on girlhood and feminism. *Once Upon a Time* is, in essence, a rewriting of Disney’s already rewritten adaptations of fairy tales—and this version is directly situated in a postfeminist context, designed to appeal to an audience that might be critical of the Cinderella Complex, or actively indoctrinated in Princess Culture and, in particular, interested in reexamining matrilineal relationships.

Mothers and Daughters in Snow White

In order to assess *Once Upon a Time*, we must first examine the fairy tales at its heart. Fairy tales are always concerned with imparting certain lessons about growing up, and frequently, these tales reflect anxieties about adolescence and the complexities of adolescent relations with parental, and especially maternal, figures. Perhaps the fairy tale that most reflects the interweaving of these two issues—and one of the most popular and well-known tales for reinterpretations in recent years—is *Snow White*.

On the surface, the original tale of Snow White is one of vanity, betrayal, and murder. But Shuli Barzalai, a noted Lacanian, describes it as “the story of two women... a mother who cannot grow up and a daughter who must” (529). Although The ‘mother’ in this circumstance is in fact a wicked stepmother, Barzalai reads the story as a symbolic coming-of-age tale in which Snow White, having recently reached puberty, must go through several trials in order to achieve full womanhood—and her ‘mother’ must endure the coming trauma of separation. Barzalai reads this separation as most difficult for the mother, who sees her daughter as a reflection of herself in the (Lacanian, psychoanalytic) mirror. As the prospect of her daughter’s womanhood becomes visible, this account suggests,

Suddenly, the daughter’s otherness is asserted. The mirror refuses to sustain any illusion of identification with the daughter; in its truth function, the specular image shows the mother that her daughter is discordant with her own identity. The mother loses control over the beauty, the creation that seemed an extension of herself. Something is taken from her, a vital part of her is cut off. Symbolically, what she perceives in the mirror is a body-in-pieces. The mirror reflects disintegration without possibility of regeneration.

(Barzalai 529)

This, then, is an account of the impetus for the stepmother's intense jealousy of Snow White. Recognizing the possibility that her step-daughter might attain autonomous individuality, she loses a part of what makes her a subject in her own right: the possibility of subsuming her daughter's identity within her own. But for Lacan, the great risk of motherhood is the "primary maternal preoccupation" with the child; the mother must strive to maintain a degree of separation from the child or risk losing her subjectivity (Luepnitz 2003). When the stepmother/Queen can no longer view Snow White as a symbolic reproduction of herself—*her* beauty, *her* body, *her* vitality—she is suddenly faced with the prospect of her own mortality, her own pointlessness, even, and therefore seeks to destroy the cause of her personal crisis by killing Snow White.

In the story, the evil queen therefore tries to kill Snow White three times (a typical, almost pedagogical pattern of the moral lesson of the fairy tale)—the first time with a comb, and the second with a ribbon, before the more consistently referenced scheme with the huntsman. Both of these earlier traps are designed to appeal to the vanity of the feminine toilette, which seems to be implied at every turn in the original tale. Of course Snow White eventually gets married and lives happily ever after, which, in the limited social perspective of the era in which the Brothers Grimm were writing, would reflect the full extent of the expected social achievement available to women—but not before she has the stepmother killed by *a pair of shoes*, once more emphasizing the decorative aspects of emphasized femininity.

Snow White's story thus suggests that the "false treasures" of femininity, are indeed, as Simone de Beauvoir would argue (1949), the deadliest of weapons. Of the girl's indoctrination into the sphere of domesticity and self-decoration, de Beauvoir argues that

All the main features of her training combine to bar her from the roads of revolt and adventure. Society in general – beginning with her respected parents – lies to her by praising the lofty values of love, devotion, the gift of herself, and then concealing from her the fact that neither lover nor husband nor yet her children will be inclined to accept the burdensome charge of all that. She cheerfully believes these lies because they invite her to follow the easy slope: in this others commit their worst crime against her; throughout her life from childhood on, they damage and corrupt her by designating as her true vocation this submission, which is the temptation of every existent in the anxiety of liberty. (64)

De Beauvoir's argument here is very similar to those that have been made about the Disney Princesses: that compliance and good-naturedness are the path to happiness, especially through heterosexual romance. Achieving a fully independent subjectivity is thus certainly out of the question for the princess story. As Barzalai explains, from her different but in this case compatible perspective, "the lesson of Snow White is that the achievement of psychic integration, of balanced selfhood within the patriarchy is difficult, perhaps even impossible, for a woman" (521).

It is then, an intriguing project to examine what might happen to Snow White and her stepmother when this story is extracted from the antiquated ideology of the atemporal fairytale land described by the oral traditions recorded by the Grimms. Certainly, in Disney's first full-length animated feature in 1937, Snow White embodied the virtues of the early Disney princess—kind, patient, compliant—and the evil stepmother is unquestionably domineering and cruel as well as terrifyingly beautiful. Their fairy tale world is the typical pseudo-medieval fantasy of castles and natural beauty. But almost a century later, in *Once Upon a Time*, these

central characters are very different, and, rather than being set in a fairy tale world, the action takes place in a small American town in 2012. Storybrooke, Maine, is inhabited by all sorts of fairy tale characters, from Cinderella, to Rumpelstiltskin, to Jiminy Cricket, none of whom know that they are fairy tale characters at all, due to a spell that has also frozen them in space and time. The Snow White story is especially central to this pastiche because these characters are collected in Storybrooke by a spell cast by the proverbial wicked stepmother herself. Reinforcing Zipes' point that Disneyfied fairytales have "insinuate[d] [themselves] into [our] lives as 'natural history'" (73) are the Disneyfied aesthetics apparent in the costume and set design of *Once Upon a Time*. Belle, from the "Beauty and the Beast" story, appears in a yellow ball gown; Alice is incorporated as a fairytale and appears in blue and white. This extends even to small idiosyncrasies. One important object for the narrative is a chipped teacup similar in appearance to the characterized cup "Chip" from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). Such citations are taken for granted as innately intersecting elements of the fairy-tale universe as we know it, but one created not by the brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen, but by Disney.

This retelling relies on the assumed familiarity of the audience with past Disney films—with princess films being the most crucial. The audience is positioned as one familiar with the films of the 1990s—an age group which could extend to people (probably female, probably American) in their early 40s and clearly, especially with the PG rating, does *not* include small children. This audience, then, could be expected to have been exposed to the postfeminist discourse of Girl Power as well as the Princess Culture that appropriated it. Most importantly, the audience is expected to take for granted that a fairy tale world would be one easily populated by both Little Red Riding Hood—who has no connection with Disney and is, in this series, a werewolf—and *Disney's* seven dwarves or that Rumpelstiltskin could easily be the Beast to

Disney's Belle. In other words, the assumed audience is expected to make absolutely no differentiation between Grimm, Andersen, Perrault, and Disney. In some ways, this is part of a larger trend, inspired by digital media and fan fictions, toward the transmedia appropriation of authorship of popular texts; a disconnection from the necessity for 'authenticity,' which can be seen in novel series that continue the storyline of *Star Trek*, or indeed new films that rewrite original plots (see Jenkins 2012). This allows the readers/viewers to feel they participate in and control the narratives (Jenkins 68), but this intertextual amalgamation also points to the way that Disney has managed to create a corporate monopoly over fairy tale storytelling to the point that the assumed audience is not expected to know where fairy tales end and Disney begins.

Set partly in real-time America and partly in flashbacks to a fairy-tale world, the story of *Once Upon a Time* begins with a ten-year-old boy, Henry, who seeks out Emma, the mother who gave him up for adoption as a baby. This 'real-world' frame, with no particular connection to fairy tales or Disney, is already framed by questions about its reality by the name of the series, the name of the town he has run away from, and of course the marketing of the series. There is thus no suspense surrounding the revelation that Henry is the only person who can leave Storybrooke because he was born outside it, in the 'real' world. Henry finds Emma and tells her that his stepmother is evil and that she needs to come with him to break the spell that binds the town. Emma is at first reluctant to establish a bond with a son she has not seen since he was born, but in attempting to return him to his adoptive family, she begins to suspect that Henry's stepmother, Regina, is not all that she seems. Emma becomes protective, and an informal custody battle begins. Meanwhile, Henry informs Emma that her new best friend, Mary Margaret, is actually Snow White—and also Emma's own mother. No one knows how Emma can break the spell, but Henry feels that the first step is to make her *believe* in his story and her

connections to all these characters, so he begins reading her stories from a mysterious magical book that slowly unravels the dark magical-world history of their family tree. The questions at the heart of Storybrooke's mystery are: Why did the queen cast the spell? What is the root of her hatred for Snow White (one of the main heroines,) and how will Emma (the other heroine) break the spell so everyone can live happily ever after?

Clearly such a plotline centered on relations between generations of women draws both on the gender narratives of contemporary Disney princess stories and on the cultural resonance of the earlier ones. The 'fairy tales' appropriated for *Once Upon a Time* include Disney's original story, *Frozen* (any pretense that this narrative thread is based on Andersen's "The Snow Queen" is dismissed by her appearance as a villain in the series in opposition to Elsa and Anna); an interestingly blended Peter Pan story which draws on both Disney's telling of J.M. Barrie's tale and a sinister retelling of "The Pied Piper" where Pan/The Piper steals children; and Alice in Wonderland, which eventually became the spin-off series *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland* (2013) which I discussed in the previous chapter. While sometimes new backstories for characters are introduced which revise their intertextual reference to both early fairy tales and Disney retellings, for the most part characters are introduced in a way that assumes a familiarity with an array of fairytales that gives the narrative meaning. But whether considered with attention to intertextuality or not, the story of *Once Upon a Time* hinges on the story of Snow White.

The main structure of the Snow White tale embedded within this compendium of adaptations and citations is similar to the 'original' Disney version. There are seven dwarves; Regina, the stepmother, has a magic mirror; and Snow White dies and is reawakened by 'true love's kiss.' The key difference is that, in *Once Upon a Time*, the reason for Regina's hatred of

“Snow,” as Mary Margaret is called in the fairy-tale frame narrative, has nothing to do with vanity. The trauma that turned her into the ‘evil’ queen we see in the present-tense American story is revealed in a series of flashbacks in which Regina, once full of kindness and innocence, is manipulated into a marriage with the king by her domineering mother, Cora. By means of magic, Cora causes the young Snow to have a riding accident from which Regina saves her. As Snow has recently lost her mother, the two immediately bond and Snow’s father, the grateful king, proposes.

Although Regina tells Snow she wants to be her mother, she confides that she is in fact in love with the stable boy, and, fearful of her own mother Cora’s strong magic and unpredictable nature, begs Snow to keep it a secret. Snow struggles with Regina’s wishes but agrees until Cora eventually manipulates her into revealing this secret in this exchange:

Cora: It warms my heart how you two share everything... Already. Perhaps, you could share something with me. Why has she pulled away from me?

Snow: What do you mean?

Cora: A mother knows her daughter. Regina’s pulled away. I love her so much, but she’s not letting me help her. And I... I know she’s unhappy. Has she said something? I’d do anything to make her happy.

Snow: You’d do anything?

Cora: Of course, dear. You know, I talked to the King about your mother. He told me how much she loved you. Losing her must’ve been so hard.

Snow: It was.

Cora: Hearing him, I realized he might as well have been talking about me and Regina. I don't want us to lose each other. If only I could show her how I feel. That, no matter what, all I want is her happiness.

Snow: Then, don't make her get married... She loves someone else. She made me promise not to tell... But she'll lose you. She can't lose her mother. No one should.

Cora: Oh, sweet Snow. It's alright. She won't lose me. You can tell me. You must tell me. ("The Stable Boy" [1.18])

Cora then follows Regina to the stables and kills the stable boy on the spot. Regina finally cannot forgive Snow for this betrayal, and when Snow herself discovers true love, Regina vows to deprive her of it in any way possible.

The conflict at the center of the rivalry between Snow White and Regina interestingly contrasts with the problems at the center of the traditional Snow White tale. Whereas in the original story the main issue at the heart of this troubled relationship was the (step) mother's struggle to accept that her power might be limited by Snow White—by admiration for her beauty and amiability but also by the threat she poses to her control over the throne and land—what characterizes the relationship most closely established as a parallel in *Once Upon a Time* is the daughter's difficulty in navigating the subjectivity of the (step)mother.

According to Lacan, small children relate to the mother as “an object or part-object” (1949: 287): an extension of themselves that provides for them (understood at first through a bodily connection), maintains them, and cares for them. She is an answer to their needs and desires; a part of their existence only, with no life outside of their own. Only later, and partially, might the child come to recognize the mother as a subject in her own right, with perhaps her own

desires (Lacan 1958 289). Although articulated differently, both the mother-as-subject and the child-as-subject are inherently incomplete identities, singularly marked by the problem of separation anxiety, which, according to Lacan, has as much to do with identity as it does with physicality and proximity (Lacan 1958 289).

Of course, the fact that the mothers in these stories are in fact *stepmothers* is important. Barzalai points out that the presence of so many stepmothers in Grimm fairy tales, for example, speaks to the high rate of deaths in childbirth at the time of these stories, with children often being left with stepmothers whose love for their adopted children was, at least for the Grimm Brothers, clearly questionable (Barzalai 516). The queen in the original Snow White tale is obviously figured as an impostor who fails to replace the true mother, the original loss of whom is thus all the greater. The fact that in *Once Upon a Time* and other contemporary texts the stepmother is no longer demonized so completely would in this context seem understandable in an era when families have many more complex reasons for separation, and stepmother-daughter relationships are often triangulated as mother-daughter-stepmother relationships. The significance of this historical change might also intervene in the usefulness of Lacanian, let alone Freudian, psychoanalytic theory for analyzing contemporary images of the family, but of course Lacan is mainly interested in the family drama as it operates at the level of fantasy, rather than a description of real-life family patterns, in any case.

The near-obsessive focus of *Once Upon a Time* with maternal reconnections—Henry-Emma, Emma-Snow, Snow-Regina, Regina-Cora, and even eventually Henry-Regina, suggests that contemporary cultural discourse is equally concerned with *symbolic* matrilineal relations, but also with their multiplication in ways that complicates any story about *true* mother-child relations. For the imagined *true* mother represents a real separation that, for Lacanians,

comprises that first loss that sparks the crisis of subjectivity (Lacan 1958 282). However, it is the child's identification as a subject that provokes the second loss, and surely *stepmothers* and *stepchildren* can experience this loss as greatly as mothers and their children do. I would suggest that a postfeminist reading of Lacan could extrapolate this mirror stage onto *adolescence*, insofar as a contemporary understanding identifies this as the period most fraught with identity-making and the site of a forceful production of a gendered identity that isn't just derived from the arrival of puberty on a fully gendered subject. Angela McRobbie's insistent return to psychoanalytic theory to explain postfeminist girlhood, via Judith Butler's interpretation of Lacan, suggests as much (McRobbie 2009 111-115).

Mother-daughter relationships have now long been understood to undergo their greatest crisis in adolescence, tied directly, since Freud, to stories about girls and women's changing social expectations. This is also especially relevant when it comes to the production and articulation of a feminist identity. In accounting for her Cinderella Complex, Dowling claims that "Without an adequate role model - one that presents autonomy as necessary to feminine identity rather than inimical to it - the modern woman is in a deep psychological quandary" (41). If the mother fights against the autonomy of the daughter, trying to maintain the bond of infancy between them, the daughter cannot move forward. This is key to many of the plots of the most recent Disney Princess films. Unlike Ariel and Jasmine, who faced absent mothers and overbearing fathers as obstacles to their independence, *Tangled's* Rapunzel (2010) features a false mother who literally wants to imprison her because intimate physical contact between them maintains her youth. Merida, too, must mend fences with her mother and persuade Queen Elinor that Merida living a life she chooses with relative autonomy will not be a threat to their family, or to a broader social status quo for which the mother is also responsible.

In *Once Upon a Time*, the sequence of broken maternal relationships plays out to detrimental effect for everyone involved. Snow, on the verge of adolescence and having been forcibly separated from her own mother, has difficulty negotiating the problematic posed for her by Cora. The decision to tell Cora Regina's secret so that Cora doesn't lose her daughter-as-object—and, importantly for her, so that Regina doesn't lose her mother—is further complicated by Snow's desire to possess Regina as her own mother-as-object. But her decision to tell effectively robs Regina of her own independence, forcing her to marry the king and, clearly, earning Snow her eternal loathing.

Regina's plan to punish Snow involves destroying her happiness in turn. Eventually Snow marries her own true love, and has a daughter, Emma, the prophesied savior of the kingdom from Regina's foretold curse. The spell Regina casts forces Snow to give up her baby and puts Prince Charming in a coma while, of course, erasing Snow's memories of the entire story, turning her into Mary Margaret, who lives in Storybrooke perpetually single and perpetually childless. Julia Kristeva suggests that, for a girl, the trauma of separation from the mother can only be overcome by having a child herself (Kristeva 178-179). In addition,

a woman seldom... experiences her passion (love and hatred) for another woman without having taken her own mother's place—without having herself become a mother, and especially without slowly learning to differentiate between same beings—as being face to face with her daughter forces her to do (Kristeva 184).

Having lost both her mother and her daughter, Snow has essentially been rendered powerless, unable to achieve a whole identity as an autonomous individual, positioning her as, Kristeva might say, “a continuous separation; a division of the flesh” (178).

Emma, as well, feels the lack of a mother. In her journey towards acceptance of Henry's stories, she tells him several times that she wants to believe that Mary Margaret is her mother, tearfully confessing the sense of incompleteness she has always felt in her life. Meanwhile, Emma has given up her career and her home in the single-minded pursuit of protecting, re-connecting with, and regaining custody of Henry, making him her central desire. While Kristeva asserts that "guiltless maternity" is motherhood "without masochism and without annihilating one's affective, intellectual and professional personality" (Moi 183), dialogue in *Once Upon a Time* often turns to a rhetoric of sacrifice and selflessness as the keys to Emma being 'ready' to take Henry back. Insofar as it is centrally an adaptation of Snow White, I am proposing that *Once Upon a Time* explores the trauma of the separation of mother and daughter in ways overwhelmingly compatible with a Lacanian framework, but particularly in the way this framework has become incorporated into a changing feminist account of relations between generations of women, highlighting the problem of separation and change manifest in daughters.

Clearly I am suggesting that *Once Upon a Time*'s complex mix of mother-daughter and maternal and sisterly anxiety marks it as postfeminist—and indeed marks the contemporary Disney films I highlight above as such, alongside other popular (non-Disney) Snow White adaptations. The live-action feature films *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) and *Mirror, Mirror* (2012) both debuted in the same year that *Once Upon a Time* premiered. The fact that this particular fairy tale is currently such a popular narrative for adaptation is significant, and it is notable that these adaptations often soften and sympathize with the stepmother as much as they stress newly active sorts of heroism for Snow White. Together, I think they imply that our current cultural moment is one in which mother-daughter relationships are freshly important to the story of girlhood triumph on which the Snow White story must at some level always center.

This relevance seems, at least in part, a product of the way in which feminist discourse has narrated its own history in terms of generational ‘waves’ at odds with each other. In this context, mainstream popular culture currently aligns mothers with the second wave, rather than with what came before recognizable forms of feminism, and daughters, with a third wave skeptical about some of the mother’s earlier claims and more inclined to individual stories than to overarching stories about systemic power. Such a polarizing simplification disenfranchises both parties in different ways. I would argue that the postfeminist context, in both isolating girls as key consumers of feminist as well as anti-feminist accounts, yet also positioning them as vulnerable innocents (at risk, perhaps, of being taken in by hegemonic norms perpetuated by Disney), has contributed in important ways to this discourse, and that texts like *Once Upon a Time* offer speculative stories about past, current and future renegotiations of these generational relations.

Moving Past ‘Matrophobia’

In 1977, Adrienne Rich discussed the perceived rift between mothers and daughters at the height of the second-wave feminist movement. She used the term “matrophobia” to discuss this divide:

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers’; and in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery.

(237)

What Rich here calls “womanly splitting” represents one drastic approach to resolving the crisis of identity at the heart of the separation and loss Kristeva is also interested in. While Lacan maintained that such a separation was constitutively necessary for subjectivity—a proposition with which Butler clearly agrees and which thus underpins McRobbie’s recent re-readings of postfeminist images of girlhood—this still seemed to him a source of anxiety, as the child still feared being “devoured” by the mother (1958 289-290).

In order to achieve an autonomous subjectivity, according to this theory, one would have to cut oneself off completely from the mother. Kristeva uses this to explain the powerful process of “abjection.” for which the mother’s body is a vitally horrifying kind of intimacy. While Rich, unlike Kristeva or Lacan before her, is interested in female experience of separation from the mother, in articulating this split, Rich joins a body of writings on motherhood that question the possibility of autonomy within the matrilineal relation. In a more explicitly post-Lacanian mode, Luce Irigaray, in “And the one doesn’t stir without the other,” also constructs a first person account of the anxiety inherent in a mother-daughter bond which does and does not constitute a separation: “Don’t engulf yourself or me in what flows from you into me,” she writes. “I would like both of us to be present. So that the one doesn’t disappear in the other, or the other in the one” (62). Christine Holmlund points out that, although at the end of Irigaray’s text “the daughter, overwhelmed, suffocated by the mother, tr[ies] to persuade her that they do not need to obliterate each other, that ‘in giving me life, you still remain alive,’” nevertheless, “ambivalence” remains “the central emotion” of this attempt to offer an alternative to the psychoanalytic account (291). Clearly these and other texts of the period are anxious about the space occupied by the mother and daughter, and their relevance to the texts I am considering here also extends to postfeminist anxieties about mothers and daughters and the generational

tensions that have animated feminism for so long. “When the one carries life, the other dies,” Irigaray writes (67).

These enquiries into mother-daughter relationships have become part of a much larger discourse of generationalism, as waves have distanced themselves from their symbolic ‘mothers’ and fretted about the different priorities of their symbolic ‘daughters’. It is the problematic position of the ‘daughters’ that plagues sufferers of Dowling’s “Cinderella Complex.” This has, perhaps, been most pronounced since the third-wavers of the 1990s pronounced themselves daughters—a pronouncement made all the more significant by the privileging and redefining of girlhood taking place around the Girl Power movement and feminist trends such as Girlie. Kath and Sophie Woodward (mother and daughter) follow Astrid Henry in arguing that

the reduction of feminism to a generational metaphor has [involved] a concomitant rejection of the mother’s feminism of the second wave within an ideological framework which may acknowledge little of the achievements of this generation of feminists...

Understandings of feminism remain polarised in many ways and expressed as binaries.

(15)

This is indeed problematic, as this binary construction creates within the feminist movement a mirror of the anxieties about identity produced in relations between mother and child. Henry also ponders this question, suggesting that

The daughter who grows up taking feminism for granted sees it as her own to criticize and reshape, yet she is nevertheless always in her mother’s shadow. She can never truly define feminism on her own—as her mother’s generation appeared to do—because both second-wave feminism and her mother continue to be dominant shaping forces in her

life... How can the daughters of the second wave continue their mothers' feminism without losing themselves in it? (179)

It is into this environment that the girl of postfeminist discourse was born—an environment fraught with tensions, both theoretical and psychological, attributed to the mother-daughter relationship and to the relationship between feminism and motherhood itself. When motherhood had been the *most* valuable possible identity available for women, a disassociation from motherhood was necessary to feminist critique, and such a disassociation remained crucial to achieving the image of girls' infinite possibilities sold by the era of Girl Power. Motherhood, that is, was still represented as a foreclosure on possibilities, a mode of subjectivity that ended the story of girlhood possibilities. In fact, one could argue that the 1990s and 2000s especially were a time in which popular media, such as television and cinema more visibly discouraged girls from choosing motherhood, with TV 'specials' devoted to the tragedy of teen pregnancy, and shows like *Sex and the City* (1998) glamorizing the life of the single (childless) 'girl'. How, then, can the postfeminist image of the girl be positioned in terms of motherhood—in relation to her feminist 'mothers', and perhaps more importantly, in relation to future girls, perhaps even including her own children?

The emergence of the field of Girl Studies within feminist discourse could be posed as an answer to this question. In an argument I have discussed previously, Jennifer Eisenhauer claims that current feminist discourse has posited authoritative senior voices against impressionable junior ones, essentially equating "the woman as one who has *become* and the girl as one who is on her way" (86). In this way, many currently important feminist voices have, in focusing their concern on the fate of the girl and also on her inadequate forms of feminism, taken up the

position of maternal authority more self-consciously than before. Eisenhauer claims that such a juxtaposition disenfranchises the girl subject, assuming that the daughter's lack can only be filled by the feminist mother's guidance. And certainly there are some positions within feminism that include negative accounts of girlhood, or that relegate girls to passive consumers of anti-feminist discourse. More broadly, however, feminists dismissing girls is not the problem.

“The subject of feminism,” as Catherine Driscoll points out, “presumes the desirability of its own re-production” (2013 2). The legacy handed down to the *girl* is conditional upon the necessity of her approaching feminism in the same way and with the same intentions as her foremothers, precluding any recognition of the *girl*'s possible difference. If this is the case, the *woman* then falls into the trap of the original Snow White's wicked stepmother, staring into the mirror and hoping to see her daughter reflected only as a part of her own image, and never expecting to see her as a separate, agentic individual. Construed as this wicked stepmother, her greatest fear will be losing her identity through her daughter's (inevitable) differentiation from her. What will happen to her when the *girl* becomes a *woman*? She, of course, will be replaced, relegated to the pointlessness of the past—much like Cora in *Once Upon a Time*, who, for all of her attempts to facilitate her own version of her daughter's happiness, is ultimately punished by banishment.

The conception of the girl as incomplete, as an ageless symbol of “exemplary instability” (Driscoll 2013 60) in need of direction has helped incorporate feminism into a custodial society, in which leading the girl toward an outward model of ‘correct’ selfhood is a major concern. And perhaps this is the driving force behind the kind of maternal dramas that characterize fairy tales today and make them different from their previous incarnations. By attempting to mend broken relationships by exploring the girlhood traumas of the mother (Snow/Emma) and the stepmother

(Regina), *Once Upon a Time* historicizes and contextualizes these generations in ways that suggest present anxieties while allowing for the co-presence of multiple generations of girls/women. *Once Upon a Time* becomes the story of several *girls* and the generational tensions that characterize relations between them. In fact, this is a story of generational collapse. Emma and her mother are *the same age* because of the spell that had both separated them and frozen Snow in time. They are therefore living out the same crises and dealing with the same issues, despite very different histories. A longing for not only maternal but more specifically *generational* reconciliation is clearly suggested.

Considering how this might work as an allegory for contemporary feminist discourse, among other things, it is worth noting that the generational mother-daughter binary has certainly not been productive for the women's movement. As Henry argues, "The ubiquitous focus in recent feminist discourse on generational differences between women has ensured that much energy has gone into internal conflicts within feminism rather than external battles against sexism, racism, and homophobia, among other pressing concerns" (183). A renegotiation today of how postfeminist discourse draws on such binary opposition between generations would require a reexamination of the way we regard girlhood. As Driscoll argues, "If feminist narratives... were deprived of feminine adolescence as vulnerable object... if, instead, they had to refer to strength, disruption and transformative potential... they would be very different narratives" (132). If the anxiety surrounding questions about how to deal with the postfeminist girl 'problem' was rethought as anxiety about generational relationships within feminism, then more recognition of girls' potential for autonomous selfhood might be possible without requiring a rejection of existing feminist discourse or already powerful feminist voices. Perhaps, then, a

princess story like Snow White would not be one of the most popular girl-centered stories of the last few years.

Conclusions

While Disneyfied fairy tales have provided us with many texts about girls, girl-centered explorations of mothering are still new territory. It is for this reason that the character of Emma in *Once Upon a Time* is so intriguing. She is not only both the principal mother character and the young romantic lead, who is generally associated more with images and ideas of girlhood than womanhood, but she is also the central daughter character. Emma's key narrative involves reconciling motherhood with her identity as a young woman surrounded by possibilities (including romantic ones). While in the beginning she is a fiercely independent young woman, a 'city girl' married to her career with no maternal inclinations, Emma eventually chooses to put her career on hold to engage further with her son, but in the speculative frame of this fantasy story, this choice is coded as simultaneously saving multiple worlds and redeeming multiple lives.

Clearly we could read this as packaging a pre-feminist choice in the feminist clothes of the girl power hero. This could, that is, be the "new traditionalism" McRobbie criticizes (2004 33-36). But my argument here suggests another significance to this assembled narrative of maternal tensions and reconciliations. *Once Upon a Time* represents a concern in the broader terrain of popular speculative fiction and film today, speculating on how the current generation of putatively 'postfeminist' girls, who grew up along with the rise of 'princess culture,' might reconcile motherhood with their own identities. The heroines of these stories offer the audience

points of identification, not confined to one generation, with subject positions that can escape the anxiety of confinement to the mother's role, and even embrace absorb motherhood into a postfeminist life narrative, which is necessarily that of a girl. These texts also attempt a reimagining of generational relations between women and girls of many ages unthinkable within the stories of the Disney princesses of the 1980s and 90s.

Such a renovation of the 'Disneyfied' heroine is obviously not an easy task within a feminist frame in which motherhood means a woman is "deprived of her identity as woman and lover" (Holmlund 290), a frame in which, while it still might seem true that "[T]he mother serves the interests of patriarchy" (Rich 45), she is also now often perceived as a feminist voice critical of girls' social awareness and agency. Perhaps it is Rich who first theorizes a key to potential reconciliation between motherhood and feminism: separating the *institution* of motherhood from the *act* of mothering. Rich proposed a new "way of understanding and theorizing both the oppressive components of motherhood and the potentially empowering components of mothering" (O'Brien Hallstein 23) that aimed to allow mothers—and *daughters*—to come to mothering with new ideas about what is viable. The matrophobia Rich discusses is, according to her, a manifestation of the understanding of the mother as "the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted" (Rich 235) and resentment at those restrictions. In order to establish better bonds between mothers and daughters, and to re-establish mothering as non-complicit with patriarchal institutions, Rich insists one must separate the act of mothering from the restrictions it implies.

This is, perhaps, one more problematic being negotiated in *Once Upon a Time*. Of course, as fairy tale characters, even more than as fictional characters, Mary-Margaret, Emma, Regina, and even Henry, have the luxury of existing in a place outside many important social

limitations—and often outside of temporal bounds. They are Disney characters, informed by their Disneyfied past. As Disney has made clear, however, revision is both possible within the Disney-verse, and in many cases an integral part of continuing the power of any fairy tale. The fantasy world they inhabit makes possible any life trajectory for these girls, which only makes it more striking that the paths they choose are often so clearly tied to dominant contemporary discourse on femininity. *Once Upon a Time* makes a conscious show of throwing off the romantic shackles of the “Cinderella Complex.” In place of the compliant girl waiting to be rescued by love, we have an emotionally unavailable, “can-do” heroine uninterested in looking (or waiting) for love. The main love stories are those of Emma’s love for Henry and Emma’s love for Mary-Margaret—that is, Emma as mother and as daughter. *Once Upon a Time* is the story of Emma foregoing her real-world life as an independent city girl to find her place at the center of a (small town) familial chain, and in doing so, discovering a more complex and more fulfilling subjectivity? It is certainly true that, in many ways, this decision reflects the dilemma attributed to the ‘have-it-all’ postfeminist woman—how to be a mother and a daughter in a postfeminist context that is, in some respects, inhospitable to both. But the significance of recrafting girl-centered princess narratives to focus on recovering matrilineal bonds nevertheless suggests something significant also visible elsewhere in Disney’s capitalization on new gender norms.

Perhaps the central conclusion to be drawn from this transformation of the fairytale princess heroine from Grimm to Disney, and then to a quite different Disney in turn, is that these renovations renegotiate what it means to be, and to have, a mother. With the humanization of the ‘Evil Queen’ characters, it becomes clear that the villainous female (familial) competitor is no longer such a viable story for popular culture images of mothers and sisters, even in the fantasy

forms that have buoyed the Disney princess boom since the 1990s. The marked trend towards an emphasis on sisterly or motherly relationships in girl-directed and girl-centered Disney films suggests an audience less interested in the mother-daughter split, and more interested in reconciliation between mothers and daughters, or between sisters, and in complicating generational certainties.

While the reintegration of the mother and the daughter may help Emma or Mary Margaret, or even Regina, for feminism it is may be the recognition and comprehension of the other's subjectivity that will allow polarized feminist generations to find an accord. Henry argues that "Within the familial structure used to describe feminist generations it is inevitable... that those who are now feminism's daughters will, over time, become its mothers" (181). Acknowledging as much makes it imperative that these distinctions are collapsed in order for the *girl* to be re-enfranchised as a full, autonomous subject capable of such a role.

“Just One, I’m a Few”: Cyborgs, Reproductive Rights, and Difference in *Orphan Black*

To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many.

-Donna Haraway, *Manifesto for*

Cyborgs

When Donna Haraway published her *Manifesto for Cyborgs* in 1987, she became an influential part of two important ongoing conversations about feminism: one about the relationship between biopolitics and the female body, and the other about the place for ‘difference feminism’ within a biopolitical world. Her arguments for a “cyborg politics” (Haraway 2) questioned polarities between ‘natural’ envisionings of the category ‘woman’ and ‘unnatural’ ones, blurring such distinctions in pursuit of more fruitful—and more diverse—reimaginings of the multiple lived experiences of womanhood. Haraway’s manifesto has been frequently cited in the ensuing decades, as theorists and scholars reflect on a society that has developed ever new technological interventions in the form and experience of the human body, and human relations with the environment. For rethinking the relations between postfeminist discourse and reproduction, this text remains especially useful as it examines the ways in which increasingly institutionalized and politicized technologies, from popular media to reproductive technology, impact women of all ages, sometimes compelling identities and behaviors but often utilizing discourses of ‘choice’ and individual freedom. In particular, the choices that inscribe hegemonic power forms on the female body are key subjects of feminist concern. Primary among these is fertility management, and in this chapter I want to consider its significance to the rhetoric of choice, agency and individualism so important to postfeminist discourse.

While fertility is an issue that affects females from menarche to menopause (and indeed before and after), it is, I would argue, particularly relevant to girls. As I have discussed in previous chapters, sex and sexuality education for girls, and discourses about choice surrounding motherhood, have made the rights gained by previous feminist ‘waves,’ including increased access to knowledge about the female body, more easily accessible and easily used contraceptives, and the legalization of abortion, especially visible in girls’ lives. At the same time these are all also parts of the social machine that enables the success of the can-do/Girl Power girl, and arms warnings against the consequences of being a ‘girl-at-risk.’ Teen pregnancy is an ongoing threat to the imagined life narrative of the postfeminist girl, for whom careful practice of individual choice is necessary to maintain the autonomy envisioned by the ‘neoliberal’ dream of a postfeminist future in which choice is limited only by taste.

Several aspects of reproductive rights haunt feminist and postfeminist discourse, but there are important strains that flow between them. The constant threat of patriarchal institutions delegitimizing the technologies that allow the avoidance or termination of pregnancies and the stigmatization of the ‘right to choose,’ and those who exercise it, affect women and girls, although pregnancy means something quite different for adolescent girls who are most often deemed to have made ‘risky’ decisions when pregnancy occurs. Fertility management for girls is both a special encroachment on the image of safe girlish innocence already threatened by adolescence, while the prospect of pregnancy especially interrupts the imagined linear temporality of feminine adolescence as a narrative about increasing choice and freedom. The celebration of free choice so central to what Rosalind Gill calls the “postfeminist sensibility” thus reaches a point of special ambivalence around not only girls’ romantic and sexual choices but, especially, their fertility. I also want to consider here a new crisis of infertility that has

grown out of the linear trajectory now intended for a postfeminist adolescence, centered on the careful, choice-based planning of motherhood.

Postfeminist discourse is grounded in an understanding of sexual difference that, as previous chapters have established, constructs an image of girlhood based on multiple borders: the clear and seemingly innate border between girl and boy, the complex generational border between girl and woman, and the tension between can-do girls and girls-at-risk, defined by borders that are constantly posed as ready to be crossed (hence the need for Girl Power). This set of oppositions narrowly constructs what it means to be a girl, ignoring other possibilities: the possibilities of non-heterosexuality, the possibility of having a body that is not ‘able’ in the hegemonic sense, including not ‘capable’ of reproduction, and (sometimes related) the possibility of crossing the barrier between girl and boy and exploring ‘other’ genders. It is in potential slippages between the One and the Other that Haraway finds the most potential for “pleasure in the confusion of boundaries.” These slippages can be explored, she argues, within another liminal space: the space between science and science *fiction*. “The stakes in the border war,” she writes, “have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination” (Haraway 3).

While Haraway finds her symbol for the multiplicitous female identity in the cyborg, existing between the natural and the unnatural, born both of nature and human design, Teresa de Lauretis, writing in the same year, argues that, rather than attribute the construction of gender to sexual difference alone, it is more useful “to think of gender as the product and the process of a number of social technologies, of techno-social or bio-medical apparati” (de Lauretis 3). In addition, she argues that film, her main object of analysis in this equally famous essay, “The Technology of Gender,” plays a part in the constant exchange of “representation and self-

representation” that work to construct gender (9). In this, de Lauretis is in agreement with Haraway that the experience of being a woman—or being a girl—is a process of both externally motivated social interpellation (by everything from reproductive technologies to filmic images of femininity) and agentic self-determination. While these are not texts generally associated with postfeminism, in their understanding of ‘woman’ as both an operation of discourse and an exercise of individual choice, de Lauretis and Haraway anticipate the conflict at the heart of postfeminist discourse. That is, both of these approaches might be used to understand the conception of the girl as both constructed by existing ideological frameworks, including commodified femininity (a problematic I take up further in the following chapter), and defined by innovations and variations as refined as individual choice.

From these speculative analyses of gender identity and the inscription of power imposed on and manifest in the production of gender, I turn to contemporary questions of fertility management, biopolitics, and the potential for multiple lived experiences of girlhood and womanhood within the series *Orphan Black*, a sci-fi drama about a group of female clones. I will argue that this series presents a story about the technology of girlhood, representing anxieties about interventions into the form and experience of the female body that are particularly relevant to contemporary postfeminist discourse on the girl. I will also locate these anxieties within the discursive frame of reexamining postfeminism and discuss how *Orphan Black* constructs an alternative to the polarities identified by deLauretis and Haraway, and even a contemporary envisioning of “cyborg politics.”

Biopower, Reproductive Rights and Feminism

In 1976, two famous lectures discussed the burgeoning field of reproductive rights from very different perspectives. The first was by the Australian feminist Germaine Greer, speaking in Las Vegas, Nevada. Greer addressed the medical ambiguities associated with the birth control methods which had then relatively recently become widely available in the United States, and warned presciently against blind faith that they would not adversely affect fertility in later years. Fertility management was, to her mind, a double-edged sword—while fraught with the possibility of as yet unknown dangers, it still enabled women not to “have child rearing thrust upon them as the only noble career for a woman” (Greer 1976 2). Much later, in *The Whole Woman* (1999), Greer would write: “There can be no gainsaying that women cannot manage their own lives if access to abortion is to be denied, but the need for abortion is itself the consequence of oppression... A woman who is unable to protect her cervix from exposure to male hyperfertility is certainly not calling the shots” (Greer 2007:112).

Greer also argues that the exaggerated positioning of women as solely responsible for sexual reproduction, or the lack thereof, is a product of anxieties about state intervention into the bodily practices of individuals and groups. This was also a central concern for Michel Foucault, lecturing more broadly on history and political theory in Paris. Fertility management was only one of the ways Foucault regarded the state as exerting control through what he labeled “biopower” in his lecture series *Society Must Be Defended* (1975-1976). But he does specifically cite a “natalist policy” (Foucault 1976, 243), and more specifically, birth control practices, as one of the means by which the state interpellates citizens as self-policing subjects—as managers of their own fertility. “Sovereignty took life and let live,” he declares. “And now we have the emergence of a power that I would call the power of regularization, and it, in contrast, consists in making live and letting die” (247). The implications of “making live and letting die” for the self-

policing, sexually active girl or woman are clear. She becomes an adjudicator of life and death, and her body necessarily becomes a site of constant discipline. In this way the power of the state is biologically inscribed upon the (female) subject.

It is no coincidence, I think, that these lectures took place only three years after the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision known as *Roe v. Wade* (1973) was handed down. And, significantly, a similar decision decriminalizing abortion was made under the *Veil Law* in France in 1975. We can thus say that biopolitics met feminism in the 1970s, providing an internationally important step toward “reproductive autonomy” for girls and women and catalyzing changes to familial structures and women’s labor (Haker 167). These are some of the most prominent developments that historicize the work of the ‘second wave’ and make possible the postfeminist discourse that suggests young girls are not only a locus of, simultaneously, both potential and risk but also charged with the responsibility of exercising the rights and choices made available to them. As I suggested in the last chapter, these opportunities, when strongly associated with previous, clearly demarcated generations, position girls as constantly walking a tightrope between achievement and regression to the pre-feminist norms of early motherhood without the same possibilities for determining what will count as feminist progress. The tensions surrounding reproductive rights are particularly important to this linear progress story about feminist achievement.

The postfeminist sensibility diagnosed by Gill involves an ambivalence about every feminist achievement, including those related to fertility management. At the same time that girls are monitored for too incautious use of reproductive technologies and the risk therein to the potential on which their status as products of feminist achievement is staked, they are also closely associated with the “can do” image analyzed by Anita Harris (2004 *Future*) that suggests

girls with so few obstacles to personal achievement should be able to also enjoy forms of status for girls and women that preceded those feminist interventions. Postfeminist success is thus at one important level constructed for girls around planned motherhood—usually motherhood planned for the future rather than the present. The “reproductive autonomy” constructed for girls, and with particular reference to girls as symbols of the future, operates as both a privilege and a hefty individual responsibility. This could, according to Hille Haker, “be described as a negative right, in this case the right to non-violation of female bodily integrity, and the right to non-interference in a woman’s way of living” (168); in other words, the right *not* to conceive.

The developments particular to a contemporary discourse of sexual autonomy centered on the way in which reproductive rights have, with the multiplication and extended availability of reproductive technologies, become understood also as a *positive* right – the right *to conceive*. A recent study of adolescent girls in Britain by Fiona Kisby Littleton suggests that, in the wake of Girl Power discourse, girls often “constituted themselves as future women, mothers, partners and paid workers... they expected to follow the ‘can-do’ track to good ‘citizen motherhood’” (Littleton 182). Here, Littleton is referencing Harris’s discussion of the way the figure of the “can-do” girl is translated as a future mother. Harris writes:

The achievement of labor market accomplishments and a glamorous consumer lifestyle are premised on the idea of an unencumbered individual who can devote herself to full-time paid work. An intrinsic element of the can-do experience is thus the delaying of motherhood... There is a great deal of social and economic support for these pathways, although this has required a reshaping of traditional conservative family values around mothering to accommodate the neoliberal agenda that calls for young women to function as high-status workers. (Harris 2004 *Future* 23)

One powerful imperative of the postfeminist discourse surrounding contemporary girls is to postpone or avoid pregnancy and motherhood. In this respect, images of girlhood such as that taken for granted by the girls in Littleton's study convey a specific trajectory that locates motherhood in a phase of life *after* girlhood. Considering the extension of the popular, public and theoretical concept of girlhood into years well after puberty, as I have discussed in earlier chapters, this phase effectively means *after* girls have achieved all of the things made available to them by female emancipation. This phase, according to Littleton, may align with the early-to-mid-thirties, but is certainly after the early twenties. This means after majority but before parenthood, and thus avoiding, as Littleton points out, the prime period of female fertility, now construed as a time of life that should be concentrated on travel, 'fun', and choosing a fulfilling career (Littleton 180). In other words, girlhood should be prolonged until, in the words of the participants, the girl had had time to "mature as a person and be more well-rounded" before the "less enjoyable" phase of raising a family could commence (Littleton 182).

That this childrearing phase is understood to be an eventual requirement will be discussed below. But as to what is expected during this phase, Littleton suggests that

'Late-age' parenting was deemed to be acceptable if a woman herself felt it was convenient in financial and professional terms. It was judged as questionable only because the mother would be 'too old' and therefore lacking in energy to care for the child that would inevitably be born once the decision to procreate had been made. The fact that conception may be difficult at such a time, and that rates of miscarriage are high for older women, was never referred to—even when candidates had indicated they possessed correct biological knowledge about egg decline with age in other parts of their interviews. (185)

Littleton uses the apparent ignorance of these girls concerning the impact of age on female fertility to highlight a weakness in sex education curricula. The impact of girls' knowledge about female fertility seems to her increasingly harmful as reliance on reproductive technologies is increasingly celebrated and (in the U.K., at least) fertility decreases (Littleton 180). These girls' insistence that they could and would get pregnant once they had actively decided to can be construed as evidence of two phenomena: firstly, that the work of the reproductive rights movements of the 1960s and 70s has in effect succeeded in making sexual reproduction a conscious and, seemingly, even a relatively autonomous choice for girls in much of the Western world; and, secondly, that the postfeminist girl represented by this study feels she is *entitled to* a carefully timed and planned pregnancy, should she choose it.

Where fertility crises are perceived to emerge, the state has intervened in numerous ways in order to promote what Foucault calls natalist policies. In Australia, these interventions have taken the form of "Infertility Prevention Clinics" aimed at successful young "Career Women," advertising campaigns for contraception that focus on the ongoing maintenance of fertility rather than the more immediate prevention of pregnancy, and "baby bonuses" for working moms-to-be (Harris 2004 *Future* 24). Two clear problems result from these interventions: the ongoing perpetuation of the can-do/at-risk polarity in the privileging of the heterosexual middle-class 'career woman' who is the goal of can-do rhetoric, supporting her privileged access to the 'choices' that make her an exemplary postfeminist success story; and the way the discourse surrounding these interventions uncritically inscribes "an eternal, feminine instinct for mothering" on the female body (Harris 2004 *Future* 24).

This latter issue has been particularly troubling for feminist scholarship. Anne Donchin argues as follows:

Organization of debate around the ‘naturalness’ or ‘artificiality’ of particular technologies replicates the same polarities that constructed women as the dominated sex originally, the identification of technology with maleness and nature with the female. The metaphors so prevalent in the anti-technology, anti-natalist discourse likening women who submit to these techniques to barnyard animals and breeding machines tend to portray technology as a disruptive force casting asunder an original natural order. This discursive technique not only fails to loosen the hold of this dualistic construction of the world but also diverts attention from attempts to understand and change the material conditions and relations that dominate infertility research and treatment. (485)

This oppositional thinking moreover reflects the difference between what Foucault calls *disciplinary* power, enacted directly on the body by the state to individualize and standardize the multiplicity of identities available, and *biopower*, which Foucault says works to “massify” the people as a population. Biopower thus constructs a global identity that is controlled through the state’s hold on life and death (Foucault 1976 242-243). In this context, one could argue that fertility management discourse is both *disciplinary* and a form of *biopower*. It is enacted directly on the body of the girl/woman by and through her own self-observation but also works to maintain the final authority of the state over natality and mortality. It operates, then, as a mode of governmentality, deploying self-interest and independent choice in the interests of a given state formation, and yet the fact that the current availability of fertility management for girls and women was hard won by feminist action complicates any equation between fertility management as governmentality and a patriarchal mode of sovereign power. Nevertheless this discourse does add contradictory burdens of embodiment and choice to female identity and, like the polarized

‘natural’/ ‘artificial’ debate described by Haraway and echoed here by Donchin, it ignores the multiplicity of embodied experience.

As I have demonstrated, the presence of reproductive technologies—both as ways to avoid young motherhood and to achieve motherhood at the ‘right’ time—are important factors in a postfeminist narrative of girlhood. I will now turn to *Orphan Black* for a speculative representation of that narrative and consider the anxieties about state intervention, reproductive rights, and identity within this text to ask what it might suggest about current conceptions of the imagined linear path of girlhood.

Cloning, State Intervention, and Multiple Identities

Orphan Black (2013—) begins with Sarah Manning—loner, criminal, and former foster child—returning to her hometown after several years away to reconnect with her young daughter. When a series of dangerous encounters with mysterious doppelgängers finally leads her to two more women who look exactly like her, Sarah resists their revelation that they are all clones. But when it becomes clear that there are more of these “clones” than even those she has met, and that they’re being assassinated, Sarah becomes involved in a plot to keep them safe. What follows is a race to discover their origins as quickly as possible in order to fight whatever powers want them dead.

Although all of the clones are in their late twenties at the start of the narrative, Sarah especially is presented in the terms of a young adult narrative of girlhood. In describing realist dystopian fantasy texts (such as *The Hunger Games* [2008]) as an extension of gothic literature, Glennis Byron and Sharon Deans describe the protagonists—often orphans, like these clones—as

individuals who “gain an increasing sense of self and autonomy...not achieved by independently going forward in a state of complete self-reliance, but by forming new relational ties and undertaking greater social commitment” (Byron and Deans 101). This is an apt summary of Sarah’s trajectory. She begins as a homeless ex-junkie with a history of irresponsible choices—a warning tale for the ‘at-risk’ girl—who has come home in an ill-conceived but well-intended plan to start over with her young daughter. In the first episode, her foster mother, knowing her history and writing her off as permanently ‘at-risk,’ expresses clear doubts about Sarah’s ability to become a successful adult and mother. Indeed, Sarah soon assumes the identity of Beth, who is the first clone she encounters and who has just committed suicide, and her first impulse is to empty Beth’s bank account, take her daughter Kira, and run.

As Sarah continues to play the role of Beth, assuming Beth’s more conservative appearance, designer wardrobe, and expensive house, she begins to seem like a child playing at a vision of inaccessible, “can-do” adulthood. But gradually she begins to understand the social significance of Beth’s career as a police detective, the pleasures of maintaining a relationship with a respectful partner and, most importantly, the importance of the connections she feels to the clones as she encounters them one by one (“Natural Selection”). Eventually, Sarah decides that her responsibility to both her new-found sisters and her own daughter demands that she put their needs before her own more selfish inclinations and pursue and eventually fight the institution that created her. Sarah’s story is, therefore, a classic *bildungsroman* at one level—a story of negotiating adolescence that resembles the storyline Byron and Deans identify with teen gothic, focused on “the balance between an emerging sense of self as a competent individual, on the one hand, and a transformed, but continued, feeling of connection with significant others, on the other” (101).

There is another important dimension to Sarah's story. While it is couched in terms of the at-risk/can-do polarity, it also shows class to be an explicit factor in terms of access to the 'choices' that put girls at risk or on track for achievement. While the decisions Sarah makes prior to her induction into Beth's more middle-class existence are undoubtedly coded as bad choices, once she has access to more money she just as clearly has more opportunities to make good, 'responsible' choices about her career, her love life, and also her family as it gradually expands to encompass a network of clones.

The diversity of this 'family' is significant. Some of the most important clone-siblings are Allison, a stereotypical suburban housewife and adoptive mother of two; Cosima, a homosexual scientist with dreadlocks; and Helena, Sarah's embryonic twin, whose abusive past has made her psychologically unstable. Other clones with the same genetic make-up as Sarah include the evil Rachel, who acts as head of the Dyad Institute responsible for creating the clones themselves and, briefly, Tony, a trans man. Across this diversity the clones present and explore distinctly different visions of embodied femininity. While Sarah represents a mature but still adolescent girlhood, anxious, alcoholic Allison epitomizes the domestic boredom of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1963), the relationship between Cosima and her lover Delphine emphasizes the difference of Cosima's lesbian identity, and the brief introduction of Tony indicates the potential for the clones to also blur gender distinctions. The fact that all of these characters come from the same genetic material stresses the possibility for a multiplicity of identities, not only for women in general, and not only based on social circumstances, but also, the series suggests, within the same subjectivity. Indeed, with the later introduction of Charlotte Bowles, an eight-year-old, disabled clone with, again, the same genetic material, generations are also collapsed as

the diversity of possible lives from the same form and the impact of bodily capacity on any life are also raised.

At this level, *Orphan Black* suggests that all of the clones are different possible identities for essentially the same person. This takes up a clearly constructionist perspective which we might compare to the one which informs de Lauretis' work. De Lauretis argues that

The understanding of one's personal condition as a woman in terms social and political, and the constant revision, reevaluation, and reconceptualization of that condition in relation to other women's understanding of their sociosexual positions, generate a mode of apprehension of all social reality that derives from the consciousness of gender. And from that apprehension, from that personal, intimate, analytical, and political knowledge of the pervasiveness of gender, there is no going back to the innocence of 'biology'. (20)

Indeed, the lived experience of each of these women is shown to differ as much, due to factors such as education, sexuality, gender-identification, and background, as Sarah's previous life differs from her adopted middle-class life as Beth.

There is an intersectionality to *Orphan Black*'s representation of identity which runs counter to the "postfeminist sensibility." The binary opposition between at-risk and "can-do" and the rhetoric of consumer citizenship that has informed postfeminist discourse on what girls can do has, I would argue, served to further delimit girlhood as an experience properly available only to certain girls. The representations of girlhood that have contributed to this discourse often offer a similarly restrictive image of the experience of being a girl. *Orphan Black* belongs, then, to a renegotiation of these restrictions, anticipated by Haraway in her call to leave behind "natural" notions of gender. Haraway argues that "Cyborgs might consider more seriously the partial,

fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment. Gender might not be global identity after all” (36). The clones are cyborgs in that they are both biologically and scientifically constituted, and they do indeed trouble the “natural” association between sex and gender, while allowing for further slippage within the field of possible gendered identities.

Meanwhile, real-world anxieties about the connotations of human cloning for the politics of identity and the social status of the individual are played out in the personal crises of the characters. Throughout *Orphan Black*, Sarah and the other clones struggle with the ambiguities that knowledge about their origins demands. Who are their ‘parents’, and what defines their ‘family’? Why, and with what consequences, can some of them give birth and not others? Where did they physically come from, and would knowledge of their genetic history help them to combat the degenerative disease that some of them are plagued with? Eventually they discover that legal uncertainties over the status of clones have allowed them all to become the property of a large scientific corporation. The series conveys this as a personal tragedy for the clones, who feel they have been reduced to ‘genetic material’ and this in turn means they must question the basic human rights they have taken for granted—especially their right to bodily autonomy. As Jeanette Edwards writes:

Concerns about human cloning draw on, reveal and reproduce cultural understandings of personhood and relatedness. The image of the human clone is tied to the laboratory and to the reproduction of life without the nurture of human relations. Through “the clone” predestination and predetermination are imagined and the replication not only of individuals but also of social classes and injustice. Cloning draws a conceptual limit to the possibilities presented by technological and medical intervention in human reproduction. (Edwards 319)

In other words, the cyborg nature of clones invokes questions about bodily rights in general—who ‘owns’ a clone, and what does that ownership mean? These questions give rise to anxieties that build on now longstanding feminist concerns that add significance to the fact that Sarah and her clone-siblings are ‘girls.’ As a dystopian fiction, *Orphan Black* raises the specter of all the possible injustices that might occur if the bodies of women or girls were owned by a state historically entrenched in both capitalism and patriarchy. How far could state intervention and the consequences of legal ‘ownership’ go?

That these questions are raised around figures of girlhood in *Orphan Black* reflects ongoing debates in the field of reproductive rights and technologies, particularly by adding connotations of inexperience and associating their ambiguous legal status with legal minority. The story turns on limitations to the rights these girls have to the fullest possible knowledge of, and to self-governance of, their physical bodies. They are repeatedly drugged and examined in their sleep and the full extent of this form of bodily violation is unknown. More important is the way in which Sarah’s known and Helena’s potential fertility is constantly exploited and threatened throughout the series. Sarah is required to sign over one of her ovaries in exchange for the return of her kidnapped daughter (“By Means Which Have Never Yet Been Tried”); Helena’s ova are forcibly removed by a cult leader in order to impregnate an adolescent girl, Gracie, also against her will (“Things Which Have Never Yet Been Done”). The exploitation of the girl’s body is consistently linked to its present and future reproductive capacity.

This last storyline in particular links to the relatively new legal ambiguity surrounding surrogate rights. Donna Dickenson cites a pivotal case in which a U.S. court decided that “Baby M” would be surrendered to her biological father despite having been carried by a ‘traditional’ surrogate—meaning the biological mother—under an informal contract to deliver the baby for

the biological father and his wife (*In re Baby M*, 537 A.2d 1227, 109 N.J. 396 [N.J. 1988]). The judge “believed that the baby was already the ‘property’ of the father” and that the surrogate could not deny him “what was already his” (Dickenson 195). Although this case is relatively clear-cut, in the sense that both the biological mother and father were identified, it set a substantial legal precedent in that the mother was not granted custody of “genetic material” contributed by the father. By extension, the ambiguities of custody are all the greater when it comes to reproductive technologies such as in-vitro fertilization (IVF), gestational surrogacy, or stem-cell technology. Dickenson argues that gestational labor of any kind should be given greater legal weight. She claims that, where this labor is undervalued in surrogacy debates, the increasing value of and demand for stem cells within medical research makes clear the importance of this labor, highlighting

the “use-value” which women produce in the reproductive labours of super-ovulation, egg extraction, and the work of early pregnancy and abortion. It is abundantly clear that these pregnancy-derived tissues have value, and enormous value. What is shown by the commodification of bodily products, such as stem cells, is that there is no firm divide, as Marx thought there was, between the use-values produced through social means of production and the absence of use-values in reproduction. (198)

Biopolitically, girls and women are required to exercise particularly important forms of agency as the producers and adjudicators of life. But if the labor falls at their feet, by the current standards of law, across the many jurisdictions to which these questions are relevant, this does not mean that they *own* the “genetic material” produced by this labour. This remains true even in the case of those who are not and have never been pregnant.

The nightmare scenarios derived from this situation that are played out in *Orphan Black* rely on the now familiar figure of the girl-hero of speculative fiction to render them as imagined possibilities for future worlds rather than problems with the present one. Telling this story uses the girl's body, rather than a more evidently mature and experienced woman's body, which adds a range of further dystopian connotations: theft of future promise, looming images of what might be for immanent generations, and perhaps most importantly, emphasis on the fact that withholding reproductive choices threatens all other rights. Some of these 'girls' have put themselves at risk in ways anticipated by governmental and postfeminist discourse, while others have not. When fragile, uncomprehending Helena's eggs are stolen the appropriation of choice over the girl's body is compounded when Gracie, the cult leader's daughter, has pregnancy forced upon her before she has even become sexually active.

This narrative as a whole serves the desires of the patriarch, Henrik, whose multiple wives and daughters live their lives in the most extreme representation of patriarchal oppression. Their existence consists solely of having and raising children, and otherwise following Henrik's orders. This is, perhaps, the anxiety at the heart of risk discourse—that without sex education that makes an enemy of sexuality, or a rhetoric of empowerment that forestalls any choices about maternity until after career or educational achievement, girls will be the victims of a system that perpetuates patriarchal structures and norms. It is very particular choices, then, rather than choice in general, which will represent defense against this risk. Their bodies, like Helena's and especially Gracie's, are the site on which biopower is enacted but also the last line of training in self-defense against this nightmare scenario. It is fitting, then, that when Helena empowers Gracie to leave the fold and then confronts Henrik, her weapons of choice are the very tools that were used to steal her bodily products. The last the audience sees of Henrik, he is strapped to a

chair resembling that of a gynecologist, his feet in stirrups, and Helena is about to violate his body with the same invasive instruments used on her. This explicit challenge is an exaggerated symbol of refusing patriarchal interests: pregnant Gracie escapes with her love interest, refusing to allow her labor—even for this unwanted non-biological child—to serve *his* desires; Helena takes all of her frozen genetic material, sets fire to Henrik’s farm, and leaves, refusing to allow her DNA to be used for *his* purposes (“Things”).

Gracie and Helena’s story is not the only representation of surrogacy in *Orphan Black*. Eventually Sarah meets her own gestational mother, Amelia, who recounts to Sarah how, at the age of 22, she agreed to carry Sarah and Helena in exchange for money and help with immigration. During her pregnancy, however, on discovering that the wealthy white couple who had approached her were actually scientists, she had gone into hiding and later given the girls up for adoption (“Unconscious Selection”). Her story reflects fears surrounding the ‘choice’ to become a surrogate. As Emily Jackson argues,

It is easy to advocate individual freedom of choice, but ‘choice’, in the abstract, is meaningless. Choice can only be empowering if the individual has a range of valuable options from which to choose. There are others who question the validity of the choice being made by women who opt to become surrogate mothers. They point to the possibility of exploitation and argue that paternalistic restriction of surrogacy is necessary to protect such women from choices which may be forced upon them by their material circumstances. Such arguments draw parallels with other restrictions placed upon the use of individual's bodies, such as the rule that people should not be able to sell one of their kidneys. The risk of coercion is simply too great, and such a choice is accepted to be exploitative, dangerous and thus illegal. (Jackson 251-252)

The fact that ‘choosing’ surrogacy is so much more difficult and governmentally restricted than choosing other bodily interventions points to the particular discursive power of choice over reproductive rights and technologies. The importance of the feminist struggle for reproductive rights since the nineteenth century always spoke to the close ties between reproductive labor and the subordination of women within patriarchy, but new reproductive technologies have clearly renovated the ways in which such labor can be exploited—especially for girls and young women at the peak of their fertility. The clear delineation between the rich white couple impersonated by the Dyad scientists and the poor black immigrant whose body they exploit simultaneously marks this issue as one of class, ethnicity, and cultural and social capital. *Orphan Black*, much like Jackson’s and Dickenson’s arguments embedded in real world politics, creates a stark contrast between those who have access to ‘choice’ and those who do not, and this contrast is pervasively hidden by the at-risk/can-do dichotomy.

IVF, Abortion, and the War on Women

In addition to questions of surrogacy and parental rights, other reproductive technologies also play a key role in *Orphan Black*. Stem cell research makes a minor appearance when it is discovered that Sarah’s seven-year-old daughter’s stem cells can perhaps cure a clone’s disease. Sarah is confronted with a difficult choice between allowing her fiercely protected daughter’s body to be violated by the very group she is fighting against or watching her clone-sister’s body waste away. In the end, she leaves the choice to her daughter, Kira, who chooses to submit her body to the company’s experiments (“Things”). The generational handing-down of a feminist understanding of bodily autonomy that includes the right to choose points to the way in which girls have inherited the responsibility to maintain reproductive rights from previous ‘waves’ of

feminism, but Kira's decision to subject herself to a painful procedure in order to maintain the integrity of the group also paints her as a next-generation young adult heroine in the same vein as her mother.

Reluctantly handing Kira over to Dyad is only one of the ways that Sarah and the other clones are manipulated by this shady, independently run government offshoot. The liminal legal space occupied by Dyad's cloning practices in this series offers an exaggerated version of the controversial political place of IVF in contemporary cultural debate. The link between the two is made explicit, and not only through the inclusion of surrogates within the plot. Rachel, Beth (Elizabeth), and Sarah, who, along with Helena are perhaps the most important of the clones, are all named after biblical characters who are given the gift of late-stage fertility by God after years of barrenness. The Dyad Institute (itself a reference to 'sister' pairs within DNA strands) calls its cloning scheme 'Project Leda,' alluding to the story in Greek mythology in which Zeus impregnates Leda in the guise of a swan, following which she gives birth to two eggs from which two pairs of twins are born—one of these four children is Helen of Troy, whose beauty brings down a civilization after wars between patriarchs over possessing her, and another is Castor. And this name is, in turn, echoed in *Orphan Black's* 'Project Castor,' the *male* cloning project finally revealed at the end of season two. These various mythologies are presumably taken up by the series creators to invoke images of unnaturally assisted—cyborg—reproduction. They also invoke stories about generations of women and girls driven apart by competition over beauty and babies as ways of achieving status in a patriarchal society, and these allusions are also important in *Orphan Black*. But pairing science with the mysteries of mythology also serves to complicate the distinction between 'natural' motherhood (and other naturalized gender destinies) and technologically produced or enhanced motherhood.

The symbolic link between cloning and IVF apparent in *Orphan Black* is similarly apparent in related ‘real world’ discourses. Matteo Galletti examines the ways in which cloning and IVF are discussed by citing several government procedural accounts, including the U.S. President’s Councils on Bioethics for 2002 and 2004—focusing on “Human Cloning and Human Dignity” and “Reproduction and Responsibility,” respectively. Galletti stresses the traditionalist language used to approach the topic within these reports. One early objection raised to both cloning and IVF was the idea that “there is a natural pattern for having children, morally codified by natural law, all violations of which are to be judged as immoral” (163). Galletti notes that most recent reports take an ontological position that favors ‘natural’ reproduction. This

does not deny importance to the cultural, social, and symbolic aspects of the act of procreation, but it intends to stress that cultural meanings and evaluations are based on biological grounds... To defend the biological domain in reproduction is to do justice to human beings as engendered and embodied beings. The idea that the human being is entirely a ‘cultural’ being (i.e., that human individuals can be reduced to their actions rather than to their biological ‘essence’) is mistaken, since it betrays a fundamental part of our identity, namely our being biological entities that experience longing... Cloning is the ultimate threat to all this, since it radically separates sex from reproduction and removes the male-female encounter from procreation. (162-163)

Despite the roundabout defense of IVF as ethically distinct from cloning within such reports, Galletti agrees that their near-religious overtone makes clear an underlying prejudice against non-traditional methods of procreation, disenfranchising those who would use new reproductive technologies and contributing to the man/woman binary and the privileging of heterosexuality that continue to perpetuate patriarchal values.

This association between individual autonomy and reproductive choice plays out symbolically in *Orphan Black* as the revelation that Sarah has a daughter raises questions among the clones. Sarah, and, as it becomes known later, Helena, are the only fertile clones. Cosima is relatively unaffected by this news, having never contemplated childbearing; Alison, with two adopted children (and therefore having used a reproductive ‘technology’ of another kind), is clearly jealous; while Rachel, whose link to Dyad is now acknowledged, endeavours not only to kidnap Kira but also to steal one of Sarah’s ovaries for implantation into her own body (“By Means”). Together, the clones represent various choices about pregnancy visibly available in the future which girls are encouraged to see ahead for themselves: the lesbian whose access to reproductive choice is limited (Cosima); the middle-class heterosexual couple who can take advantage of alternative methods (Allison); the former ‘bad’ girl whose pregnancy was unplanned (Sarah); and the young, rich, single career woman intent on procreating on her own terms and in her own time (Rachel).

The plotline of the series therefore draws on what I have previously argued is the historical recoding of reproductive rights in terms both *negative* and *positive*. While Sarah makes it clear she has had at least one abortion, and the rhetoric of choice—or, more frighteningly, the lack of choice—centering the Helena/Gracie subplot derives from access to birth control and abortion. Rachel’s desperate attempt to conceive by literally taking Sarah’s fertility points to reproduction being understood as an entitlement—and an entitlement under threat. The real life equivalent to the genetic flaw that renders Rachel infertile is, as suggested above with reference to Littleton’s research, delayed motherhood—an important tenet of postfeminist discourse that suggests we might read the clones as figures of postfeminist girlhood. Pointing out the temporal aspect of this particular issue, Haker notes that,

whereas birth control resulted in a considerable drop in the number of births per woman, assisted procreation encompasses the distinction between genetic, biological and social parents and questions the traditional biological concept of parenting, while at the same time maintaining the latter by responding to the assumed (female) desire to become pregnant and actually give birth to a child. (173)

It is interesting to consider how the “cyborg” technologies that allow women to blur the boundaries between biology and technology at the same time reinscribes the innate femininity assumed by essentialist patriarchal views. De Lauretis argues that the reduction of identity within psychoanalysis and taken up by discourse to “women = Woman = Mother” (20) is perhaps the most deep-seated existing technology of gender, collapsing and foreclosing on other possible modes of identity. It is not my intention in this chapter to privilege youthful childrearing, ‘late-age’ childrearing, or no child-rearing at all: my aim is instead to problematize the relation between girls and reproductive rights and technologies, and to make clear the way that the figure of the girl is defined by both childbearing capacity and childrearing choices. This is yet another double bind of postfeminist discourse, in which there is all choices are potentially coded as ‘wrong.’

Dolores Dooley also stresses this tension, by which “techniques such as in-vitro fertilization coexist with a powerful ideology of motherhood as a biological imperative” (153). Paradoxically, the choice *not* to conceive, made possible by birth control and abortion, and clearly viewed as a great enabler and product of female liberation, is now being counterbalanced by a pressure to conceive naturally despite possible increases in fertility problems due to the late-stage motherhood encouraged by the rhetoric of responsible choice associated with access to those rights. Discourse on these new reproductive technologies treats motherhood as a delayed

but “essentially feminine moment of fulfilment” (Harris 25) for which all girls must plan carefully. “Given this,” Heather Widdows argues, that “those who wish to assert and work for women’s rights should carefully consider whether access to [new reproductive technologies] is really something that benefits and liberates women, or whether it is further entrenching a view of women as a biological/genetic ‘baby maker’” (163). The fact that Sarah and Helena are treated as little more than baby-makers by the various institutional representatives of patriarchal fundamentalism and governmentality speaks to the potential for this entrenchment.

While these expanding technologies may carry unknowable connotations for the future of reproductive rights, this series makes clear the anxieties inherent within them. *Orphan Black* is part of a larger trend in speculative cinema (see O’Riordan 159) that takes an ambivalent stance on cloning, considering its potential (for example, through the eyes of Cosima who becomes involved in genetic research) as well as its inherent flaws. It is particularly important, in viewing *Orphan Black* through the prism of girls’ relations to postfeminist discourse, that the greatest dangers faced by the protagonists in this series do not derive from futuristic technologies imagined at the interface between the world of the series and the world of the audience, but rather from reproductive technologies that already exist. The constant threat of state intervention in the family that builds around Sarah and the individual right to bodily autonomy for each clone feeds an underlying fear that, not only might Sarah’s, Helena’s or Kira’s reproductive rights be taken from them, but their self-determination is at risk in the same way. If, as Byron and Deans argue, dystopian realist young adult texts such as *Orphan Black* operate “by opening up an alternative window through which to view the world,” allowing readers/viewers to “decide for themselves what it really means to be a young adult in contemporary society” (Byron and Deans

102), then being a girl in the society represented by *Orphan Black* means a constant fight to maintain reproductive autonomy in the interests of producing a viable self.

The society represented here is, of course, a speculation on the future of reproductive technologies. Producer Graeme Manson, commenting on the series as it was filming in Canada and airing throughout North America, claimed that “it’s meant to be Generic”, rather than America (in Lederman 2013). This seems to be an important distinction. Comparing *Orphan Black* to *Lost Girl* (2010—), another Canadian speculative (fantasy) series which deals with bisexuality, and sexuality in general, very “matter-of-factly,” Marsha Lederman suggests that Canadian production enables these series to not only blur distinctions between expected genres but to blur distinctions between morally fraught distinctions like sex and gender categories in ways that are impossible in the United States (2013). This may also apply to the directness with which state intervention into reproductive rights is treated within the series. Abortion remains a heavily politicized subject in the United States; but while *Roe v. Wade* continues to be debated in some quarters, this decision and the access to abortion it enables has, perhaps wrongly, been installed with a sense of permanency in sex education for young women. In fact, and this may be more pressing at the time of *Orphan Black*’s release, newly looming threats of bodily intervention and invasion have grown around arguments against abortion.

In 2012, as a federal move to subsidize birth control as part of a national health care system was being fiercely disputed in the United States, several new ‘pro-life’ legislative proposals were introduced into various U.S. state governments. These proposals were all attempts to limit women’s access to reproductive technologies, including contraception and abortion, and soon collectively became known in popular media and other public forums by the label, “The War on Women.” Among these proposals were several initiatives to introduce ‘trans-

abdominal' and even the more invasive 'trans-vaginal' ultrasounds as a mandatory part of pre-abortion screening. These processes were designed to include a description of the fetus and an 'opportunity' for the pregnant girl or woman to interact with it; that is, to hear its heartbeat or see its image on an ultrasound screen. A grace period of up to 72 hours was then specified before the subject was allowed to seek an abortion (Rodrigues 55-56).

When Sarah, having signed over her bodily rights to Dyad in exchange for the safe return of her daughter, is wheeled into an operating room to (unbeknownst to her) have her fertility given to another, it is easy to draw comparisons between Sarah's ordeal and the invasive procedures, sometimes referred to by feminist activists as "state-sanctioned rape" (Kopsa 2012), which some states still demand for abortion candidates. The biopolitical effects are clear and direct, in both cases. Discussing these prescribed ultrasounds, Sara Rodrigues writes that "it is the sociocultural legitimacy of material bonding via the ultrasound that is exploited by anti-choice legislation... in order to regulate women's capacity to exercise choice" (61). These regulations, sometimes termed 'Right-to-Know' acts in the relevant legislation, play upon the self-governance encouraged by biopower and other state controls to, with bitter irony, dissuade the subject from exercising free will, thereby maintaining the regionally popular pro-life stance while remaining within the confines of constitutional law.

Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose argue that state interventions of this kind necessarily play on rhetoric of *choice*: "the principal biopolitical achievement here lies on the axis of subjectification: these strategies exhibit the characteristic formation in which apparent choices entail new forms of 'responsibilization' and impose onerous obligations, especially, in this case, upon women" (Rabinow and Rose 209). In addition, Rodrigues argues that

The discourse of ‘Right-to-Know’ acts... retains women’s sexual health and activity within what Foucault calls the order of power-knowledge... Such logic inherently aligns childbirth, and eventually motherhood, with ‘health’ on the one hand, and abortion and childlessness with pathology on the other. (67)

In other words, by reinscribing motherhood as ‘healthy’ femininity and thereby lack of motherhood as unhealthy, dominant binary conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality are perpetuated. Meanwhile, the psychological impact of such bodily invasion is sidelined by the assumption that the mothering instinct will override reproductive choice and that this, ultimately, makes the procedure morally sound. The question of fetal personhood so commonly deployed in anti-abortion (‘pro-life’) arguments suggests that the personhood of the mother is subsumed by the biopolitical need to continue the procreation of the species and, crucially, to incite and sustain appropriate attitudes to that procreation. The underlying assumptions of the Right to Know campaign certainly do not align with the hard-won reproductive rights gained in the last century of feminism, but it is important to note that all such biopolitical aims concerning women’s dispositions towards fertility rely on a pedagogical discourse that places girls at the center of such political action.

The “Generica” universe of *Orphan Black* is thus a world informed by ongoing political debate over reproductive rights, looming bodily invasion, and questions about fertility. As I have outlined it in earlier chapters, the postfeminist discourse of girlhood is also predicated on choice: the choice to exercise reproductive rights, the choice to be educated, the choice to be a can-do girl. *Orphan Black* presents the viewer with not only the potential for divergence from the limited narrative of empowerment available to girls in the different life trajectories of the various clones but also a reminder, both through Amelia and through the choices Sarah is forced to make

to save her daughter, that those choices are not empowering for every girl. Overall, *Orphan Black*'s speculation on an alternative reality interacts directly with real issues regarding what it means to be girl set out by educational imperatives to view her reproductive choices as choices about the relative autonomy and responsibility of the self that are set about by sometimes contradictory biopolitical intervention.

Conclusions

As *Orphan Black* concluded its second season, another new series debuted on American television. *The Lottery* (2014) is set in the near future, portraying a world in which the population has suddenly become infertile. Dealing with the impact of this event six years later, a government agency finally artificially impregnates one hundred eggs and decides that the carriers of these eggs will be chosen by a lottery and then compete for public favor on national television. Meanwhile, the youngest of the world's children are being quietly taken into government custody on the pretense that their parents are unfit for a responsibility so important to the nation. The main characters in these separate storylines about the spectacular prize of pregnancy and the state's control of parenting come together as the series begins to unveil government involvement in the fertility crisis.

The Lottery is, overall, a story that legitimizes reproductive technologies while reinforcing the essentialist idea that all women desire to be mothers—not unlike the equally fantastic plotline of *Orphan Black*. What these and other science fiction programs dealing with themes of gender and fertility, such as *Extant* (2014), in which a female astronaut becomes mysteriously pregnant while in outer space, productively imagine a growing concern for state

intervention in *all* aspects of fertility. While postfeminist discourse treats reproductivity not only as a responsibility but also a *right*, its increased reliance on technology allows for and interacts with new forms of interference by the state that have produced these paranoid biopolitical tales. The very real government interventions into how abortion will be allowed that I sketched above constitute only one aspect of “State control of the biological” (Foucault 1976: 223).

Although state intervention into human reproduction has a long history (see Rose and Rabinow 208-212), these more contemporary interventions continue to have a direct impact on perceptions of reproductive rights and the place of fertility, pregnancy and maternity in the definition and experience of subjectivity—perhaps most importantly, for girls who, in the context of postfeminist discourse, are required to be educated in the management of their own fertility in the interests of particular images of ideal citizenship. In the United States, decades after abortion was putatively made a right, the fact that this right is still being debated (and arguably subverted) speaks to the ongoing work necessary to maintain the choices that make this narrative of empowerment accessible. As Rodrigues puts it,

Making abortion care difficult to access... responds to the threat posed by the gains made toward increased sexual freedom for women, and ensure that women’s reproductive potential [will] be available for exploitation and regulation by the state, which relies on women to reproduce the citizenry. (67)

With technology offering more and more paths by which the state can exert forms of biopower, we might well wonder whether the future will indeed be a time of increased freedom for the female subject—or if, as speculative texts such as these would have us believe, a time in which the body will be held captive by its own desires.

Series such as *Orphan Black* offer us one important addition to discourse on the “can-do” girl at the heart of postfeminism. This girl is a cyborg. Even as she necessarily interacts with, even incorporates, technology to control her fertility, she is always already going to one day be a mother. While in the previous chapter I briefly considered ways in which motherhood is being partly reconciled with the discourse of empowerment in modes of commodified girl culture like Disney films, discourses impacting on reproductive technology make it clear that maternity is built into the postfeminist image of the girl, but as her future. As Harris had already suggested in considering the “can-do” girl, appropriately timed motherhood is glamorized as “a consumer lifestyle experience that enhances an image of success” (2004 *Future*, 25). Postfeminist media culture constructs a life narrative for the girl that hinges in important respects on the responsible use of reproductive rights.

It is nevertheless important to notice how this ideal consumer citizen girl (incorporating her technologized future maternity) is also problematized in a series such as *Orphan Black*. Allison’s discontent with her middle-class lifestyle marks this as a difference that is undesirable within the range of possible lives for this “genetic material,” while Cosima’s lesbian difference and particularly Tony’s transgender difference offer more dramatic and, I would argue, valuable variations. While these are ‘different’ futures consistently imagined as a minority distinct from the more mainstream vision of girlhood embodied by Sarah, their presence in such a storyline indicates that girl empowerment isn’t simply about making the choices appropriate to the “consumer citizen” of the Girl Power fantasy. Collectively the clones present a much more complex vision of potential subjectivities that can be considered as an extension of the cyborg nature of contemporary girlhood.

Haraway writes that “The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion” (1).

In their struggle over life and death—the lives and deaths of the clones and their present and future children—these clones are indeed depicted as on the illusory border “between science fiction and social reality.” Although their stories are explicitly fictional, and in fact the differences between the “Generica” in which they live and the North America it directly relates to are exaggerated by generic tropes at every turn, the world of *Orphan Black* is clearly an imaginable future of our own world. This line walked between fact and fiction is one travelled also by a girl we recognize all too well, and the story here emphasizes that her identity, while often collapsed by discourse into the singular, is in fact multiple. This should remind us of the constant exchange between “lived experience” and fiction which is, according to De Lauretis, what drives feminist criticism:

That women continue to become Woman, continue to be caught in gender... and that we persist in that imaginary relation even as we know, as feminists, that we are not that but we are historical subjects governed by real social relations, which centrally include gender—such is the contradiction that feminist theory must be built on, and its very condition of possibility. (10)

In closing this chapter, I would argue that in postfeminist discourse girls continue to become Girl—an imagined conglomeration of empowerment and entrenched ideas of femininity that includes future motherhood. This, too, is a fantasy, which doesn't make its effects any less real. This is the construction that must be challenged and reconsidered, and speculative fiction, as a cyborg text itself, enables that reexamination. In texts such as *Orphan Black* we see both the Girl

and the multitude of potential subjectivities she absorbs into her fantastic unity, imagining “Generica” as a society much like our own—both limited in its discourse and unlimited in its possibilities for resistance.

Real or Not Real? Class, Consumption and the Postfeminist Masquerade in *The Hunger Games*

What must it be like, I wonder, to live in a world where food appears at the press of a button? How would I spend the hours I now commit to combing the woods for sustenance if it were so easy to come by? What do they do all day, these people in the Capitol, besides decorating their bodies and waiting around for a new shipment of tributes to roll in and die for their entertainment?

–Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*

The final chapter of this thesis considers more closely a theme at the heart of postfeminist ideas about girlhood: consumption. If Girl Power is the central tenet of postfeminism, as I have suggested in earlier chapters, it is also, and perhaps above all else, a mode of consumption. Girl Power names not only new standardized ideals of “can-do” girlhood but standardizes that ideal and idealizes that standard through process of commodification. Insofar as it operates as a central tenet of postfeminism, we could define Girl Power as a commodified ideology of girlhood empowerment that has an almost hegemonic authority within contemporary ideas of femininity. The fact that girl empowerment must be a positive aim of feminist politics and that commodification of femininity must not be establishes the ambivalence of Girl Power for contemporary feminist media and cultural studies.

My consideration of how contemporary popular speculative fiction centered on girl heroes belongs to and represents postfeminist media culture, while also representing the ongoing renegotiation of postfeminist media culture, would be incomplete without an assessment of how such images of girlhood incorporate patterns of consumption. I will particularly focus on those highly gendered modes of consumption related to fashion and beauty, which have always particularly exemplified the ambivalence of Girl Power, considering how such patterns engage with a discourse of regulation and self-policing that is also represented ambivalently within

contemporary fictions directed to young adults. My central example for an interrogation of consumer citizenship as an expression of postfeminist girlhood in this chapter will be the trilogy of books and the as yet unfinished series of film adaptations of those books collectively known as *The Hunger Games* (Collins 2008-2010; Ross 2012; Lawrence 2013-2015).

The Hunger Games series is, like *Orphan Black*, set in a realist dystopia, a world with narratively central points of resemblance to our own, where capitalism and governmental controls are the villains rather than vampires or evil stepmothers. The world of “Panem,” where the assembled series is set, is a futuristic America where class stratification and governmental resources enable a utopian existence for an elite who all reside in the central “Capitol” while the residents of the dependent “Districts” that surround the Capitol suffer poverty and exploitation. Dystopian ‘American’ societies controlled by the careful isolation of different classes, and often ruled by idealistic but overbearing leaders, represent a popular trend in recent young adult novels and films, with *The Hunger Games* and the *Divergent* series (Roth 2011-2013; Burger 2014; Schwentke 2015) being the most successful, both as best-selling book series and box office hit film series. The critique of a possible future American government that centers these storylines turns on questioning contemporary understandings of class and power. Recalling the previous chapter, the same might also be said of *Orphan Black*. The fact that *the girl* is at the center of this critique in such texts must thus be significant. This girl hero acts as both participant in and symbol of a revolution, of a movement towards utopia, and might be aligned with what Angela McRobbie identifies as the “neoliberal” positioning of the girl as “an attractive harbinger of social change” (2009 58).

For McRobbie, neoliberalism is a name for the way in which recent political trends, both in her native United Kingdom and in the United States, have privileged the free market while

“disarticulating” civil and social rights projects—such as, and exemplarily, feminism (2009 26). Rosalind Gill further defines it as a mode of governmentality that operates across a range of social spheres...increasingly understood as constructing individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regulating” (2008 442-443). This is crucial to McRobbie’s key argument that girls are, within a neoliberal regime, trained or socialized to consume “a highly conservative mode of feminine ‘empowerment’” through the exercise of *choice* within the consumer world of fashion, beauty, and leisure (2009 27). This is the crux of her highly influential concept of “the postfeminist masquerade,” which describes how girls, under the influence of this dominant mode of consumption, must practice self-surveillance and self-policing in order to maintain hegemonic standards of femininity and heterosexual romance (2009 59-72).

While I have argued elsewhere that understanding girls as objects of discourse without sufficient regard for their active interpretation and deployment of discourse ignores important possibilities for their critical engagement with culture, this concept of “masquerade” is very important to any understanding of girlhood, or indeed femininity in general, in the contemporary Western world. It is certainly essential to understanding what any definition of *postfeminist* girlhood could mean. If postfeminism describes the process of exchanging the feminist project for empowerment through consumerism, as the Girl Power narrative suggests, then this masquerade is the embodiment, the lived experience, required by that narrative. While it is not the intention of this thesis to interrogate how this embodiment might be understood by girls, previous chapters have already suggested that the girl characters of contemporary speculative fiction have consciously engaged with this masquerade as a given aspect of what it means to be a girl—whether questioning it, challenging it, or accepting it, it seems to be universally considered

as something that must be contended with when navigating feminine identity. The masquerade must be *performed*, and that performance, or the rejection of performance, is often at the heart of the central conflicts these characters face.

The Hunger Games is, then, an excellent text for an assessment of where girlhood can be found between the lines of the spectacular and the real. The titular Hunger Games, in which lower-class youths fight to the death for the entertainment of the elite and as a lesson in the power of the state for all, are themselves a masterful example of spectacle. In the arena, a series of ultimately life-threatening challenges are set for the competitors. These are undoubtedly real experiences for the adolescent fighters, but just as clearly artificial in the sense that they are intricately stage-managed. For our purposes, it is what happens outside of this arena, in the ‘real’ world of Panem, which is just as significant. In the world opposed to this media spectacle, with its crafted personae for competitors who are also celebrities, it is equally clear that individuals manage the challenges of their ordinary world through the careful maintenance of facades that are also real presentations of identity. Individual social selves are also carefully constructed and maintained, although in more subtle and often insidious ways. The series protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, is drawn into the spectacle of the Hunger Games when she volunteers to save the life of her sister, whose name has been drawn as a competitor in the annual lottery. It is the way Katniss perceives, questions, and resists the political ‘masquerade’ of the Hunger Games that anchors the series narrative. But in this chapter I want to stress the way Katniss is also positioned as perceiving, questioning and resisting a pervasive system of gender performance that exceeds the spectacle of the games.

From the beginning of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss's survival depends on the *appearance* of being a compliant member of Panem society. Panem is an empire in which being yourself could prove fatal if that self is anything other than what the Capitol's governing authorities want it to be. The authoritarian regime led by President Snow is maintained via two core strategies. The first strategy is a stranglehold on all consumer goods, from necessities like food to the most fleeting luxury. This control requires manipulating both economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1983), keeping the poor, poor and the wealthy, wealthy. The second strategy is a fear campaign centered on the Hunger Games which, until Peeta and Katniss, has apparently succeeded in keeping visible social critique and active rebelliousness in check. The Hunger Games as both media spectacle and disciplinary strategy helps maintain the imperial regime through a forced collective consciousness that celebrates materialism and artifice and places both alarming pressures and little value on the lives of its youth. It is always the young, one boy and one girl from every district, who must be sacrificed to the Hunger Games, representing an awareness of the symbolic importance of youth to society as well as the personal importance of young people to families and communities. As young people represent future generations, they also represent the future; in so doing, they also envision a symbolic historicity: "adolescence continuously enacts Western progress carried in the oppositional positions of past and present and ever points toward even greater futures" (Lesko 2012 137). The strategic effectiveness of the Hunger Games also suggests that the greatest symbolic threat to a dystopic social order is youth, and thus to make a great show of crushing it is to reinforce absolute power.

The reproduction of labor within Panem is achieved by exercising heavy controls on the circulation of all kinds of capital—the most important finally being cultural capital. Pierre

Bourdieu likened society's relation to cultural capital to a game of chance in which the odds are only with the elite, arguing that capital operates as

a lex insita, the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world. It is what makes the games of society—not least, the economic game—something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle. Roulette, which holds out the opportunity of winning a lot of money in a short space of time, and therefore of changing one's social status quasi-instantaneously, and in which the winning of the previous spin of the wheel can be staked and lost at every new spin, gives a fairly accurate image of this imaginary universe of perfect competition or perfect equality of opportunity, a world without inertia, without accumulation, without heredity or acquired properties, in which every moment is perfectly independent of the previous one, every soldier has a marshal's baton in his knapsack, and every prize can be attained, instantaneously, by everyone, so that at each moment anyone can become anything.

(Bourdieu 280)

This is also the stratagem behind the now ubiquitous phenomenon of the reality TV program, where nothing is at stake and everything can be gained. But in reality, according to Bourdieu, the burden of achievement falls squarely on the shoulders of the 'inheritors' or 'acquirers'—a clear allusion to the young in Bourdieu as well as in any analogy to Collins—and the great illusion of this 'game' is that people in general are encouraged to believe that, like Katniss and the other "Victors," they might be raised up out of inauspicious circumstances and 'become anything' despite overwhelming odds. Just as fantasies like 'the American dream' offer an illusory hope that capitalism can raise any young person to greater comfort (or even fame), winning the Hunger Games means winning a place in the Victor's Village, increased income for one's family

and community, and a life of celebrity. But while the odds in Panem, and in our world, are similarly stacked by wealth and access to training (terms by which the outer districts are directly disadvantaged in Panem), the consequence of failure within the arena is not remaining underprivileged, but certain death.

The transmission of cultural capital in Panem is paradoxically key to this situation which seems to be determined by the life and death authority of the state. As Bourdieu argues, cultural capital is mainly passed on to the young in the form of access to training or education (86). In Panem, the youth of the Capitol possess a presumed level of cultural capital simply by being born there. Within each of the twelve subordinate districts, however, there appear to be class lines articulated by social and cultural as well as economic capital. In District 12, where Katniss has grown up, the “merchant” class to which her school-peer Peeta belongs is clearly much more affluent and, indeed, more attuned to the workings of Panem society. I will return to this point later. Katniss’s own mother is seen to have sacrificed her class standing, and the accompanying advantages of her merchant family, by marrying a coal miner. Her fair, delicate appearance, inherited by Katniss’s sister Prim, suggests a long line of maintaining the distinction between these classes by bloodlines. Prim also inherits her mother’s capacity for healing, obviously by training rather than genetics. It’s significant that, in the rebel District 13, where the kind of class privileges maintained along family lines characterizing District 12 and Panem in general, have been minimized in the interests of survival in exile and preparation for war, this nurtured talent provides a pathway to medical training which might eventually have led to a career as a doctor for Prim; meanwhile, her mother in District 12 could only operate as an unlicensed healer paid in bartered goods by the community.

In counterpoint to Prim, Katniss's appearance and abilities seem to be inherited and learned entirely from her father. Katniss's features are often referred to as the darker, more 'common,' features of District 12 workers and she is also presented as sharing her father's interest in the outdoors, including, crucially, his hunting capabilities, as well as his love of folk music and beautiful singing voice. All of these inherited and learned attributes seem to locate Katniss entirely within the lowest tier of the most underprivileged district, imbuing this person who hunts to feed her family with a mythical quality tied to images of a life before capitalism (for the readers) and by extension a life before the empire (for the people of the districts). In times of trouble, Katniss finds solace in the uncivilized surroundings of the woods, positioning her as the utopian antithesis of the dystopian capitalist government, a neo-naturalist in a world stratified by controlled urbanization and increased intervention of the state into media and technology (Jameson 48). In this way Katniss is also reminiscent of the 'goddess' imagery of Woman that Donna Haraway takes issue with in her critique of the politics of naturalized gender identity (1997 37). While the threat of starvation caused by the state institutions of Panem is a defining factor of Katniss's existence, driving her resistance, she is also a figure who stands outside the ordinary influences on the young people around her. What Katniss also resists are the media and other dominant cultural constructions of identity that even the more privileged members of Panem society accept.

While formal education seems to be mandated and universal in Panem, the world this dystopian story describes is not the assumed meritocracy of 'neoliberal' society. After their education the youth of Panem will take up the work that their family of birth and their gender assigns them to: in District 12, this seems to be limited largely to coal miner (male) or mother (female), implying a cyclical link between biological determinism and disadvantage. Like all

other institutions in Panem, universal education is designed to maintain the balance of power currently in force rather than allow upward mobility or what Bourdieu refers to as the “conversion” of economic into cultural capital (285-286). For young people expected either to continue in the limited roles available to their parents or to be entered in a life-or-death competition, the only training that truly gives them an edge is physical and/or weapons training, which, fortunately for our heroine, is one thing her intimacy with her father, and then with her mentor and friend Gale, gives her access to. The unfolding story makes it clear that in some more privileged districts, talented children are segregated into a Spartan-style warrior training camp to increase their chances at the one avenue for life transformation in Panem—the Hunger Games.

Birth and geography have a determining power in Panem, given that people are not allowed to move between districts, and policing of social roles and rules is ever-present. The Hunger Games is the only exception. The fight to the death competition elevates one winner every year to the status of celebrity idol with more than abundant resources but also the freedom to pursue an array of pleasures. The Hunger Games thus seems to operate as a disturbing allegory for the cutthroat ‘market’ in the real neoliberal world of readers and viewers, where young people are offered a mythical dream of the future in which everyone has a chance at ultimate success despite the fact that, as Bourdieu’s arguments concerning ‘distinction’ and ‘habitus’ suggest, the odds are truly in the favor of those given privileged access to abundant capital of all kinds. This privilege is explicit in Panem. Capitol citizens are the only ones who are never summoned to compete in the Hunger Games at all, and in the more privileged districts (1 and 2), children selectively trained to succeed in the Games are referred to as the “careers.” These tributes from wealthy districts who train all of their lives to volunteer for the games have inherited the economic, social and cultural capital of their community and added to it the best in

specialized training. At the intersection of these forms of capital they are those most tipped to win the Games and, in the history of the Games, most often have.

Katniss, having received unique training, is marked out as special from the beginning. Thus she is unexpectedly ranked very high in the competition from the early stages. But there are questions early on as to how long Peeta will survive. While exceptionally strong and clever, his lack of appropriate training means he is never viewed as a likely winner even as he quickly becomes the romantic hero of the story—for the readers as much as for the Panem viewers. As the main young adult heroes, Katniss and Peeta are of course differentiated from the norm, but in fact the norm for youth in District 12 is severe disadvantage and likely death. Their habitus marks them as lacking capital in comparison to the other Districts, let alone the Capitol, and the media spectacle of the Hunger Games plays a role in making visible the inevitable perpetuation of disadvantage among the ‘lesser’ districts. This is clearly compatible with the conception of class that has been important to discourse on postfeminism. Firstly, it complements Anita Harris’s argument that “risk” discourse is closely linked with ethnicity and class in disenfranchising young female subjects and cutting off their access to the forms of empowerment that are seen to enable success (2003 57-60). Secondly, it is essential to the understanding of femininity *as* capital, discussed most notably by Beverley Skeggs, who considers the ways that working-class women approach the performance of femininity as a form of social and cultural capital where other forms are unavailable (see Skeggs 2005). The way in which femininity is performed to enable such mobility is essential to the “postfeminist masquerade,” and it becomes essential also to Katniss’s survival.

These forms of ‘training’ in Panem turn on what a Foucauldian approach would refer to as “discipline,” while the corporal spectacle of the Games is clearly aligned with the forms of punishment (and government) that he sees as having been decentered by the emergence of modern discipline (1977). Michel Foucault argued, some time ago, and primarily with reference to all-male prisons and military schools, but with no less relevance to current educational institutions, that the premise of our own forms of schooling and training is to construct “successful” citizens by forcing on them “correct” social principles and attitudes via visible constant surveillance, status rewards for toeing the line, and heavy penalties for stepping over it. In the exaggerated case of the Hunger Games as training, the “tributes” symbolically pay with their lives for the rebellious spirit of their ancestors and offer salutary examples of the constant processes of surveillance. But the speculative form of these texts allows these forms of surveillance to be closely tied to a spectacular version of execution by the state in which, as much as any king, the young tributes offered to the games also die on behalf of the state. The story of Panem, then, asks questions about the stakes of the impact of contemporary media culture on subject formation and political life by seeing echoes of sovereign power in our currently more governmental social forms.

Surveillance is key to life in Panem, where every action seems to be under the scrutiny of President Snow (a plot strain much more deliberately portrayed within the films). The annual Hunger Games are “mandatory viewing” for all of Panem as are many other forms of spectacle in a state-owned and state-controlled single media source that closely resembles our television medium. Using this medium, Snow actively manipulates Katniss’s image to fit the one he believes will most effectively distract and placate the public audience. Aided by media advisers, hosts, and program production staff, he constructs her as a harmless, adoring wife-to-be, using

the threat of his own all-seeing eye to restrict her capacity to use her celebrity in any other way. This manipulation and threat is visible to Katniss and those close to her but invisible to the broader audience, speaking to Foucault's argument that while state power comes from visibility, *disciplinary* power "is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes upon those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility" (187). Snow and his machinations behind the scenes juxtaposes with the very visible 'Big Brother' (that the novels reference Orwell's *1984* is fairly explicit) constituted by the cameras in the Hunger Games arena. This surveillance presents a real and visible threat to the tributes' struggle for survival. Knowing the location of the tributes at all times through their implanted "trackers," the Gamemaker subjects them to constant life-threatening situations in order to herd or draw them closer together and heighten the probability of combat for the cameras. While they are thus subject to public execution at one level, on the other hand they are also subject to forms of surveillance which demand constant discipline and vigilant schooling of the self. Like Foucault's "examination," the tributes are constantly observed by experts testing, ranking, and separating young individuals into like groups and weeding out the less skilled or willing. The Hunger Games acts as the ultimate test of a life-long training in obedience to the rule of continual observation. The Hunger Games as test functions to both bestow an image of individuality while trying to erase agency (Foucault 192). In this they act much like the commodified promise of entitlement guaranteed to the hegemonic girl by Girl Power by reinforcing a dominant mode of identification while activating choice as the path to success—a concept I will explore further below.

An added dimension of this story, perhaps unanticipated by Foucault's model of disciplinary surveillance, is what literary and theatre analysis might call the breaking down of the fourth wall. The Hunger Games as an arena under constant surveillance is also a media spectacle

with an active audience. Experts are not the only adjudicators of the action, and the arena narrative is dramatically shaped by these interactive spectators, who, much more than the Gamemaker/producer, determine what conduct within the arena will be deemed ‘correct.’ Lacking Katniss’s skills, Peeta’s great advantage throughout the Games is that he understands cultural and social capital in a way that Katniss does not, and this means understanding the necessity of addressing an audience. Katniss seems largely oblivious to the importance of presenting an appealing (rather than only permissible) image. But Peeta’s skills in all forms of self-presentation appear almost immediately he and Katniss are singled out as tributes from District 12 and seems linked to his more elevated class position. This is not only a ‘natural’ talent but a product of training. Peeta’s knowledge of how to address people (“He knows that sponsors must be manipulated” *Catching Fire* 426) is a form of cultural capital that seems irrelevant to Katniss’s own background, dominated by the struggle to survive and feed her family. Peeta understands that if tributes want “sponsors” for their arena performance—that is, game-changing gifts from wealthy spectators which might help them out of difficult situations—they must provide entertainment as well as survival. For Katniss and Peeta, he realizes, this means capitalizing on Katniss’s unthought charisma and producing a romantic storyline for the viewers’ consumption; it means translating Peeta’s unrequited love for Katniss into a generic story so appealing it can overwhelm the popularity of the games as execution spectacle. Assisted by the cultural expertise of Peeta as well as her support team, including their ‘mentor’ Haymitch and their stylist/designer, Cinna, Katniss gains a chance of winning the game by learning how it should be played.

The open secret of the Hunger Games, in a perverse reversal of its marketing slogan (“May the odds be ever in your favor”), is that the odds are always stacked against the competing

fighters. They are particularly stacked against Katniss at the beginning because she must compete against the better-trained “careers” and because she lacks sufficient comprehension of the forms of capital which will help her succeed. Peeta and Katniss’s mentors encourage her to seek out ways to amass the sorts of social capital which can raise her chances. As Bourdieu suggests of social capital in general, this must be accrued via networks or alliances—through an “exchange... which presupposes knowledge and mutual recognition” (287). Interestingly, while Peeta and Haymitch base their attempts at forming useful alliances on the recognition that Katniss must be kept safe at all costs (for Peeta as his love interest and for Haymitch and his cohort as the symbolic power of revolution), Katniss seeks out people who need her protection (such as the young girl, Rue, in the first Games). In any case, Katniss eventually learns to garner favor with the public through performance of girlhood narratives they expect, but she never learns to value the traditional ways of achieving upward mobility these hegemonic narratives suggest.

It is the *performance* that is important, in any case: as Haymitch tries to tell Katniss early on, “It’s all a big show. It’s how you’re perceived.” (*Hunger Games* 135). The Hunger Games are themselves a mode of normalization, a way to regulate behavior and standardize desirable identities through the visibility of surveillance. In order to survive the games, Katniss must perform an identity that may be different from her own, but which is visibly compatible with hegemonic culture. “What we often see on reality television is the performative made explicit,” write Skeggs and Wood. “That which is meant to be normative, a citational form of social reproduction, becomes writ large as its component parts are revealed through ungovernable bodies and embodied excessive performances” (2011: 18). In other words, Katniss must be seen not only to embody Panem’s cultural norms, but to perform them in such a way that they seem

accessible to the audience. The sense that this is how the placating, distracting force of popular culture works is, of course, eventually turned on its head when Katniss becomes The Mockingjay—the symbolic embodiment of utopian rebellion—and discovers that being such a leader requires as much self-conscious performance as surviving the Hunger Games.

That she is now a political symbol does not equate to an accrual of culture capital—or her own narrative of empowerment; rather she is manipulated in different ways as a representative of the revolution—but around her new networks form. The symbol of the mockingjay which eventually becomes conflated with Katniss herself as a symbol of social change grows in importance as the story progresses, as it is transported from district to district, in graffiti or marked on pieces of bread, or is transmitted as a story on underground airwaves. Much like the bracelet Haymitch gives to her rival Finnick as a sign that Finnick is really Katniss's ally (*Catching Fire*), the mockingjay becomes a sign that people are on Katniss's side—which, after all, was what the original mockingjay pin meant when her school-friend Madge gave it to her before the first Hunger Games (*Hunger Games*). It is through the exchange of this object-capital that those loyal to rebellion define their 'style' of politics, and around this symbol they form allegiances not based on class, as in the Capitol system, but based on the "fantasy of classlessness" (Thornton 28).

Sarah Thornton argues that subcultural capital, more than Bourdieu's cultural capital, is transmitted primarily through popular media and circulated predominantly among the young as an attempt, implicit or explicit, to escape from the larger flows of cultural capital taking place around them (29-30). Predicated on the sense that youth are 'outside' the system to begin with, the relationship between youth and subcultural capital suggested by Thornton resonates with the way the Panem resistance movement begins among its tributes—first Katniss and Peeta, and

then, later, victors of various ages who had all once been victims of the systematic youth sacrifice that is the Hunger Games (though the banished/outsider District 13, via Plutarch, plays a role throughout). Subcultural capital itself is amassed through the rejection of some other external form of authority, and the singularity of this rebellious stance unites a subculture (254-255). Interestingly, Bourdieu himself was aware of this particular chink in the armor of the class-based system, writing that “The more the official transmission of capital is prevented or hindered, the more the effects of the clandestine circulation of capital in the form of cultural capital become determinant in the reproduction of the social structure” (288). In Panem, where all capital—economic, cultural, and social—is painstakingly controlled, the “clandestine circulation of capital” finally amounts to this society’s downfall. The amassing of social capital within and around the resistance, primarily generated by taking over the nation’s media facilities, eventually turns the tide in its favor.

Althusser, Ideology and Discourse

Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that, culturally speaking, we identify youth as a site of upheaval; that adolescents represent “the inevitability of cultural change.” Spacks suggests that “adults concur with the young in a vague notion that the ‘Establishment’ represents forces of stultification if not of active criminality” and that because modern “adolescents function as social outsiders, not yet accepted into the established order; their separation from the realm of social power now constitutes their virtue” (10). The *Hunger Games* trilogy supports this conception of the cultural centrality of youth insofar as Katniss and Peeta, and the young people they necessarily represent, are a constant implicit threat to the authoritarian Capitol because they are positioned as asking how the world should be organized. The fragmentation of resource

production (one district has mines, another pastures and so on) means that in Panem, only the Capitol can function independently and yet, paradoxically, the Capitol depends entirely on the districts' resources at the same time. Precisely to support the management of this distribution, communication, including not only the state-owned media but most of the pleasures and social organization communicated by culture, is also centralized in and spectacularly distributed outward from the Capitol. No input that isn't sanctioned by the authorities can reach beyond the most local audience. This is why Katniss's folk songs are revolutionary, especially once she has transmitted them to the watching world during the hunger games; they are reminders that non-capitalist forms of culture unrelated to Capitol propaganda exist—and therefore resistance is possible.

This dystopia is one of many which is predicated on, according to Fredric Jameson, “the conviction that rich societies like the U.S. will need to convert to another kind of ethic if the world is not to end up, as it currently seems destined to do, in the spectacle of a First-World gated community surrounded by a world of starving enemies” (49). The futurism of the series is undercut by the recognizability of this media-saturated environment. Suzanne Collins makes it very clear that power in Panem is, as Foucault and so many others have pointed out about our own world, constructed through discourse. Power in Panem is exerted not first of all through military force, but by controlling ideology, and especially that artifice that masquerades as identity. I might suggest that it is a straightforwardly Althusserian ideological state media apparatus that tells people in Panem what is real and not real.

Louis Althusser summarizes the way in which class-based societies, which would include authoritarian regimes such as Panem, interact with Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) as a

quadruple system of interpellation as subjects, of subjection to the Subject, of universal recognition and of absolute guarantee, the subjects 'work', they ;work by themselves' in the vast majority of cases, with the exception of the 'bad subjects' who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State apparatus.

(180)

The climactic moment of the first book (and the first movie) is the moment that Katniss stops 'working' as a subject. When only she and Peeta are left as combatants in the Hunger Games, Katniss suggests they eat poisonous berries (*Hunger Games*). They both know this will kill them, but Katniss also specifically aims to rob the Hunger Games of any victor and thus challenge the Capitol's willingness to let them die. In this strategy, and in her victory when the Gamemaker saves both her and Peeta, Katniss provokes the intervention of the very ISA that she opposes. Because of the tightly dependent interaction between the all-seeing eye of the government/Gamemaker and the interactive spectators of Panem, Katniss's lateral movement outside of the system which strove to interpellate her as a 'good' subject is extremely public, and therefore a media fiasco. Seneca Crane, the Gamemaker in charge of the first games, dies under mysterious circumstances, presumably killed in punishment for his own negligence in allowing the dismantling of the Hunger Games, and Katniss is sent on a media campaign to convince Panem that all she did was for love, not politics (*Catching Fire*). The Hunger Games, the relationship between Peeta and Katniss, and the mockingjay are all symbols built up and torn down by the media to great political effect, and all are eventually appropriated by the resistance for the same purpose. Not Katniss herself, that is, but the discourse surrounding Katniss is what begins a rebellion and brings down the existing Panem empire.

It is worth asking why, as I have already observed, it is the young, not only in the Collins series, but in many fantasy books and films, who are tasked with this political upheaval, and who, prior to succeeding, suffer most from oppression. Perhaps it is because, as Kerry Mallan and Sharyn Pearce suggest, young people seem to be those who are seen to be most obviously manipulated by the media industries we recognize. Mallan and Pearce suggest that,

When removed from any temporal or spatial verities, the commercial representations of youth acknowledge the contradictions in and ambivalence of this stage of maturation and turn angst, rebellion, and even nihilism into desirable commodities. By mapping these psychological conditions specifically onto a young body, the market forces create ... a site from which ideological or political struggle is elided, reducing the body to a purely superficial or external referent. (4)

Young people are thus interpellated as voiceless subjects, while being *the* media subject of choice (and of course, as this thesis has discussed, the *girl* has been an especially important and popular form of this subject since the emergence of Girl Power). ‘Youth’ itself is commercialized, while the agency of the people that idea represents is discarded from the image presented. In such a way Katniss and her fellow tributes are marketed not only as physical paragons but as representations of soon-to-be-lost innocence and thus of potential corruption and rebellion. Their individuality is lost under the symbols they are meant to signify.

Ironically, it is in responding to this media apparatus, in choosing from the images presented which to ‘consume,’ that young people are meant to express the individuality that this same media system spectacularly declares is unrepresented. Harris argues that “Consumption has come to stand in as a sign both of successfully secured social rights and of civic power. It is primarily as consumer citizens that youth are offered a place in contemporary social life” (2004:

“Jamming” 163). The clear link between our own world and the precipitous dependence on consumption for expression of identity in Panem is marked throughout the Hunger Games trilogy. Indeed, across the series people of both genders express and exert their own agency through external displays of primarily cultural capital. It remains crucial, nevertheless, that Katniss’s story is subtly but clearly gendered in a world where gender lines can apparently be traversed at will, where androgyny is in fashion, and even the cruelty of the Hunger Games is inherently ‘equal.’ Though Panem seems to be ‘post-gender’ in a way that futuristic dystopian/utopian narratives often are (Jameson 42), Katniss’s tribulations throughout are inflected with overtones of postfeminist discourse.

Katniss’s rags-to-riches story is itself the dream narrative imagined by Girl Power. Of the U.K. in the 2000s, McRobbie writes:

The impact of class inequalities, racism and the sheer persistence of unsurmountable obstacles for girls growing up in poverty are eclipsed by the emphasis on improvement, success and the significant increase in the numbers of young women going to university. These changes also feature prominently in the process of young women coming forward and being seen to benefit from the attention of the government. The education system now looks favorably towards young women and reward them for their effort. The result is that the young woman comes to be widely understood as a potential bearer of qualifications, she is an active and aspirational subject of the education system, and she embodies the success of the new meritocratic values which New Labour have sought to implement in schools. This re-positioning is a decisive factor in the new sexual contract. The contractual dimension entails an offer made to young women which cannot be refused, without painful repercussions. (2009 73)

Again, while McRobbie references specific national policies, she takes pains to point out the international political trends that have occurred in the same period, including the rhetoric of girl empowerment discussed above. McRobbie's account is therefore very relevant to the story of Katniss, poised on the brink of both starvation and adulthood, literally fighting her way to fame and fortune. As Skeggs has pointed out, what is missing from Bourdieu's theory of capital accrual is an intensive analysis of where it intersects with gender (2004 22). She suggests that, while gender normalcy gives boys an institutionalized form of cultural capital, femininity has a more tenuous position in such a system of exchange as it is "a constantly transformable act based on attachment and detachment of practices and objects in a circuit of exchange, a willful playfulness, performative and performing" (2004 28).

The relation between femininity and capital is precisely what an examination of the postfeminist masquerade interrogates. The postfeminist critique is concerned with the way that often very real impediments to the accumulation of all forms of capital, such as class and other economic inequalities, but also other intersectional forms of discrimination, are overlooked in favor of a narrative that insists that, for girls, proscribed ideals of femininity are part of the empowered journey of becoming whatever you want to be. In a recent study, Emilie Zaslow found that girls she interviewed

experience a sense of cultural discordance in girl power media culture where transgressive and commercial girl power cultural discourse collides with the constrained social, political, and economic realities of their lives.... Although the girls do adopt girl power rhetoric about choice and individualism, they describe feeling confined in their own style, voice, sexuality, and imaginings of the future. (160)

Such a narrative of success seems as empty and unrealistic as Katniss's celebrity, which can only operate without reference to the very real inequalities of Panem society. Her rise to fame also directly reflects another point of tension between contemporary media and much feminist analysis of girlhood—the cult of 'instant' celebrity exemplified in the reality TV genre.

The media spectacle of the Hunger Games is directly modeled on reality television, including hosts previewing each season's contestants and soliciting audience identification with their profile narrative. In this context, Katniss's visible success story in the media completely conceals the process of accumulating cultural capital and foregrounds instead, as I have already discussed, an exaggerated performance of individuality that mirrors reality television codes in the world of its audience—codes which often include unrealistic representations of body image and a strict adherence to traditional gender codes. Slightly less restricted by the inequities Katniss faces growing up, Peeta better comprehends the political game that is winning favor among the audience by manipulation of character and plot. And so Peeta plays up Katniss's beauty, her alluring natural charm and bravery, and eventually their love story, in order to help her survive.

The designer Cinna, in turn, dresses Katniss in uncharacteristically feminine clothing to enhance her gendered identity, although always with an eye on the character which makes her stand out as an individual among other characters. As with girls on reality shows which "emphasize," as McRobbie notes, "talent, determination, and the desire to win," the Katniss image is purveyed as a "highly motivated young woman" making it all the more difficult to "discern real sociological intersections of structural factors of ethnicity, social class and gender, in regard to young women" (McRobbie 2009 74). The injustice and poverty Katniss has experienced all her life are swept under the rug in order to highlight her beauty, her "colourful

self-biography” (2009 74) and, later, her completely invented ‘talent’ of fashion design. While the inequities of Katniss’s life are not represented as originating in the fact of her being a girl—although surely she could have become a coal miner, like Gale, if she were a boy rather than starve to death—her hyper-feminized image is clearly meant to give her an advantage.

While the dystopian Panem, in which injustice is meted out equally, does not reflect our own society, it does, perhaps, expose an assumption that operates at the heart of postfeminism: that being a girl is no longer a source of inequity; that whatever boys can do, girls can do too. The fact that Finnick is the one who is sexually victimized, while Katniss is the strong, silent type, suggests that gender inequalities do not apply in Katniss’s world. It is thus particularly significant to notice where gender difference retains social force in this future world and which codes are an inherent part of life in a world still organized by sexual difference for human reproduction (see chapter four) but not for the distribution of capital.

One boy and one girl enter the Hunger Games arena from each district, setting gender as a fundamental social distinction from the first plot premise. In the continuously screened arena and in the media spectacle that precedes it, lithe young bodies are displayed in ways designed to heighten their gendered beauty. It is in this respect that feminine fashion and glamour, and gendered heterosexual coupling, are essential for Katniss to navigate the dangerous political terrain of the Capital. The double bind of postfeminist discourse is all too present in this future world. Gender is presented as a non-factor in one’s capacity or agency at many levels. Success at the Hunger Games seems not to particularly privilege girls or boys, and across the series the leading political rival for President Snow is the female ‘President’ Coin, while many other occupations seem stripped of the gendered associations readers and viewers would expect. Although most of Katniss’s main antagonists are male, and some occupations (like the miners in

District 12) do seem to be gendered, there are male and female stylists, beauticians, domestic servants, technicians and laborers of many kinds. Moreover, in the film versions, a flamboyant and ornate colorful style characterizes the fashion, hair and makeup of most Capitol citizens, both women and men.

Despite these apparent qualifications as to how fully gender determines the future prospects of people in Panem, what McRobbie's account of the masquerade would call Katniss's "excessive performance" of girlhood is called upon to aid her survival in the arena. This paradox manifests in ways that resemble the post-feminist masquerade. McRobbie argues that "The high-visibility trope of freedom currently attached to the category of young women can be equated with a 'double movement'; gender retrenchment is secured, paradoxically, through the wide dissemination of discourses of female freedom" (2009 55). While patriarchal values are, it seems, no longer a hindrance at the particular socioeconomic level which determines employment, they clearly have force in terms of what Bourdieu would call "embodied" cultural capital (skills in self-presentation) and social capital (including traditional familial institutions). *The Hunger Games* makes the continuing importance of this force allegorically clear for our world as well as Panem. Katniss may save Panem from a corrupt government, but she must do so with a perfect manicure and on camera, and her eventual post-victory foray into domesticity (marriage and children with Peeta), while reluctant or at least hesitant, appears in a narrative coda that makes that result seem a foregone conclusion.

The discursive relation between Panem and Katniss, while fictional and speculative, should thus be understood with reference to our widely shared contemporary discourses on contemporary girlhood. It represents a struggle to define what is authentic for the girl in question, in the midst of social forces focused on determining for her what is real (substantial,

effective, unavoidable) and what is not. It is not incidental that Collins includes among the life-or-death decisions Katniss must make seemingly trivial ones like what one should wear, how to be effectively ‘girly’ for an audience, and how to act around a boy you like or tell if your peers really like you. While in our context these decisions may not be life or death, they certainly help determine our conception of what it means to be young and female. Catherine Driscoll argues that

Ideological apparatuses that urge girls to want to be a particular kind of subject include structures such as the family with its shared images of good and bad families or girls. Some state apparatuses are clearly organized in order to address girls—such as age-of-consent legislation and related discourses on birth control restrictions and marriage limitations—but ideological apparatuses also address girlhood. To be named/recognized as a girl implies a range of approved and valued behaviors differentiated from women, boys, or children (2002 118).

In our cultural context, categorical ‘girlness’ is a powerful interpellation for any individual, and it requires the very trait that in Panem may most effectively save or end your life: ‘correct’ gender performativity.

Embodied Gender: The Fashion/Beauty Complex

Before being elevated to the visible drama of the Hunger Games, which constitutes the spectacular marker of ideal youth in Panem, Katniss’s daily actions are concentrated on making sure her family is fed. Her interest in gender performance seems noticeably absent, but then everything about this situation is framed as atypical. Katniss is an exception. She dresses for

comfort rather than appearance by choice, barely attends to the possibilities of heteronormative romance, and is unconcerned with whatever etiquette might be considered feminine. It is, in fact, only after her arrival at the capitol, when her legs are first shaved, her callouses first filed, and her eyebrows first plucked, that Katniss seems to take notice of her own appearance, much less the colored, buffed, and modified appearances of those around her which the narrative voices emphasizes as in contrast with her. Only when Cinna transforms her completely into the media icon “Girl on Fire” does Katniss begin to grasp the meaning of Peeta’s comment that “she has no idea the effect she can have” (*Hunger Games* 91).

Katniss’s makeover again signals the fact that her story is informed by a postfeminist context. Rosalind Gill suggests that

It might be argued that a makeover paradigm constitutes postfeminist media culture. This requires people (predominantly women) to believe first that they or their life is lacking or flawed in some way, and second that it is amenable to reinvention or transformation by following the advice of relationship, design or lifestyle experts, and practising appropriately modified consumption habits. (2007: “Postfeminist” 161)

In other words, makeover shows encourage—or rather, enforce—the embodiment of Girl Power discourse, or commodified girl empowerment. Gill argues that the rhetoric of “compulsory individuality” used to inscribe on the female body shame based on a lack of cultural capital “reinvigorates class antagonisms” (2007: “Postfeminist” 162). This tendency toward criticizing the ‘choices’ of those with less access to capital (Skeggs and Wood 14) is built into the cyclical nature of risk-discourse that, again, marginalizes girls based on their particular habitus. Not knowing the high capital choices to make, and not embracing them in performance of gendered individuality, itself puts girls at risk. The transformations at the heart of reality television series

essentially displace the subject and replace lived experience with what Skeggs and Wood term the “normative performative” (20).

This transformation is a difficult one for Katniss. At every turn she feels little bits of an identity that feels authentic for her being chipped away. Even while she competes in the arena, trying to win over the public, gain sponsors, and convince the Capitol she is a force to be reckoned with, Katniss questions what she must do. But when fighting for her life is not framing the performance, Katniss feels the artifice far more directly. Twirling a Cinna design to create the illusion of flames during her first Cesar Flickerman interview, Katniss feels she looks like “a silly girl spinning in a sparkling dress” (*Hunger Games* 136). She understands the artifice of this regime of beauty and fashion and the necessary charade of performing femininity for the cameras as signs of weakness. What everyone but Katniss apparently realizes is that in the Capitol, as in postfeminist media culture, this is the cultural capital available to girlhood and that especially required for successful girlhood.

While Harris argues that consumerism is the primary enactment of social rights for youth in general today, she states that girls in particular are seen as those who benefit most from the alignment of consumption and agency. Harris writes:

To be girl-powered is to make good choices and to be empowered as an individual. These uses of Girl Power position young women as creators of their own identities and life chances, and as liberated by their participation in the consumer culture that surrounds them. They both emphasize the positive opportunities for young women to invent themselves (2004: “Jamming” 167).

What you buy and what you wear have long been important markers of subjectivity for young women, and there have always been very varied limits to the scope of particular girls' consumer choices. But postfeminist girl identity is overdetermined by an overabundance of media-constructed signifiers: there is more girl-oriented television programming, magazines, and advertising than ever before. Girl Power rhetoric appears amidst, and is influenced by, advances in media technology that multiply opportunities for consumption and multiply the forms of messages endorsing what Angela McRobbie calls a "luminous" girlhood constantly at our fingertips. McRobbie defines several "luminosities" which maintain patriarchal ideas of femininity and heterosexuality in ways that intersect with class and race, but foremost amongst these is the "fashion/beauty complex" (McRobbie 2009: 58-59).

Within a postfeminist context, while the consumer choices available to postfeminist girlhood are meant to allow girls to express their identity, in true Althusserian style these in fact work to reinforce normativity including, centrally for girl culture, the propagation of a sense of heteronormative order. McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism* follows in a long line of feminist writers discussing the "masquerade" necessitated by increasing liberties for young women, from Joan Riviere to Simone de Beauvoir and through to contemporary feminist cultural studies. The production of girlhood today, argues McRobbie, "comprises a constant stream of incitements and enticements to engage in a range of specified practices which are understood to be both progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine" (2009 57). Postfeminist discourse suggests that, while contemporary girls are offered all of the rights and privileges of their male counterparts, they are simultaneously encouraged to express embodied gender within a strict set of rules. While these constraints may not exist equally or in the same way for all girls, and they may be resisted in a multitude of ways on a daily basis, with McRobbie I would argue that

popular culture routinely supports social and political pressures to express what Harris calls “consumer citizenship” through the maintenance of a certain image handed down, as in Panem, through the media.

While the performance Katniss must make of girlhood in the Capitol is far from the way she thinks of herself, Katniss was, if less self-consciously, enacting embodied ‘girlness’ long before she arrived: her choice to wear the pin given to her by her friend Madge; her choice to allow her mother to braid her hair in the way that becomes a media trademark; her choice to wear the blue dress formerly belonging to her mother. While the extravagance of the material options in the Capitol may shock her, from the beginning Katniss understands that ornamentation is important in expressing her identity. If Katniss is practically untouched by the Capitol fashion/beauty complex in her District 12 life, she is not ignorant of the pleasures of self-care or of how they are gendered. It is in this way, in fact, that Collins’ characterization of Katniss can position her as both safe from accusations of shallow consumer identity and, at the same time, as available for the pleasurable spectacle of a total makeover which reveals her innate (unselfconscious) glamour.

While Driscoll argues that “feminine adolescent identity is the ultimate commodity on sale to girls,” she also argues that the capitalist exploitation of femininity in selling girlhood to girls is only part of the story. In fact, the girl as ideal consumer stands for the attractions of consumption in general and for social anxieties about consumption that suggest some of the appeal of Katniss’s story. “The significance of late modern girls to consumption is not that they consume (everybody does), or that their sexuality is in fact bound up in commodification,” Driscoll writes, “but that they are perceived to derive an inordinate amount of pleasure from commodification and commodity fetishism” (2002 110). Collins both appeals to and critically

represents this kind of pleasure in the extended makeover scenes in which Katniss is buffed and polished and dressed extravagantly, all the while internally narrating the inauthenticity of the process. When Peeta says that Katniss has “no idea the effect she can have,” this may be true, but it does not mean Katniss is entirely ignorant of the intrinsic power of correctly performing femininity, because she can certainly recognize it in others. Katniss’s combination of intrinsic beauty as a virtuous resource capitalized on by her makeover and her apparent authenticity and resistance to being seen as a girl commodity are what the viewers of Panem embrace. This is also why she can be held up as a revolutionary idol by the readers/viewers of *The Hunger Games* text as an admirable girl hero.

Katniss’s associations with a world before capital does not, then, absolve her of associations with commodified gender codes. But beyond the pleasure of ornamentation that Katniss seems to share with other girls, she remains distinguished by her struggle to find and maintain a viable life as well as a viable identity outside the Capitol. In the Capitol the ornamental is far more important than it was in District 12, where commerce is largely restricted to basic necessities in the midst of the district’s dire poverty. The ostentatiously decadent Capitol seems to be dominated by a commercial fashion and beauty industrial complex that further inscribes cultural norms of femininity on girlhood, placing heavy emphasis on a specific type of artifice perpetuated in magazines and advertisements. In Panem, thanks to the centralized media and fragmented production, complete investment in this complex is limited to the decadent Capitol. In the end, Katniss both benefits from the capitalization of the makeover moment and is positioned, at least in the first two books and associated films, as also authentically at war with commodity culture as much as she is at war with the oppressive regime of President Snow.

In the Capitol, Katniss is both fascinated and disgusted by the ways in which money is seemingly thrown away on improving appearance and enjoying pleasure (see the epigraph to this chapter). For example, one of her stylists pays to have her skin tinted whatever color is in fashion every season. Brian McDonald writes that “for Capitol residents, being a real person means a kind of birdlike flight, freed from any kind of gravity—aesthetic, ethical, or relational—an effortless flapping of weightless wings on the way toward the always receding and ever more lurid ‘final word in entertainment’” (21). We later learn that there is some underground dissent within the Capitol itself, and the films reflect this by styling some Capitol residents, like Plutarch, in far more muted ways. But for the most part it seems that identity there is primarily expressed through artifice and performance. It is designed to allegorically represent the excesses of our consumer culture gone horribly wrong. While in Panem fashion and makeup are privileged modes of bodily performance of capital for men and women alike, the world of her readers which Collins is also representing has much stricter codes for girls than for boys in this respect. As Jessica Miller argues, “Gendered beauty norms are... much more costly, onerous, and even dangerous for women than they are for men and... violations of those norms are punished socially, politically, and economically” (153). The commoditized femininity Katniss is forced into does not preclude commoditized masculinity, and this is to some extent true in our own reality where the gendering of commodified identity production is more one-sided.

Collins has famously declared that she was inspired to write the *Hunger Games* trilogy after flipping back and forth between news and reality television programs. Katniss’s life outside of the Capitol contrasted to her life within it offers an apt metaphor for the blurring of lines between entertainment and authenticity in both genres, and for a potential privileging of image

over substance. McRobbie also asserts that our own fashion and beauty system insists upon the girl's complicity in these enforced roles:

The element of choice becomes synonymous with a kind of feminism. But what the young woman is choosing is more than just participation in consumer culture. No aspect of physical appearance can be left unattended to.... Such routine practices [pedicures, shaving, etc]... are required by all women who want to count themselves as such, and these rituals constitute the post-feminist masquerade as a feminine totality (2009 66).

As in Panem, gender is central to the way the mediated frame for identity helps predict the likelihood of a range of social roles and available cultural practices. The girl must construct her image carefully with reference to a larger gender framework tied to a totalizing idea of sexual difference but also with reference to the problem of girl empowerment and girlhood promise built into postfeminist discourse. The beauty/fashion complex thus also operates as an Althusserian ISA, offering a mode of interpellation that leaves little room for significant transgressions against ideals of femininity. As McRobbie would argue, such forcefully invited identificatory moments demand gender performance.

Compulsory Heterosexuality

Collins represents Katniss's dramatic immersion in the world of mediated style and fashion with evident awareness that girls in the audience consuming Katniss are interested in what Katniss is wearing and how her unconventional beauty is unveiled. This can be seen in how Katniss responds to Cinna's more personalized creations—the designs which embody her rebellious spirit, an identification with her home in District 12, and which also make her feel 'naturally'

beautiful. If Katniss also offers a critique of this immersion, it is important that her performance of femininity becomes most demanding when Peeta confesses his love for her on television (while she is waiting in the wings). Katniss's angry response indicates that she perceives in this 'made-up' love story the same weakness she saw in her overly ornamented self (*Hunger Games* 135). While identification with these ideals is something she understands as a choice made by other girls, Katniss doesn't buy into this image of heteronormative romance because, like Capitol fashion, it is something she doesn't have time for in the practical world of scrounging for food, in the 'real' world where families like hers might be starving.

The tie between heterosexual romance and commodity culture is built into the narrative starting point of the series. Out in the forest, in her ostensibly 'pre-capital' world of hunting and gathering food because the circuits of exchange for buying food exclude her, Katniss confesses to her hunting partner Gale that she sees the traditional romantic couple, and the nuclear family model it supports, as a pointless investment of time in a world where youth are ritually exploited as political sacrifice. Why should she ever get married or have children to live in fear of the Hunger Games? As the story unfolds it becomes clearer, and more important, that Katniss has been too concerned with survival to think closely about whether or not she has feelings for long-time companion Gale, much less Peeta. Later, when she realizes, as Gale says, that she does indeed need love, and specifically Peeta's, to survive, Katniss clumsily begins to accept that she has feelings for him (*Mockingjay*). But there is never a foregrounded moment of declaration or consummation, and Katniss never becomes comfortable with images of romance, just as she never becomes comfortable with being styled. Cuddling into the crook of Peeta's arm or picking out wedding dresses are activities that for Katniss can be nothing more than a show for the people of Panem. They belong to fleshing out Katniss's reality television character.

As Miller writes, “Katniss never seems more feminine than when she’s acting as Peeta’s lover” (154), and this is, of course, the product of a compulsory heterosexuality underpinning ‘appropriately’ gendered performance—a construction that is as important in the contemporary society lived by Katniss’s audience outside the books or films as it is within them. So while Katniss reacts angrily to Peeta’s original declaration of love, Haymitch and the rest of her team understand that he has given her a ‘gift’—he has made her seem special or, as Haymitch puts it, “desirable” (*Hunger Games* 135). She can now be perceived as authentically feminine and therefore as offering an authentic, meaning comprehensible, image of what a girl ought to be. The crowds, of course, love it, just as Haymitch predicted, and the Katniss-Peeta romance becomes one of the reasons, if not the primary reason, for their survival. Her gender “legibility,” as Judith Butler (1993 37), and McRobbie after her, might call it, allows both viewers and sponsors to find Katniss relatable since she now fits into the heterosexual matrix. Paired with Peeta, she is put in her place within the media environment and the familial institution it partly represents, and is therefore given credence as a subject within this ideological regime.

It is as Peeta’s bride that Katniss is at the height of performance. Although their romance is, eventually, framed as authentic within the narrative as a whole, this romance largely happens out of the frame of the texts, or off screen, and their on-screen engagement is entirely a media spectacle, as are, later on, their fictional wedding and unborn baby. It is for this reason that Snow mandates that Katniss appear in her final Cesar Flickerman interview wearing a bridal gown, to heighten the audience’s sympathy for her lost future (*Catching Fire*). The connotations Snow sees in this costume are well-known to all Katniss’s possible audiences. The wedding dress has long represented a unique, and fundamentally feminine, subject position. Driscoll argues that

The bride is not only an individual (psychology), if she is that at all. The bride is a position that can be occupied by individuals—the object of a public gaze, a spectacle of momentary independence, desiring herself and her own elaboration of the bridal ideal. The bride is a romantic mannequin and a fashionable fairy tale princess, but these forms of pleasure are shared and public even when they appear most personal... The wedding dress is a continual pose—a tool or machine—as well as such a subject position (2002 189).

Katniss's bridal experience is both explicitly centered on her and entirely generic. It is an effective summation, in the end, of Katniss's relation to Panem society, which gazes at her and watches her every personal move while also constructing a narrative for her, willfully oblivious to the lived experience which gives those actions meaning for her. It is apt, then, that Cinna should choose the state-mandated bridal gown as the costume which he will use to transform Katniss into the revolutionary image of the mockingjay for a state-mandated audience. In this moment Katniss is ironically repositioned from one generic but intensely personal subject position (the bride) to another (the resistance leader). While Katniss does not choose this latter role either, and resists it also, she is certainly more comfortable with this façade than that of bride and future wife.

Katniss's initial rejection of the heterosexual romance narrative is of crucial importance to the appeal of the texts. Vera Woloshyn, Nancy Taber and Laura Lane write that "Katniss' critical assessment of the demands that are put upon her with respect to her appearance and the need for heteronormative romance demonstrates their unreasonableness and, often, perverseness" (189). In other words, Katniss sees the masquerade in action with apparently perfect clarity. The postfeminist context has meant that this "masquerade of womanliness", which Riviere first

discussed nearly a century ago when analyzing one female intellectual's need to perform femininity and seek approval and sexual attention from males within her field (see Riviere 1929), is now largely discussed with reference to the necessity for contemporary girls to 'manage' their image according to their circumstances and project appropriate images of femininity.

McRobbie's more recent adoption of the term defines it as a

mode of feminine inscription, across the whole surface of the female body, and interpellative device, at work and highly visible in the commercial domain as a familiar (even nostalgic or 'retro'), light-hearted (unserious), refrain of femininity. It has been re-instated into the repertoire of femininity ironically... This signals that the hyper-femininity of the masquerade which would seemingly re-locate women back inside the terms of traditional gender hierarchies... does not in fact mean entrapment... since now it is a matter of choice rather than obligation. (2009 66)

The performance of these specific codes of femininity, further inscribed by the fashion/beauty complex and the heterosexual love narrative, is both non-essential and absolutely expected.

Together they make representing the gendered self a complex and weighty process for contemporary girls.

Self-representation within the *Hunger Games* trilogy becomes more and more crucial to Katniss's survival as the story draws to its conclusion. Her costume changes increasingly reflect the resistance that she believes in but never asked to be a symbol for. Her relationship with Peeta becomes central to the war effort, and she is called upon to simply be seen helping rather than to actually help—her image is far too valuable to risk scarring it. Driscoll has pointed to the relationship between the media and the constantly de- and re-constructed image of girlhood, and thus the ideal girl's "simultaneous importance and irrelevance" (2002 69). For the most part this

describes Katniss's relation to Panem, where she is important as a picture, an idea, a symbol, or a television clip, but irrelevant as an actual person. Who she is matters less than what she is seen to be. And perhaps this is how the masquerade most inhibits girls in our own society—by carefully constructing her gender performance with reference to outside observers, the girl becomes little more than a multitude of projections.

Conclusions

So what is the effect of all of this role-playing on our heroine and the construction of her identity? At the end, Katniss is a broken and fragmented identity and we only see her recovery in a few small glimpses leading towards a muted coda representing her future life. While we are left with a sense that she has found some peace in this new domestic life with Peeta we are allowed no closer view of who she now thinks she is. The substance of the trilogy instead focuses on how Katniss learns to manipulate the spectacle, to manage the discourse surrounding her, and to look behind the façade and discover other things there. Katniss “moves,” as Kelley Wezner argues, “from being unknowingly shaped by Panem’s panopticon to actively participating in her own identity formation... It’s not about what’s *real*, it’s the fabrication of reality that truly matters” (154).

This may be the crux of what makes the *Hunger Games* trilogy postfeminist. Katniss’s confusion about and resistance to compulsory gender coding is as clear as the assumption of her heterosexual femininity. Her tacitly ‘post-gender’ society is steeped in popular conceptions of traditional and implicit masculine and feminine roles and embodiments. While Katniss may be an unconventional heroine, her story, in which a white girl rises above misfortune on the strength

of her own character, remains the story of Girl Power, complete with sublimated ideals of gender performativity circulated as essential cultural capital by the apparatus of the media. Above all, self-presentation—often through consumer choice—is emphasized as the core of a socially mandated identity construction. *The Hunger Games* finally suggests that, for its contemporary audience, as in the future Panem, the most important thing in a world where image is everything is deconstructing the masquerade.

Conclusion

In 1996, at the height of the Girl Power campaign and the promotion of consumer citizenship for girls, Debbie Epstein and Deborah Lynn Steinberg published an essay discussing the mainstreaming and commodification of the women's rights movement. They argued that, "In some ways, it could be argued that the extent to which feminism seems now to occupy the 'centre' obviates the need for marginal space. However, it should not come as a surprise... that the world doesn't change just because we move up in it" (3). In this, I feel, they have aptly summarized a problematic at the heart of contemporary feminist discourse, a discourse which is pervasively informed by postfeminist media culture. The question is how to approach feminist issues from the *heart* of media culture, rather than from the liminal space at its margins?

In this thesis I am suggesting that one possible answer to that question is through speculative fiction—through fiction, that is, that blurs the lines between the real and the unreal and between the past, present and future. Speculative fiction is a space in which to experiment with real issues at the heart of social injustice. Fredric Jameson describes eras in which utopian narratives are most popular as

periods of great social ferment but seemingly rudderless, without any agency or direction: reality seems malleable, but not the system; and it is that very distance of the unchangeable system from the turbulent restlessness of the real world that seems to open up a moment of ideational and utopian-creative free play in the mind itself or in the political imagination. (45)

A claim that the current generation of girls are "without any agency or direction" often characterises generational feminist discourse, and in discussing this accusation I have also tried

to acknowledge ways in which the current system perpetuates difficulties for girls in terms of both their understanding of gendered identity and the ways in which they might be engaged in maintaining or improving the situation of women and girls. Such conditions, according to Jameson, are currently those from which utopian—and dystopian—texts arise.

But I would take Jameson's theory further, and argue that *all* speculative fiction is, at some level, utopian (or dystopian, and thus inversely sketching utopian ideas). To imagine a world in which Alice could become a seafaring merchant, or one in which Snow White could reconcile with her stepmother, is to imagine a world in which the traumas of girlhood can be finally healed. This would never be a *postfeminist* world—although postfeminism is certainly also a fantasy that can be deployed in this way. As my thesis has contended, we do not live in a world where the right to gendered patterns of consumption, or reproductive rights, or sexual expression, enables a girlhood that is free from patriarchal influence. Where popular and public media claim to describe such a world on a daily basis they offer accounts of girlhood that are inherently false. But when the postfeminist world is imagined by popular contemporary speculative fiction it appears framed by another level of ambivalence. If anything, the utopia imagined by current speculative fictions is *post*-postfeminist, in that it problematizes the 'givens' of postfeminism itself and by placing the complexities of the lived experience of girlhood today into other worlds it renders them more malleable.

That is not to say, however, that the (cross-media) producers of these texts alone have singular authority over the ideologies seen therein. Although this thesis has offered no empirical research, I have at times hinted at the potential power of the reader. In following with Michel de Certeau (1984), I imagine the intended audience of these texts—girls—as possible textual 'poachers,' using these hyperdiegetic fantasy worlds as 'a private hunting reserve' for meaning

(171). Following de Certeau, Jenkins writes: “consumers are selective users of a vast media culture whose treasures, though corrupt, can be mined and refined for alternative uses” (27). While these texts certainly suggest a broader discourse—one that is certainly ‘corrupt’, but which I argue is shifting—I cannot speak for the way in which that discourse is received. My concern here has extended only to the space created by these texts for meaning-making, rather than the ways readers make those meanings thereafter.

With that in mind, through the texts I have considered, I believe the reader/ viewer has been invited to engage in ‘free play’ with the certainties that have developed within postfeminist media culture. With the *Alice* texts, our very notion of girlhood was interrogated; contemporary vampire texts challenged ‘acceptable’ ideas of girl desire and questioned theories of neo-traditional retrenchment; mother-daughter narratives were reexamined through nostalgic encounters with Disney princesses; cyborgs and clones interrogated the status of reproductive rights and how far feminist victories over those rights have been won; and Katniss Everdeen embodied a complex relation to consumer citizenship which revealed the intransigence of gender through forms of revolution.

While these separate texts, approached discretely through often differing theoretical frameworks, may, when taken individually, form smaller snapshots of the broader media culture I am interrogating, my goal has been to weave together a bricolage of discourse that both reflects the fractured instability of the ongoing postfeminist debate, and speaks to the fluid nature of the cross-media narrative. I have tried to weave together a variety of analytical tools that have been taken into account in discussions of postfeminism and girl studies, with a diverse range of texts that I feel represent the core issues of these often tenuous fields. Taken together, this set of texts

raises questions about the extent to which postfeminism currently delimits popular ideas about what it means to be a girl.

My argument, throughout this thesis, has been that contemporary media culture is heavily influenced by the very public circulation of postfeminist discourse, but the texts I have examined suggest that the now familiar “postfeminist sensibility” is perhaps also facing a moment of upheaval in which that discourse is being renegotiated. By this I mean that postfeminist discourse, including Girl Power, is in the early stages of itself being historicized. Among the texts I have discussed here this may be most obvious in series like *Once Upon a Time*, which caters mainly to an audience of *post*-postfeminist girls who grew up on 1990s princess films. But in texts that make less room for multiple generations, like *The Hunger Games*, Girl Power rhetoric is both taken for granted and itself the subject of allegorical challenge.

The way in which this might affect concepts of girlhood is clear. Postfeminist media culture has circulated many assumptions about what a girl can be, should be, or is. While many of these assumptions are very limiting (including the girl definition of ideal girlhood as overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and heterosexual) more problematic still is the multitude of assumptions and associations attached to the girl as media image. The girl is, more than anything, overdetermined. As the neo-liberal heroine, the potential sexual victim, or the capitalist consumer, the girl has become central to not only feminist discourse but images of social change, challenge and hope. In the face of such over-determination the articulation of a girl identity is a heavy task indeed. In a *post*-postfeminist world—the world imagined or suggested by much speculative fiction for girls today—a conception of girlhood would be inclusive of the potentiality for unlimited and diverse identities, but *choice* will not be sufficient to explain it. This girlhood is less determined by future successful citizenship than by widely varying forms of

experience. While this world is, of course, a utopia, it is, as Jameson says, one inspired by an idea of (or perhaps a hope for) a “malleable” reality. Tested by the desire for such a reality, postfeminist girlhood is exposed as the fantasy it has always been.

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