Young Femininity in Contemporary British Cinema: 2000-2015

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Abstract

Girls and young women have become more ubiquitous than ever in twenty-first century media culture. This is particularly true of cinema, as some of the most successful recent films are centred around young female protagonists, such as *The Hunger Games* franchise (Ross, 2012) and *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Taylor-Johnson, 2015). British cinema has also witnessed a proportionate increase in girl-centred films since the millennium, some of which are contemporary British cinema's most successful films. This includes commercial hits such as *StreetDance 3D* (Giwa and Pasquini, 2010) and *St Trinian's* (Parker and Thompson, 2007), as well as an increasing number of critically acclaimed films by female filmmakers, such as *Fish Tank* (Arnold, 2009) and *The Falling* (Morley, 2014). However, these films have so far received little or no academic attention.

This thesis explores how young femininity is constructed in female-centred British films between 2000 and 2015 in an era defined as postfeminist. It examines key themes such as girls' ambitions, education and friendship. I use a combination of textual analysis and critical reception study, as well as analysis of extra-textual and paratextual materials where appropriate, to examine how discourses of girlhood are mediated both within the films themselves and outside of them in order to discern how these films and their critical reception contribute to, and are informed by, ideas about girlhood that circulate within the wider culture. In doing so, I argue for a nationally-specific postfeminist framework, and consequently provide a greater understanding of how postfeminism is articulated within a British context. I also seek to counter the author-led, masculine bias within British cinema through positioning critically respected films alongside critically maligned films, particularly those aimed at young girls, in order to provide these films with much-needed academic attention and demonstrate that they are worthy of consideration in relation to British cinema's output in the twenty first century.

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Introduction

Girls and young women have become more ubiquitous than ever in twenty-first century media culture. Several commentators have highlighted the increased visibility of girls in public life since the 1990s (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2009; Projansky, 2014), leading Sarah Projansky to assert that twenty-first century media is 'obsess[ed] with girls' (2014: 95). This fascination with girls is evident throughout contemporary media culture, as, since the 1990s, girls have increasingly appeared as 'celebrities characters and products' (ibid: 2) in films, television programmes, pop music, advertisements, Young Adult books and digital media, such as girl bloggers and vloggers. There are an overwhelming number of examples of these girls, including film stars like Jennifer Lawrence and Kristen Stewart; pop stars such as Katy Perry and Taylor Swift; and vloggers like Zoe Sugg, who appears under the name Zoella. It is not just celebrity girls that are a source of fascination but everyday girls as well (ibid). As I will explore later on in this introduction, girls in contemporary media culture are both celebrated and regulated, symbols of progress, change and achievement, as well as the focus of moral panics and anxieties about them being 'at risk' (Harris, 2004).

Alongside this increased appearance of girls in media culture is the development of Girls Studies as an academic discipline in the twenty first century. This work has developed out of many academic disciples, such as Phycology, Sociology, Film Studies, Media Studies and Cultural Studies, from academics such as Catherine Driscoll (2002), Anita Harris (2004), Mary Celeste Kearney (2006, 2015), Jessalynn Keller (2015), Angela McRobbie (2004, 2007, 2009) and Jessica Ringrose (2013) to name but a few. The introduction of the interdisciplinary academic journal *Girlhood Studies* in 2008 further points to the exponential growth of work in this area since the 2000s.

While I have highlighted that the increased presence of girls is evident throughout popular culture, this is particularly apparent within cinema. As Projansky notes, citing example such as *Juno* (Reitman, 2007) and *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004), 'between 2000 and 2009 literally hundreds of films featuring girls as central characters appeared in U.S. movie theatres', (2014: 95). Indeed, this 'obsession' with

girls has not shown signs of waning in recent years, with some of the most successful recent films being films that feature young female protagonists. These include films such as *Frozen* (Buck and Lee, 2013)*, The Hunger Games* trilogy (Ross, 2012) and *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Taylor-Johnson, 2015). These films span a variety of genres and intended audiences, from Disney animation to adaptations of young adult literature. The modes of young femininity within these films are also varied, and they have been subject to much critical – and some academic – attention. Furthermore, the success of films like these has led to a number of articles appearing in the press about female audiences 'taking over' the box office, whose ideal audience has long been established as blockbuster-watching young men. A recent article in the *New York Times* claimed women are 'driving ticket sales to a degree rarely, if ever, seen before' (Barnes, 2015), with the three 'biggest live-action openings of the year' in *Insurgent* (Schwentke, 2015), *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Cinderella* (Branagh, 2015), while a number of films aimed at young men in the same period were unsuccessful (Barnes, 2015).

British cinema has also experienced a proportionate increase in the number of 'girl films' (Projansky, 2014: 95) in the twenty first century, some of which have been British cinema's most successful films in recent years. Phyllida Lloyd's *Mamma Mia!* (2008) earned 4.5% of the total £8.6 billion earned by the top British films worldwide between 2001 and 2012, and is the only film in the list directed by a woman (Vincent, 2013). In 2007 Ealing Studios revived the *St Trinian's* series (Parker and Thompson, 2007), which earned over £12 million at the UK box office and was followed by a sequel in 2009 (Fitzherbert, 2009a: 21). Meanwhile, the British film industry produced its first 3D film with *StreetDance 3D* (Giwa and Pasquini, 2010), which made £11 million in the first five weeks of its release (Gant, 2010). Both *StreetDance* and *St Trinian's* are case study films in Chapters Two and Three respectively. Moreover, contemporary British cinema has also witnessed an increase in female directors, who have also produced notable girl-centred films (Leggott, 2008; Murphy, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2010). This includes figures such as Lynne Ramsay, Andrea Arnold, Amma Asante and Carol Morley. Figure 1 shows the number of girl-centred British films produced between 2000 and 2015. Although

the number of films is relatively small with fluctuations in production, it shows a proportionate increase across the period, with a peak in 2008.[1]
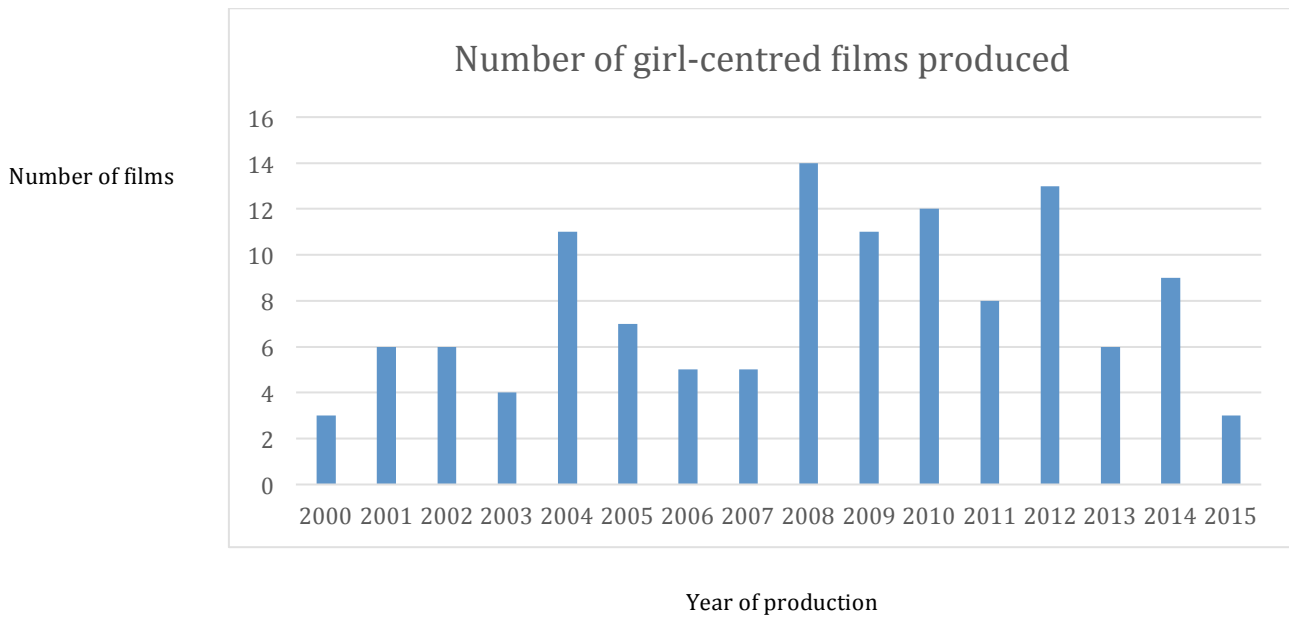
Number of films

Figure 1: Graph showing the number of British girl-centred films produced between 2000 and 2015

Contemporary British cinema's girl-centred films emerged within an era defined as postfeminist (Whelehan, 2000; Projansky, 2001; McRobbie, 2004; 2009; Negra, 2009; Ashby, 2005; Brunsdon, 2000; Tasker & Negra, 2005; 2007; Levy, 2006; Gill, 2007; Genz, 2009; 2010; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Radner & Stringer, 2011). As Diane Negra asserts, 'any significant engagement with the popular culture landscape of the last fifteen years requires wrestling with postfeminism' (2009: 2). Negra's use of the word 'wrestling' points to the complex and contentious nature of postfeminism as a concept that has been conceptualised in numerous ways. It has been thought of as a 'backlash' against the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 70s, 'a double entanglement with feminism, sensibility, a historical shift since feminism or an epistemological break from feminism' (Polaschek, 2013: 2). It is the 'double entanglement' (McRobbie, 2004; 2007; 2009) and the postfeminism as a sensibility (Gill, 2007) theses that are of most concern to my research. I shall discuss McRobbie

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[1] The low figure for 2015 reflects the cut off point for data collection in this thesis. More films produced in 2015 were released into 2016.
[2] The idea that postfeminism has undergone a shift since the 2008 financial crash will be discussed later on.

(2004; 2007; 2009) and Gill's (2007) work in more detail later on in this introduction. Firstly, it is worth briefly outlining some of postfeminism's early key characteristics.[2] According to Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, postfeminism 'broadly encompasses a set of assumptions… to do with the "pastness" of feminism' (2007: 1). Tasker and Negra, draw on McRobbie (2004) to argue that what is 'distinctive' about postfeminist culture is the way in which feminism is seemingly "taken into account" in order to demonstrate that it is no longer needed (ibid). They also note how postfeminism is 'white and middle class by default' - with issues such as class and race neatly glossed over - and rooted in consumption (ibid: 2). Postfeminist culture constructs women as 'empowered consumers', who are able to reap the benefits of feminism – such as career opportunities and supposed sexual empowerment – while participating in consumer culture, which is deemed essential in the 'production of the self' (ibid). This is evident in paradigmatic postfeminist texts such as *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) and *Ally McBeal* (1997-2001). In light of this, the notion of 'having it all' is of paramount concern in postfeminist culture. On the one hand, postfeminist culture promotes the idea that women can 'have it all' and should aspire to this. On the other hand, 'having it all' is a 'recognised fantasy of postfeminist femininities', and anxieties and questions about whether women can indeed 'have it all' circulate alongside this (Brunsdon, 2000: 167).

This thesis explores how postfeminist discourses of girlhood are mediated within contemporary British cinema, both within the film texts and their critical reception and paratextual materials, such as interviews and production notes, in order to examine how the films are both informed by, and contribute to, ideas that circulate around girls in twenty-first century media culture. This specific focus on contemporary British cinema means that this thesis argues for a nationally specific postfeminist framework. Postfeminism is a 'pervasive phenomenon of both British and American popular culture, often marked by a degree of discursive harmony', as evidenced by certain 'transit' texts such as *Sex and the City* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Maguire, 2001) that are popular with both US and UK audiences (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 13). At the same time, postfeminism means 'different things in these national and cultural contexts' (ibid: 14). As will become evident through the case

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[2] The idea that postfeminism has undergone a shift since the 2008 financial crash will be discussed later on.

study work, this thesis argues that, although there is a degree of 'discursive harmony' (ibid), postfeminism is articulated differently within a British context in a number of ways. For example, the films discussed in this thesis frequently utilise the postfeminist trope of the makeover. However, these British films often eschew the element of consumption inherent within this, framing it as brash and particularly associated with American culture. In addition, while postfeminism is 'middle class by default' (ibid: 2), British cinema is often preoccupied with issues of class. Therefore, this thesis explores the intersection of class and gender in contemporary British cinema, particularly through the pairing of middle class characters with working class characters and how this impacts upon articulations of postfeminism within a British context.

Work on postfeminism in a British cinematic context remains limited in comparison to the wealth of work on US texts. McRobbie (2004, 2009) explores postfeminism within *Bridget Jones's Diary*, while Justine Ashby similarly calls for a nationally specific framework in her article 'Postfeminism in the British Frame', in which she explores the 'snug' fit between postfeminism and the politics of the UK's New Labour government (2005: 128) through an analysis of *Bend It Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002). However, both of these works focus solely on a single text. More recently, Louise Wilks (2012) has explored representations of female sexuality in British cinema in the period defined as the 'naughty noughties' in order to discern the extent to which the films' female characters are depicted as sexually empowered as postfeminism suggests. However, although she examines a range of films over a nine-year period, Wilks' work is rather narrow in scope due to its specific focus on sexuality. In looking at how postfeminist discourses of girlhood are mediated within contemporary British cinema's constructions of young femininity over a fifteen-year period, this thesis goes beyond sexuality to consider broader aspects of feminine identity in order to provide a more thorough understanding of how postfeminism is modified and articulated within contemporary British cinema and further our understanding of how postfeminism informs British popular culture.
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Scope of project and intervention

Although postfeminism provides a crucial context, this thesis intervenes primarily into the field of British cinema studies. This research is unique in that it explores how young femininity is constructed in contemporary British cinema since the millennium in a range of female-centred films that have as yet received little or no academic attention, while examining previously explored texts in a new light through the thesis' focus on girlhood in British cinema. The range of case studies is diverse, encompassing films from a variety of genres and sectors of production, such as social realism and historical films, as well as genres less commonly associated with British cinema, such as sports films. To date, the aforementioned work by Ashby (2005, 2010), McRobbie (2004) and Wilks (2012) is the only work dedicated specifically to looking at female-centred films British films in the twenty first century. In her examination of the contemporary British woman's film, Ashby continues her work on the British woman's film from the 1980s (King, 1996) to explore how the key themes of female friendship and liminality are evoked in more recent films. Ashby concludes that more contemporary films such as *The Land Girls* (Leland, 1998), *Morvern Callar* (Ramsay, 2002) and *My Summer of Love* (Pawlikowski, 2004) are too 'politically opaque' to be considered more feminist than their 1980s predecessors (Ashby, 2010: 168), and too diverse to be considered part of a coherent cycle. Moreover, Ashby considers *Bend It Like Beckham* and asserts that the film updates the 'key generic themes of friendship and liminality into a post-feminist idiom' (ibid: 164), claiming the success of the film suggests 'the woman's film might be strengthened from by extending its address to younger audiences' (ibid). Indeed, this thesis' examination of young femininity points to a vibrant cycle of female-centred films with young female protagonists with a number of recurring themes and tropes across a variety of genres, which demonstrates that, although diverse, they can be comfortably linked together, unlike the films Ashby identifies. In addition, this thesis asserts that British cinema *has* made a more concentrated effort to address younger audiences during the twenty-first century, as demonstrated by films such as *Fast Girls* (Clarke, 2012), *StreetDance 3D* (Giwa and Pasquini, (2010), *St Trinian's* (Parker and Thompson, 2007), *Wild Child* (Moore, 2008) and *The Young Victoria* (Vallèe, 2009), where the films' address to younger audiences is an important part of their production and reception discourses.

The aforementioned work by Ashby appears in Bell and Williams' (2010) edited collection *British Women's Cinema*, which explores the centrality of the woman's film to British cinema history. The collection highlights how some of British cinema's most successful films are women's films, and as such are not 'cuckoos-in-the-nest or exceptional observations bur rather form the very core of popular national cinema' (2010: 7). Pam Cook also asserts the importance of examining femininity in discussions concerning national identity and British cinema (1996: 7) in her work on the Gainsborough melodramas from the 1940s. Meanwhile, Sue Harper, in *Women in British Cinema: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know* (2000), charts mainstream representations of women in British films from 1930-1990. (The second part of her book also looks at women as creative personnel). Harper cites the work of women filmmakers such as Sally Potter and Gurinder Chadha and their female-centred films during the 1990s as holding the potential for British cinema to move away from its long-standing overwhelming preoccupation with masculinity as British cinema entered the new millennium, optimistically stating: 'If ever there was a time when change was possible, it is now' (2000: 236).

British cinema's preoccupation with masculinity in the 1990s, particularly 'masculinity in crisis', is well documented (Leggott, 2004; Monk, 2000; Spicer, 2001). However, as Vicky Ball notes, British cinema's focus on masculinity in crisis occurred alongside discourses relating to the "feminization" of British television in the 1990s (2012: 249). In her work on the British female ensemble drama (FED), Ball argues that the FED is a 'distinctive form of feminine gendered fiction' in that it 'focuses upon particular communities and a pluralized sense of female identity at the level of region and class' (2012: 256) which emerged during the 1960s within the context of second-wave feminism. However, Ball argues that the FED experienced a 'visible postfeminist shift' in the 1990s through the way in which the 'narratives… revolve around the marriage plot' as part of a postfeminist process of "re-traditionalization" (Adkins, 2000) that seeks to return women to traditionally gendered networks, such as the nuclear family under the guise of progress (Ball, 2012: 251). Ball also points to an increased commodification of femininity within the FED into the millennium in line with neoliberalism and its impact upon broadcasting (ibid: 258). While an examination of young femininity in contemporary television is beyond the constraints of this project, Ball's work here highlights the

need to consider the interconnections between gender and class within a British postfeminist context, which reoccurs throughout this thesis.

Within work on contemporary British cinema, figures such as James Leggott (2008) and John Fitzgerald (2010) have highlighted a trend of an increased number of social realist female-centred films directed by women, such as *Red Road* (Arnold, 2006) and *A Way of Life* (Asante, 2004). This is particularly notable as social realism is a mode of filmmaking within British cinema that has traditionally, by and large, excluded women from both production and on-screen representation (Fitzgerald, 2010: 73; Leggott, 2008: 72). This focus on social realism is also evident in Charlotte Brunsdon's (2000) work on 'desperate girls' in '90s British cinema, in which she claims films such as *Under the Skin* (Adler, 1997) and *Stella Does Tricks* (Giedroyc, 1996) exhibit a 'thread of desperate-ness in the staging of the female experience' that points to the 'impossibility or intolerability of the heroines' lives' from which they struggle to escape that raises the question of 'how to "do"' postfeminist femininity (Brunsdon, 2000: 167). Brunsdon (2012) also claims British cinema's 'desperate girls' continue into the twenty first century through films such as *Red Road* (Arnold, 2006) and *The Unloved* (Morton, 2009).

As is evidenced throughout the production and reception discourses of many of the films discussed in this thesis, social realism is often synonymous with British cinema itself. Much of the work concerned with national identity in relation to gender – typically masculinity - in British cinema is concerned with social realist films, such as work by Hill (1986, 1999), Dave (2006) and Murphy (2000). Within this, there is a frequent focus on British cinema during the 1980s and 90s, which –as this thesis does – constructs these films as reacting to the political, social and economic climate of the time (Friedman, 1993; Hill, 1999; Murphy, 2000). However, this thesis challenges this focus on social realism in British cinema through examining films from a variety of genres and modes of filmmaking, positioning populist mainstream films – such as *St Trinian's* and *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Chadwick, 2008) – alongside author-led, art-house films, such as *Fish Tank* (Arnold, 2009) and *My Summer of Love*. The purpose of this is not only to provide the most comprehensive examination of young femininity in contemporary British cinema possible, but also to challenge the 'gendered hierarchies of cultural value' (Ball, 2013: 244) in British

cinema. Many of the films I explore are critically maligned due on the basis that they are centred around and aimed at young girls, and are therefore somehow superficial and of low cultural value. By positioning these films alongside more critically respected films, I demonstrate that these populist films are worthy of study as part of a consideration of British cinema's output in the twenty first century. The focus on auteur-led films in British cinema is highlighted by the very recent publication of *New British Cinema* (Wood and Smith, 2015). This book consists of interviews with 'key' filmmakers working in British cinema today, such as Richard Ayoade, Jonathan Glazer and Steve McQueen. While some female filmmakers are included, such as Amma Asante and Carol Morley, whose work is also discussed here, they are outnumbered by men, and the focus is on work by filmmakers who make author-led films that are exhibited at film festivals and win awards, highlighting their critical prestige. This therefore reinforces the importance of this thesis' consideration of more mainstream, but less valued, films as worthy of academic study. Although, as I have outlined, this thesis intervenes primarily in the field of British cinema studies, it also makes a secondary intervention into feminist media studies through its exploration of how postfeminist discourses of girlhood are mediated within a British context. The following section will provide a discussion of girls, girlhood and postfmeinsm before going on to look at the context of contemporary British cinema.

Girlhood and postfeminism

I have previously highlighted the importance of considering postfeminism from within a specifically British national context. Angela McRobbie's work on postfeminism acknowledges this, as she theorises postfeminism from within a UK-specific context by exploring the relationship between postfeminism and Britain's New Labour government (1997-2010), particularly New Labour under the leadership of Tony Blair (1997-2007). For McRobbie, postfeminism is a 'new kind of anti-feminist sentiment' that is different from merely being a 'backlash' against feminist gains made in an earlier period (2009: 1). Postfeminism, McRobbie argues, is characterised by a 'double entanglement' whereby elements of feminism have been 'taken, and absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life' (ibid: 1). A vocabulary of words like "choice" and "empowered" is then employed and 'converted into an individualistic discourse' that is used as a 'substitute for

feminism' (ibid.). These ideas are then 'disseminated more aggressively, so as to ensure a new women's movement will not re-emerge (ibid.). The key to this 'double entanglement' is the way in which postfeminism allows some of the more 'palatable' elements of feminism to be retained, such as notions of economic and sexual freedom (ibid: 12), while allowing women and girls to 'reclaim their femininity' by engaging in traditionally gendered concerns, such as a hyper-feminine appearance because, under the guise of equality, they 'choose' to do so (ibid: 21). In fact, postfeminism positively encourages this.

This equality that is offered to young women is, as McRobbie states, entirely 'notional' and, as part of this offer, young women are expected to adhere to the new 'sexual contract', which is mobilised within two key sites: education and employment, and consumer culture (ibid: 72). Under the new sexual contract, young women are encouraged to 'come forward and make good use of the opportunity to work, to gain qualifications… and to earn enough money to participate in the consumer culture'. This is seen as a 'defining feature of contemporary modes of female citizenship' (ibid: 54). Under the new sexual contract girls are seen and considered to be highly productive, particularly within the field of education and employment. According to McRobbie, girls today are now 'marked by the possession of grades, qualifications and occupational identities', more so than their male peers (ibid: 73). These 'top girls' are represented as hard-working, high-achieving girls – crucially, white and middle-class girls – who are often destined for Oxford or Cambridge (ibid: 15). Moreover, McRobbie specifically links the emergence of these highly productive girls with the rhetoric and policies of the New Labour government:

> Within the language of the New Labour government, the girl who has benefitted from equal opportunities now available to her can be mobilised on the values of the new meritocracy (ibid: 57-58).

Meritocracy – the idea that anyone, regardless of their background, could achieve their goals as long as they worked hard (Jones, 2011: 139) – was central to New Labour's ethos, and continues to be important within the ideology of the Conservative government today, building on an ideology that emerged with Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government during the 1980s and continued with

John Major. The 1980s were seen as the decade in which 'already foundering traditional class structures and class-based associations finally broke down, giving way to the more fluid and individualised social formations fostered by the processes of neoliberalism (Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 2). Thatcher 'rejected utterly the language of class, it was *individuals'*, who were expected to take responsibility for their own lives and create their own opportunities without the help of the state (ibid: 7). John Major similarly expressed a desire to produce a 'classless society', where people relied on their own abilities and good fortune to rise above their beginnings (Turner, 2013: 4). New Labour's meritocratic ideals were particularly evident in their education policies. In 1997 New Labour's successful election campaign was defined by the line: 'Education, education, education'. Indeed, Tony Blair reiterated this pledge during New Labour's re-election campaign in 2001. In a speech on education given at the time, Blair vowed to 'overcome decades of neglect and make Britain a learning society, developing the talents and raising the ambitions of all young people' (Blair, 2001). This focus on education included a drive to get a rising number of people to enter higher education, with a goal of '50% of young adults progressing to higher education by 2010' (Blair, 2001). Ultimately, however, this target was not realised (Curtis, 2009). Young women were seen to be the direct beneficiaries of this policy, as the rate of increase in women's participation in higher education has been double that of men, and, as of 2006, women outnumber men in full-time undergraduate and postgraduate courses (Scott, Dex and Joshi, 2008: 7). Furthermore, New Labour's aspirational rhetoric was particularly gendered, as through this idea of aspiration, young women were 'encouraged to avoid low-paid and traditionally gendered jobs like hairdressing' (McRobbie, 2009: 59). New Labour's policies also reflected their desire to get women to make the most of their new-found 'equality' in the workplace by offering childcare provision policies and childcare and working tax credits (Toynbee and Walker, 2011: 157). However, these incentives arguably largely benefit middle class women in higher paid jobs who could potentially afford to return to work after having children (Annesley, Gains and Rummery, 2007: 235). While New Labour presented this as part of their equalities agenda for the benefit of women, it was more about securing economic growth, as women were positioned to believe that 'choosing *not* to engage in full-time paid work is becoming increasingly impossible' (ibid: 235). The prevalence of postfeminist discourses relating to young women's aspirations and education during

this period in the UK media and government policy is paralleled in a number of films discussed in this thesis, including, but not limited to, those discussed in Chapter One, which is dedicated to depictions of girls' ambitions.

McRobbie's notion of postfeminism also entails young women's engagement with the fashion and beauty industries. For McRobbie, this is directly linked to the sexual contract's offer for young women to work and earn a living, as, according to McRobbie, this is then 'offset by the emphasis on carefully staged body maintenance as an imperative of feminine identity' (2009: 63), which she refers to as the 'postfeminist masquerade'. Joan Riviere (1929) first identified the idea of a 'feminine masquerade' by claiming that women who wish to possess typically masculine traits put on a 'mask of womanliness' in order to avert feared retribution from men (Riviere, 1986: 35). McRobbie draws on these ideas by demonstrating how the postfeminist masquerade allows the 'possibility of distance' from femininity, but through an 'ironic, quasi-feminist inhabiting of femininity as excess, which is now openly acknowledged as fictive' (2009: 64).[3] The crucial aspect of this postfeminist masquerade is the notion of 'choice' that is central to postfeminism. These beauty practices are presented as freely chosen. These practices are not undertaken for male approval but simply because the woman chooses to do so. At the same time, these 'self-imposed feminine norms' work to 'enforce sexual difference' and reassert traditional gender norms (ibid: 69).

The terms of the sexual contract, therefore, make young women highly visible through the attention paid to them in the fields of education and employment and the beauty industries. As McRobbie says, they are 'put under a spotlight' (ibid: 54). This in turn means that young women are expected to scrutinize every aspect of their lives and become 'harsh judges of themselves' (ibid: 60). This is part of the 'female individualization process' within postfeminism in which women are expected to plan their lives extensively in order to avoid failure. Here 'self-monitoring practices', such as diary-keeping and the life plan are paramount because in this neoliberal era, individuals are expected to take responsibility for their own lives as the old

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[3] This idea of excess is perhaps best exemplified by the fashion for vintage clothing, which both conveys a reassuringly traditional image of femininity, while also being deliberately playfully anachronistic.

structures such as social class become less visible within institutional life (McRobbie, 2007: 35).[4] While every individual – both men and women – is expected to take responsibility for there lives, as we shall see through the work of Rosalind Gill, it does seem that this is particularly applicable to women. For it is women who are arguably being specifically addressed in terms of these 'self-monitoring practices', which suggests that the ethos of neoliberalism is often gendered.

Like Angela McRobbie, Rosalind Gill theorises postfeminism as more than simply a 'backlash' against the gains of the second wave. Drawing on McRobbie's 'entanglement' discourse, Gill views postfeminism as an 'articulation or suture of between feminist and anti-feminist ideas, and this is effected entirely through a grammar of individualism' (2007: 162). More than this, Gill conceptualizes postfeminism as a 'distinctive sensibility' that characterises a number of contemporary media products. According to Gill, this 'sensibility' is made up of a number of interconnected themes, including:

> The notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of the makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference (ibid: 147).

For Gill, a key aspect of the postfeminist sensibility is its 'obsessive preoccupation with the body' (ibid: 149). In today's media, Gill argues, 'possession of a "sexy body" is presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity', a body that is both a source of power and in constant need of monitoring and regulating (ibid: 149). Gill notes how this intense focus on women's bodies is strongly linked to the increased sexualisation of contemporary culture, in which women are 'invited to become a particular kind of self', on the condition they use their agency to 'construct oneself as a as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy found in pornography' (ibid: 152). The implications of this pornified sexualisation of

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[4] The fact that postfeminism is conceived as highly individualistic becomes important within Chapter Three of this thesis, which uses Alison Winch's work on the 'postfeminist sisterhood' (2013) to explore depictions of female friendship amongst pairs of teenage girls.

contemporary culture will be discussed later on in the thesis in relation to the media panics that circulate concerning the supposed sexualisation of teenage girls, and the idea that it is 'too much too young'.

In common with McRobbie, Gill stresses how this production of the self is underpinned by a 'grammar of individualism', as the 'notion that all our practices are freely chosen is central to postfeminism' (2007: 153). Both Gill and McRobbie emphasise the idea that postfeminist culture presents women as entirely autonomous, and not 'constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever' (ibid). However, as Gill points out, if women are entirely free to do as they choose, how can we account for the fact that the "look" that is most valued in postfeminist culture – a slim figure and hairless body – is so similar? (ibid: 154). Moreover, Gill further explores the relationship between the notion of personal choice and increased 'self-surveillance'. Gill acknowledges that monitoring the self has always been crucial to the performance of successful femininity, but the kind of self-surveillance required by postfeminism is distinctive in a number of ways. First is the intensity of the surveillance and scrutiny women are placed under, as exemplified by magazines such as *Heat*, which single out and 'zoom in' on individual body parts in order demonstrate how a female celebrity has somehow 'failed' to perform her femininity successfully. The second aspect is the 'extensiveness of the surveillance', in that it extends to other spheres of life, such as work and family, and not just the body. The final distinctive aspect is the 'focus upon the psychological', where one is expected to transform one's inner self as much as one's appearance. This is evident in the proliferation of self-help books and makeover shows in the contemporary period in which individuals are required not just to work on their appearance but also modify their attitude and behaviour, which is often seen as crucial to a successful transformation (ibid: 155).

Although Gill's work has much in common with McRobbie, Gill explores the direct links between postfeminism and neoliberalism. Gill argues that postfeminism 'fits perfectly with neoliberalism' (ibid: 162). Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff define neoliberalism as 'a mobile, calculated technology for governing subjects who are constituted as self-managing, autonomous and enterprising' (2011: 5). The neoliberal

ideal of the self-managing subject who does not need to rely on the state is highly reminiscent of the postfeminist ideal. As Gill states,

> It is clear that the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating, subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely-choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism (2007: 164).

The obvious similarities between postfeminism and neoliberalism's ideal subjects prompts Gill to ask whether 'neoliberalism is already gendered, and that women are constructed as its ideal subjects? (ibid). The relationship between neoliberalism and postfeminism is undeniable, and this will be explored in more detail in Chapter One, which looks at the construction of the figure of the ambitious girl in the contemporary British sports film.

What is arguably most striking about this discussion of the work of both Rosalind Gill and Angela McRobbie is the way in which postfeminism is particularly concerned with young women. As McRobbie says, in postfeminist culture, 'women must be young women' (2009: 26). Girls have functioned as figures through which to explore contemporary society throughout history; for example, being mobilised to signal progress and modernity, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s (McRobbie, 2009: 58). Historian of girlhood Carol Dyehouse argues that 'waves of anxiety horror stories and panic… have accompanied social change since the Victorian times' (2013: 250). As this section will demonstrate, the combination of the girl as both a celebratory figure and one of anxiety and concern continues to be particularly prominent in the twenty-first century. As Sarah Projansky notes, 'at the turn of the twenty-first century, the convenient figure of the girl… surfaces once again to work through contemporary issues, such as… neoliberalism and postfeminism' (2014: 11). Projansky, therefore, highlights the importance of the figure of the girl in the twenty-first century while also reinforcing Gill's argument that neoliberalism is seemingly gendered due to its association with postfeminism. Other academics have also emphasised the significance of the figure of the girl in the contemporary era in a similar manner. For Catherine Driscoll, the girl 'figures as an image of change, crisis and personal and cultural tensions' (2002: 305). Anita Harris, meanwhile, argues that the girl is a key figure bound up with ideas about what it means to 'prevail or lose out in these new times' (2004: 14), so much so that, according to Harris, in the

twenty-first century 'the creation of the contemporary social order is achieved in part within the space of girlhood' (ibid: 2). The reasons why the girl has become such a prominent figure can be seen in the aforementioned work by McRobbie (2009) and Anita Harris, as both explore how the gains of second-wave feminism have been used to show how girls in particular have benefited from new opportunities created by changed working conditions in the twentieth century, which, when filtered through an individualistic discourse of 'choice' and 'empowerment', make young women the 'most likely candidate for performing a new kind of self-made subjectivity' that ties in neatly with neoliberalism (Harris, 2004: 6).

As mentioned above, the figure of the girl in the twenty first century signifies both celebration and opportunity, and anxiety and concern. I will now go on to look at how this is achieved in more detail. According to Anita Harris, 'One of the most important words in the lexicon of new female success is *girlpower*'. For Harris, the concept of 'girlpower has been highly significant in the image of young women as independent, successful and self-inventing' (ibid: 16). Girl power originated from the phrase 'grrlpower' used by the 'riot girrl' movement, in alternative music cultures that advocated a 'do it yourself' punk philosophy. This meant the phrase lent itself easily to be co-opted by the individualistic discourse of postfeminism. Girl power is a 'sexy, brash and individualized expression of ambition, power and success' (ibid: 17). As Harris explains, the girls who embody girl power are 'outspoken, not afraid to take power, believe in themselves, and run their own lives' (ibid). The phrase 'girl power' has been attached to a number of iconic female characters within popular culture, such as Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar) from the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), and Lara Croft from the *Tomb Raider* videogame and film series. In the UK, girl power is most often associated with the all-girl pop group the Spice Girls, who adopted the phrase as their slogan in the nineties. As mentioned previously, in her article 'Postfeminism in the British Frame', Justine Ashby explores the 'snug' fit between postfeminism and the politics of the UK's New Labour government (2005: 128). A key component of this was the language of 'girl power' as popularized by the Spice Girls. According to Ashby, this promoted a boisterous, even aggressive attitude toward gender politics (ibid: 129). Ashby adds that the contradictory nature of girl power 'confounded any real attempt to politicize it'. Girl power all at once seemed to 'link being sexy with

being ballsy, to celebrate female camaraderie while privileging individualism' (ibid: 129). The articulation of girl power as postfeminist is immediately apparent here, as girl power draws on the opportunities for young women provided by feminist gains within an individualistic, depoliticized framework that suggests the ability to 'have it all'.

One of the key works to explore girl power's evocation of the confident, successful girl is Anita Harris' 'future girl'. In the twenty first century, Harris argues,

> Power opportunities and success are all modelled by the "future girl" – a kind of young woman celebrated for her "desire, determination and confidence" to take charge of her life, seize chances and achieve her goals (2004: 1)

In fact, the 'future girl' is so significant that she 'is imagined, and sometimes imagines herself, as best able to handle today's socioeconomic order' (ibid: 2). Furthermore, Harris argues that constructions of girlhood today can be divided into the 'can-do' girls and the 'at-risk' girls. The 'can-do' girls are the "girls with the world at their feet":

> [They are] identifiable by their commitment to exceptional careers and career planning, their belief in their capacity to succeed, and their display of a consumer lifestyle. They are also distinguished by their desire to put off childbearing until "later" (ibid: 14).

Angela McRobbie also draws on this idea of the successful girl in her assertion that

> The meanings which converse around the figure of the girl or young woman are more weighted towards capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation (2009: 57).

While the figure of the successful 'can-do' girl is arguably the most evoked figure in both popular culture and governmental and educational policy. Although 'growing up "right" has always been important to the formation of feminine subjectivities, nowadays success is 'constructed as a mainstream experience for young women, and failure is deemed to be the consequence of an individual's limitation' (Harris, 2004: 16). Ultimately, 'good choices, effort and ambition alone' are viewed as the qualities necessary to succeed (ibid). Although success is viewed as a 'mainstream

experience', as Sarah Projansky notes, this 'can-do' version of girlhood is a 'narrow version of acceptable girlhood' (2014: 1), a 'fantasy promise that if girls work hard,… they can achieve anything … this narrative promises unbelievable happiness and achievement' (ibid: 5).

However, the 'can-do' girl also has an 'unsuccessful' counterpart in the 'at-risk' girl. 'At-risk' girls are more likely to experience "misaligned occupational ambitions…a lack of sense of power or opportunity', and more likely to indulge in 'inappropriate consumption behaviours, for example, drugs and alcohol. They are also more likely to become pregnant at a young age' (ibid: 14). These girls are likely to be the 2% of girls who leave school without any qualifications and are 'singled out more forcefully as educational failures' (Allen, 2008, quoted in McRobbie, 2009: 73). These 'at-risk' girls are then 'cut off from the imagined majority of successful girls' and become defined by their problems (Harris, 2004: 26).[5] Here, in line with neoliberalism, 'structural disadvantage is re-cast as poor personal choices, laziness and incompetent family practices' (ibid: 25).

As mentioned previously, the focus on girls and young women today is not just celebratory - as in the case of the successful can-do girl who makes the most of the opportunities available to her – but also partly 'regulatory' as well (ibid: 1). As Anita Harris argues, the conditions of neoliberalism, in which the responsibility to 'make themselves' in order to succeed is placed squarely upon the individual, have generated 'considerable anxiety about the future of youth' (ibid: 5). Since girls and young women are constructed as those best equipped to cope in these circumstances, it is unsurprising they are the ones who arguably generate the most concern. For example, it is significant that at the same time as girls are celebrated for being 'more confident and resilient than ever', research, journalism and government policy have all articulated, and contributed to, fears and concerns about young women (ibid: 13). Particular areas of concern are 'eating disorders, lack of self-esteem, and mean girl behaviour' (Projansky, 2014: 6). Jessica Ringrose terms this gender-specific fear and anxiety as 'postfeminist panics'. Ringrose points to such panics as panic over overly

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5 As Sarah Projansky notes, 'the moral panic depictions of the at-risk girl are paradoxical (in that they contribute to the very thing about which they worry') (2014: 5).

'successful' girls, 'overly aggressive' girls and 'overly sexy' girls. These panics, she argues, 'work to reconstruct universal notions of girlhood and ideal and deviant types of girls' (2013: 5). While moral panics about girlhood have featured throughout history, Ringrose claims these panics as specifically postfeminist because they are constructed as consequence of feminist gains. For example, girls' success at school and work is presented as damaging to masculinity, while 'aggressive' behaviour is seen as 'girl power' taken too far. Concern about the sexualisation of girls is framed as postfeminist because it is presented as a 'moral problem resulting from too much and too early sexual liberation for girls on the back of feminist gains' (ibid: 42). Furthermore, Ringrose highlights how this sexualisation panic is a 'contradiction to the "successful girl" thesis' because girls are viewed as having overcome gender inequality, including the 'oppressions of their "sexed" body', and yet there is this competing discourse of moral panic around girls' sexuality and sexualisation (ibid: 42). This panic over girls' sexuality will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

All this attention on girls as the subjects of both celebration and regulation leaves them 'very little opportunity to be out of the spotlight' (Harris, 2004: 185). McRobbie refers to this as 'luminosity' and argues that this 'spotlight' ensures young women are visible in a 'certain kind of way'. This 'moving spotlight' has a theatrical effect in that it 'softens, dramatises and disguises the regulative dynamics' (2009: 54). Mary Celeste Kearney (2015) draws on McRobbie's idea of luminosity in her work on sparkle in 'post-girl power media'.[6] Kearney notes how the amount of sparkle in girl culture has 'increased exponentially in since the start of the new millennium, making our world twinkle and shine as if it's bedazzled with pixie dust' (2015: 1). This sparkle is specifically linked to postfeminism that it is only really available within mainstream girl culture to white, middle class girls. Kearney identifies three different types of sparkle, each associated with discourses of girlhood. Firstly, there is the sparkle in depictions of magic produced through animated special effects. Kearney traces this through animations such as Disney's

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[6] Gonick et al. use the term 'post-girl power' to differentiate between girl power in the 1900s and the millennium. They argue that within the socio-political context of the 1990s 'girls could be active. In the 2000s they are now *expected/ demanded* to be fully self-actualized neo-liberal subjects' (2009: 2).

Cinderella in 1950, where magic is used to signal 'supernatural yet normative physical transformations supposedly necessary for heterosexual coupling' (2015: 6), to live-action teen dramas in the 1990s and 2000s, such as *Charmed* (1998-2006), which centre around girls who have magical powers. The second aspect of sparkle is environmental, in which sparkle is 'produced via twinkling stars, flickering candles and shimmering lights' and used to 'signify a girl's first romance' (ibid.). However, more recently, this environmental sparkle has been seen in the glittering cityscapes in programmes such as *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), and is used to signify 'wealth, independence and sexual agency' (ibid: 7). The final form of sparkle involves the 'adornment of girls' bodies via glittery make-up, sequined clothing and bejewelled accessories' (ibid.). This type of costuming was not common until the early 2000s, but is has since become ubiquitous.

 In addition, Kearney also links the pervasiveness of this sparkle to postfeminist celebrity culture, drawing on the work of Hopkins (2002) and Harris (2004). For Hopkins, fame has superseded heterosexual romance as the 'ultimate girl fantasy' (2002: 4). Harris, meanwhile, claims the celebrity lifestyle is the 'exemplar of the can-do experience' (2004: 130), in that the 'ordinary' girl is able to 'work on herself as a celebrity project and gain some kind of public profile in the process' (ibid: 127). The centrality of celebrity to contemporary constructions of girlhood is evident in Melanie Kennedy's work on girlhood and tween popular culture. Kennedy notes how this 'exclusively female preadolescent demographic is seen to emerge alongside a heightened visibility of girls within poplar culture since the mid-1990s, and containing anxieties about girlhood in this intensely mediated environment' (2013: 2). Kennedy explores key US tween media, such as the Disney Channel series *Hannah Montana* (2006-2011), which tells the story of teenager Miley Stewart (Miley Cyrus), who lives a secret life as the pop star Hannah Montana. She argues that tweenhood is mediated within a distinctly postfeminist, neoliberal culture (ibid: 32), and 'celebrity plays a central role in tween popular culture, articulating the parallels between "becoming" woman and "becoming" celebrity' (ibid: 2). However, Kearney argues that this sparkle is not just regulatory as McRobbie suggests because, she claims, girls in these media texts are '*stylistically heightened to make them visually superior to virtually all else in the frame*' through the use of glitter and sparkly make-up (2015: 2-3) (original emphasis). These girls are 'literally luminous

in their bedazzling, spectacular displays of girlhood' (ibid: 5). This notion of sparkle highlights a key point of departure between US and UK constructions of contemporary girlhood, as is evidenced throughout this thesis, although the British characters do partake in the postfeminist makeover, they do so in a more subdued way, reliant on clothes swaps with friends or second-hand clothing from charity shops, as is the case in *Wild Child*. In *Wild Child*, discussed in Chapter Two, American Poppy's (Emma Roberts) reliance on designer clothing is depicted as brash and unnecessary. In addition, in the films I explore, clothes are not so much an indication of wealth and status, but rather a way of attempting to create an identity and bonding with friends.

Like McRobbie, Sarah Projansky uses this idea of girls under a theatrical light in her use of 'spectacular girls'. Projansky breaks this concept of spectacular down into three points of discussion. Firstly, girls are spectacles because we are constantly invited to look at them through their ubiquitous presence, which means they are constantly on display. Secondly, they are spectacular in that they are 'fabulous'. They 'dazzle' as in the case of the can-do girl who achieves her goals and is full of self-confidence. Finally, some girls are not so much 'spectacular' as 'spectacle[s]', scandalous girls whose behaviour is identified as a problem (2014: 6). Moreover, Projansky argues that this spectacularisation of girls is expressly linked to celebrity culture, as the 'media's fascination with celebrities and girls is intensifying simultaneously' (ibid.). Projansky emphasises the 'intense publicness of contemporary girlhood: the way in which girls are readily available to us, similar to the way every aspect of a celebrity's life is fair game…' (ibid: 7). The spectacularisation of girls is evident throughout celebrity culture, and to engage in a detailed discussion of this would extend beyond the scope of this research. It is in celebrity culture that the division of girls into spectacle and scandal is most apparent. For example, *Mean Girls* star Lindsay Lohan was shown to become a victim of her success at a young age and constructed as a 'scandalous' girl, who took part in at-risk girl behaviour, such as criminal activity and addiction. *Harry Potter* star Emma Watson, however, has risen to become 'spectacular' as an actress who uses her

success to positive ends, as demonstrated by her role as a UN ambassador.[7] The visibility of female celebrity bodies has also increased significantly, most strongly demonstrated by the recent 'nude photo leak' in September 2014 in which various young female celebrities, such as Jennifer Lawrence, were hacked and released online, making their private bodies highly visible in a very public way. This increased visibility does not just affect female celebrities, however, as social media sites such as Instagram and Facebook enable young people to document and share every aspect of their lives, so they become as accessible as a celebrity, echoing and reinforcing Anita Harris' claim that the ordinary girl can now 'work on herself as a celebrity project and gain some kind of public profile in the process' (2004: 127). This is particularly gendered as it is girls who are arguably most visible. This can be seen most recently in the increase in YouTube stars such as Zoe Sugg, known as Zoella. After amassing millions of subscribers to her weekly lifestyle vlogs, mostly filmed in her bedroom, Sugg went on to launch her own beauty range and release two best-selling Young Adult novels (Marr, 2014).

Post-postfeminism?

Within the postfeminist landscape of the twenty-first century, there has been concern that feminism has become a 'superficial gender gloss on an essentially conservative ideology of DIY resposibilization and self-invention' (Harris, 2004: 187). Recently, there has been a notable re-appearance of the word feminism within the popular culture landscape, particularly since the global economic crisis of 2008 and its subsequent recession. There is, of course, an inherent difficulty in attempting to analyse a cultural moment as it is happening, but one text that has made a significant attempt at scholarly intervention in this area is Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker's *Gendering the Recession* (2014). Negra and Tasker note how the key tropes of postfeminism, such as a 'preoccupation with makeover and self-fashioning' and 'the celebration of sexual expression and affluent femininities' are 'enabled by the optimism and opportunity of prosperity (or at least the perception of it)' (2014:1). This leads Negra and Tasker likewise to ask 'whether and to what extent the conceptual and theoretical account of gender developed in an earlier and distinctly

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[7] The discourses surrounding Emma Watson and her role with the UN will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

different economic era still apply? (ibid.). Negra and Tasker acknowledge that postfeminism's emphasis on choice has not disappeared but 'reads differently now the economic bubble has burst' (ibid: 6). They refer to this post-2008 landscape as 'recessionary culture', and while it is still highly individualistic – retaining the idea that management of the self can effect positive change – this 'celebratory discourse' is 'conceptualized by a perception that equality is a luxury that can no longer be afforded… the postfeminist consumer is placed as an icon of excess …, an emblem of the boom and of its short-term financialism' (ibid: 5). For example, the previous era's focus on choice and the 'commodification of domestic femininities' still exists in recessionary culture but is transformed into the idea of 'female consumer resourcefulness' (ibid: 6-7). This is exemplified by the image of the female cupcake baker as representative of adaptive economy and safe female entrepreneurialism (ibid: 7). Within the UK, it has been demonstrated by reports by groups such as the Fawcett Society and researchers from the House of Commons Library that women are three times more likely than men to be impacted by the 'austerity measures' introduced by the government. This is due to changes in tax credits and child benefits, as well as a lack of public sector jobs and pensions (Martinson, 2012). Through the image of the female cupcake baker, widening structural inequalities are ignored, highlighting instead the resourceful woman who creates her own work by capitalising on her traditional, domestic femininity. This 'cupcake culture' of female resourcefulness can be linked to discourses of austerity within the UK through its image traditionally feminine domestic skills. Biressi and Nunn note how during the recession, the UK government and media sought to instil the "right kind of values" and public conduct through 'the idea we are "all in this together" and the deployment of historical resources and myths of wartime British pluck' and "making do" as a way of managing insecurity (2013: 171).

Postfeminist culture was noted for its 'classlessness', despite its address to young middle-class, white women. While this demographic category is still privileged, in recent years the British class system has arguably become more apparent within popular culture with 'wealth and inequality emerging as a key themes across numerous media genres and modes' (Negra and Tasker, 2014: 10). On the one hand, there has been a 'renewed fascination with aristocratic elites' through television programmes such as *Downton Abbey* (ITV, 2010-2015) and events such as the Royal

Wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton in 2011. Within this thesis, this is most evident within Chapter Four's examination of a number of recent films that highlight aristocratic young women from the pre-twentieth century era in order to engage with discourses surrounding young femininity in the twenty first century. On the other hand, we have also witness a number of texts looking at some of Britain's most disenfranchised groups, such as Channel 4's *Benefits Street* (2014-) and *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* (2011-). This comes at a time when discourses about 'benefit scroungers' are widespread within the right-wing press, in which government cuts to the welfare system are justified through the demonisation of welfare claimants. Imogen Tyler considers these types of programmes within the context of 'deepening inequality and class polarisation in Britain' (2008: 18). According to Beverly Skeggs, during the 1980s and early 1990s, there was a 'sociological retreat from class' that mirrored political discourses of individualism and social mobility (2005: 45). However, as Tyler argues, class differences and antagonisms have become '*explicitly* visible in contemporary Britain (2008: 20) (original emphasis). This can be seen through the figure of the 'chav' (an often derogatory term for the white poor), who feature within these aforementioned programmes, which, according to Tyler, encourage and celebrate the 'caricaturing and mockery of the working classes' (ibid: 32). Furthermore, Tyler claims the figure of the 'chav mum' is a particular target of sexist class disgust. While the supposedly uncontrollable sexuality of young working-class mothers has always been a source of social anxiety, it is possible to understand the hatred and fear of the figure of the chav mum within the context that she contradicts the norms of postfeminist, meritocratic, middle class femininity, which are based around promoting economic growth through education and increase female participation within the workforce (ibid: 30).

As part of this concern with wealth and inequality, recessionary culture acknowledges that young people in particular are financially worse off than the previous generation. While emblematic postfeminist texts such as *Sex and the City* and *Ally McBeal* showcased single young women who were financially independent with stable careers and disposable income having fun in the city, as Negra and Tasker note, since the recession these celebratory texts have been replaced (in the US) by a 'spate of "girl"-centred genres in which urban women make their way socially while coping with financial duress' (2014: 14). These include television

shows such as *New Girl*, (Twentieth Century Fox, 2011-) *Two Broke Girls* (Warner Bros Television, 2011-) and *Girls* (HBO, 2011-), and films such as *Tiny Furniture* (Dunham, 2010), *Frances Ha* (Baumbach, 2012) and *Girl Most Likely* (Berlman and Pucini, 2012). The situation is similar in the UK, with a number of texts exploring the post-university lives of young women, who have benefitted from the educational opportunities central to postfeminism and yet there are no career-jobs for them to go to and the city is no longer a playground. This theme is taken up in television programmes like the comedy series *Drifters* (Channel 4, 2013-) and the film *Love Me Till Monday* (Hardy, 2013), in which graduate Becky (Georgia Maguire) is working as an office temp and has a series of unfulfilling encounters as she attempts to find the man of her dreams.

It is widely acknowledged that feminism has re-emerged into popular culture since the recession, facilitated largely by the Internet and social media. In recent years, there has been a considerable rise in feminist blogs and campaigns run by young women, a number of which were adapted into popular feminist books. For example, online magazine *The Vagenda* initially sought to critique the narrowness mainstream women's magazines (Baxter and Cosslett, 2014), while *The Everyday Sexism Project* sought to raise awareness of the types of sexism women routinely experience that are often taken for granted (Bates, 2015). Journalist Caroline Criado-Perez campaigns for greater representation of women in the media and in 2013 led an eventually successful campaign for the image Jane Austen to appear on a banknote. In addition, journalist Caitlin Moran gained notable attention for her book *How to be a Woman* (2012), which incorporates feminist critique into personal memoir. However, alongside this online feminist activity is the rise of misogyny and threats of violence against women, with many of the figures discussed here reporting rape threats through sites such as Twitter.

While the term 'feminism' is used more freely within popular culture, there is a sense that feminism in the contemporary era does not necessarily share the same characteristics as the second wave, and the influence of postfeminism is still apparent. Karen Darmon notes some of the main tropes of this contemporary feminism, which she dates to 2009, following Angela McRobbie's *Aftermath*. This includes issues of bodily integrity, violence against women and career and education

(Darmon, 2015: 703). The issue of bodily integrity is often framed around a reaction against the ideal slim female body favoured by postfeminism, with *Girls* creator/star Lena Dunham often presented as a 'figurehead' for this through the attention she received for frequently, and unashamedly, displaying her non-normative naked body within the series. Moreover, this re-focusing on issues such as violence against women and career (particularly the issue of the pay gap) take place alongside an 'avidly postfeminist cultural mindset' (Negra, 2014: 276). For example, in 2011 Conservative minister for Universities and Science, David Willetts, claimed that feminism was the "key factor" contributing to economic decline in the UK, as the increase in education and employment opportunities for women since the 1970s has led to a lack of social mobility for working-class men (Prince, 2011). Willetts' comments clearly articulate the idea inherent within postfeminism that girls and women have been the primary, if not sole, beneficiaries of social, political and economic developments at the expense of men.

This chapter began with a discussion of Angela McRobbie's work on postfeminism. Recently, however, McRobbie has acknowledged the re-emergence of feminism within cultural life. In order to keep this 'new threat of feminism at bay', McRobbie argues, an 'amplification of the control of women' is needed to ensure existing power relations are maintained (2015: 3). This is done through the idea of the 'the perfect', which is deployed as a key motif of contemporary femininity in order to 'stifle the possibility of an expansive feminist movement' (ibid.). The perfect is both part of 'female "common sense" in that it is expected of the 'can-do girl' (Harris, 2004), but also something potentially dangerous as it is a 'mechanism for unleashing potentially new waves of self- harm' (ibid: 4). The perfect, therefore, is a 'heightened form of self-regulation based on an aspiration to some idea of [what Lauren Berlant (2011)] terms the "good life" (ibid: 9). For McRobbie, social media constantly displays images of 'the virtual good life', particularly sites like Instagram, with its endless stream of selfies,[8] shopping and partying that are regulated by the

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[8] According to urbandictionary.com, a selfie is 'An act usually carried out by girls aged 12-21, the act involves taking photos of ones self while posing' (Urbandictionary.com, 2012). This definition highlights the gendered nature of selfies as an act in which predominantly girls and young women attempt to create an idealised version of themselves through taking sole direction of their pose and the

user in the goal of perfection. These sites also emphasise the increased suffering attached to contemporary femininity, as girls in particular are harshly scrutinised and can often become the victims of cyberbullying (ibid: 5).

The constant self-regulation on which the perfect is predicated – the neoliberal spreadsheet of self-assessment (ibid: 10) – is one of the ways in which the perfect can be viewed as a 'more hard-edged version of the postfeminist masquerade' (ibid: 12). Now, feminism is not disavowed, but internalised as 'inner-drive and determination to meet self-directed goals' (ibid: 12) in the pursuit of the good life, typically a work-life balance, where traditional femininity is maintained through the value attributed to husbands, family etc. It is not so much 'can-do' as 'can do and must do better' (ibid: 16). This also encourages 'solidaristic competition' as women must compete with other women to reach the top of their careers (ibid: 7). This is most evident with the figure of Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg and her book *Lean In* (2013), in which sets out a series of instructions for women to follow in order to achieve success in the workplace. Sandberg's book is part of a group of 'feminist manifestos' that perform an advice-giving function. These books 'espouse an ever-expanding program of self-discipline rather than structural reform (Negra, 2014: 284). While self-help books have been a significant part of postfeminist culture, Diane Negra notes how these more recent examples differ from their earlier counterparts. Unlike the earlier texts, these more recent books are chiefly concerned with women's life choices and emotional behaviour 'in relation to professional opportunity and advancement' (ibid: 279). Catherine Rottenberg also explores Sandberg's book in her work on 'neoliberal feminism' (2013). Rottenberg defines neoliberal feminism as the incorporation of 'mainstream feminism with the market values of neoliberalism' (419). Like McRobbie's work on the perfect, Rottenberg's neoliberal feminist is 'aware of the inequalities between men and women' but 'disavows the social, cultural and economic forces producing this inequality, but also because she accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work-life balance based on a cost-benefit calculus' (ibid: 420).

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angle of the camera, and in some cases, adding a filter effect to minimise imperfections.

In addition, McRobbie argues that the perfect is bolstered by the 'light-hearted endorsement of the imperfect', which stands as its other (2015: 13). For McRobbie, this is exemplified by the articulation of Lena Dunham as a figurehead for the rejection of postfeminist ideals concerning the body, as mentioned earlier. McRobbie views this as 'quasi-feminist' due to Dunham's self-conscious self-deprecation and self-reflexivity', where failure is positioned as part of growing up (ibid.), while at the same time it is widely acknowledged that Dunham is highly privileged and as a result of this is frequently criticised for creating work that endorses a 'cliquey' exclusionary form of feminism that is not relevant to women from minority groups (ibid: 15). Dunham is frequently criticised for her 'white privilege' feminism that focuses on more 'mainstream' issues, such as the ability to combine a career with parenting, and a focus on women's sexual empowerment (Adewunmi, 2012). Dunham was also criticised for the lack of women of colour in *Girls* and her failure to address intersectionality, which is a recurring theme in discussions of contemporary feminism (ibid).

One of the most noticeable ways in which feminism has resurfaced in recent years is through the sphere of 'celebrity feminism'. Hannah Hamad and Anthea Taylor note how 'the figure of the self-professed feminist celebrity was a recurring feature of Anglophone celebrity culture in 2014, snowballing over the year to become a sustained and on-going flashpoint of the cross-media celebrity landscape' (2015: 124). They cite major examples such Beyoncé's 2014 MTV Video Music Awards performance which saw the star perform in front of a giant illuminated 'feminist' sign, Jennifer Lawrence publicly referring to the publication of her stolen nude photos as a "sex crime", and also British star Emma Watson's role as UN Goodwill Ambassador and her speech on gender equality as part of the #HeForShe Twitter campaign (ibid: 125). This celebrity feminism is not necessarily as widespread as it may appear, as Hamad and Taylor note how others, such as pop stars Katy Perry and Lady Gaga, 'publicly refuse to identify as feminist' (ibid). Katy Perry is a particularly interesting example as while in 2012 she refused to call herself a feminist, by 2014 Perry said in an interview that she did identify as a feminist. However, her definition of feminism as meaning "I love myself as a woman but I also love men" (Stampler, 2014) is highly individualistic and also draws on the anti-feminist stance that feminism is a form of misandry, as suggested by her insistence

that she "also love[s] men". It is evident that the meanings around feminism today are complex and contradictory, as some standpoints are 'more reminiscent of the individualist, apolitical or backlash discourses of millennial postfeminism' (Hamad and Taylor, 2015: 125). At the same time, as Hamad and Taylor argue, 'discursive struggles over the meaning of feminism are now, perhaps more than ever, largely staged in and through media culture' (ibid: 126).

Emma Watson's role within celebrity feminist culture is particularly significant to this thesis due to her status as a star of contemporary British cinema. In December 2014 Watson appeared on the cover of the UK edition of *Elle* magazine's 'feminism issue'[9] as 'the fresh face of feminism', which was promoted on social media through #ElleFeminism. In the accompanying interview, Watson talked about her role in the #HeForShe campaign and her belief that feminism is about "choice" for women (Candy, 2014). Jessalynn Keller and Jessica Ringrose use *Elle's* feminism issue to explore teenage girls' responses to celebrity feminism. They note how this #ElleFeminism is a form of celebrity feminism held together with neoliberal principles in line with what Catherine Rottenberg (2013) refers to as 'neoliberal feminism'. In addition, Keller and Ringrose view Watson's emphasis on choice for women as 'indicative of this neoliberal imperative' (2015: 132). Furthermore, they also argue that the prominent inclusion of men within the campaign is 'typical' of neoliberal feminism, as it attempts to make feminism seem less threatening to men (ibid: 133). It is therefore apparent that feminism has experienced a resurgence in recent years, particularly within the sphere of celebrity culture. However, this feminism is markedly individualistic than earlier 'waves', due to its relationship with contemporary neoliberalism. The case studies in the following chapters will attempt to trace British cinema's engagement with this resurgence as part of their circulation within a particular cultural context.

The context of contemporary British cinema

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[9] *Elle's* adoption of feminism is cautiously welcomed because, as McRobbie notes, women's magazines need to be constantly reinventing themselves', which means a 'feminist voice might well only last for a couple of fashion seasons and then be discarded…' (2009: 5).

This section will look more specifically at contemporary British cinema since the millennium. It will chart the changes within British cinema over this period, particularly the influence of the various governments upon the industry during this time. As Tom Ryall notes, governments not only impact upon the production of films by providing financial support such as subsidies and tax breaks but also 'contribute to the cultural climates in which films are produced and circulate … it is important to acknowledge the role of the state in relation to the construction of a film culture' (2002: 5). However, in monitoring the cultural climate in which the films that inform this thesis are produced it is worth echoing James Leggott's assertion that 'the legacy and influence of any present-day phenomenon is, by definition, near impossible to assess' (2008: 1). This is partly because, as Ryall says, 'the effects of policies may take years to come into fruition – or not, as the case may be' (2002: 5). In order to explore British film culture since the new millennium, it is necessary to go back further to the 1990s, as many of the changes that would come to impact upon this period were starting to be put in place as early as 1996, just before and into the New Labour administration, which began in 1997. While the British film industry has always been characterised as a see-saw of highs and lows, in 1996 'the number of British films produced was the highest since 1957' (Ryall, 2002: 7) and the industry was experiencing great international success with films such as *Trainspotting* (Boyle, 1996) and *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Newell, 1994).[10] As Hannah Andrews demonstrates, both the governments led by John Major and Tony Blair 'paid greater attention to film culture as part of a new focus on "creative industries". New policies to support the film industry were introduced, including tax breaks for British cinema and funding for film productions raised through proceeds of the National Lottery' (2014: 83). Toby Miller emphasises the newly-appointed New Labour government's commitment to film when he notes how 'Within its first hundred days, the new administration had appointed the country's first official minister for film, announced the three lottery recipients, permitted Channel 4 to spend more on filmmaking, and introduced a 100% take rebate scheme for production' in order to help establish a properly integrated film industry' (2009: 43). That is not to say, however, that New Labour were unique in their support of the film

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[10] James Leggott draws an analogy between the buoyancy of the film industry at the time and the upbeat mood of New Labour's 1997 General Election campaign (2008: 3).

industry, as previous governments had 'intervened in the industry through a range of legislative and administrative procedures' (Ryall, 2002: 5).

Arguably one of the most significant events to impact upon the British film industry under New Labour was the introduction of the UK Film Council (UKFC) in April 2000. This new 'quasi-governmental body' was set up by Chris Smith, the minister for Culture, Media and Sport, with the aim of 'overseeing all aspects of public intervention into film culture' (Andrews, 2014: 83). The Film Council was designed to bring in a number of existing bodies, including the BFI, which was ' responsible for the cultural and educational promotion of film' (Ryall, 2002: 9). The aim of the UKFC was to 'facilitate the production of popular British theatrical films which are profitable and attract significant audiences at home and abroad' (UK Film Council, 2000: 14). These aims clearly point to an attempt to create a more commercialised film culture, whilst also maintaining a culturally British film culture. As Hannah Andrews notes, the aim was to move from 'subsidy to investment', with the expectation that British films should aim for 'popular mainstream appeal and commercial success' as part of a 'fully-functioning indigenous "creative industry"' (2014: 83). For James Leggott, this partnership between a public body and private funding was a 'typically Blairite arrangement' (2008: 17).

It is impossible to provide an overview of British film culture in the twenty-first century without discussing the role of television. Hannah Andrews regards Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) such as Channel 4 and the BBC as the 'key players in the commercialized British film culture at the turn of the 21st century' (2014: 82). According to John Hill, 'support of film production has been a significant trend in the UK' (1996: 153). This is largely due to the establishment of Channel 4 in 1982, and Channel 4 and the British film industry have been 'intimately intertwined for much of their histories' (Andrews, 2014: 7). In addition, Channel 4 has gained 'considerable industrial prestige for its on-going support for British film culture' (ibid: 6). In the 1980s and early 1990s, Channel 4 adopted a 'creatively-led' approach to film production that focused on making 'uniquely British films', with budgets under £10 million (Deans, 2003). However, in 1998 Channel 4 'consolidated its filmmaking operations into one single, semi-vertically integrated mini-studio' in the form of FilmFour Ltd (Andrews, 2014: 83). Led by the increased investment in a

more commercialised film culture, FilmFour Ltd set out to make bigger budget films with the potential to be successful both at home and in the US (Deans, 2003). Hannah Andrews views the establishment of FilmFour Ltd as the 'clearest manifestation of the confidence boom in the industry' at the time (2014: 83). After a number of failures, FilmFour scaled back its operations in 2002. Its 'distribution and sales arms were closed' and production was re-integrated into Channel 4's Drama department under Tessa Ross (ibid: 106).[11] FilmFour then became Film4, a free-to-air digital channel, in 2006.

The BBC has also significantly supported British film culture in this period. In 2000 BBC Films announced it would be supporting 'middle-budget features' (ibid: 84). As with Channel 4 and FilmFour, BBC Films was a separate arm of the corporation, and sought to fulfil its aim of supporting middle-budget features by entering into co-production or distribution deals, often with Hollywood studios or their subsidiaries. The film *Becoming Jane* (Jarrold, 2007), in which Hollywood star Anne Hathaway plays a young Jane Austen opposite James McAvoy, is indicative of the kind of feature supported by BBC Films. *Becoming Jane* was co-produced by BBC Films and distributed by Miramax in the US. Similarly, the middle-budget film (£13.5 million) *The Duchess* (Dibb, 2008), starring Keira Knightley, which appears as a case study in Chapter Four, was co-produced by BBC Films and the French company Pathé, as well as Paramount Vantage. Therefore, both Channel 4 and the BBC were following the 'prevailing logic of the industry' that public funding is best placed in 'backing films designed for the popular mainstream' (Andrews, 2014: 84).

As well as having commercial ambitions, the BBC Films brand is clearly very aware of its parent company's status as a public service broadcaster funded by the license fee. This is evident in the various 'micro-budget schemes' established in recent years.[12] These schemes also ensure that a certain percentage of the budget is spent on training and skills development (ibid: 126). The micro-budget Digital Departures

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[11] Hannah Andrews points to how FilmFour's lack of success highlights the fact that, although it was funded by Channel 4, its commercial ambitions meant that FilmFour got separated from it's raison d'être: to produce innovative, non-mainstream work suitable for its parent channel' and floundered in a crowded marketplace (2014: 106).

[12] A micro-budget is a budget under £1 million (Andrews, 2014: 121).

scheme was set up by BBC Films in order to celebrate the city of Liverpool's status as European Capital of Culture 2008. As part of the scheme, teams of filmmakers applied for funding of £250,000 to make a film that is developed, filmed and post-produced in Liverpool (Andrews, 2014: 126). The three chosen films were Terence Davies's *Of Time and the City* (2008), Lawrence Gough's *Salvage* (2008) and Lindy Heymann's *Kicks* (2008). *Kicks* is included as a case study within Chapter Three's examination of representations of teenage girls' friendships, as it tells the story of two fifteen-year old girls, Nicole (Kerrie Hayes) and Jasmine (Nichola Burley), who are obsessed with fictional Liverpool footballer Lee Cassidy (Jamie Doyle). The film's specifically Liverpudlian identity and its place within the Digital Departures initiative will be discussed in more detail in relation to the film's themes and aesthetics in Chapter Three. The presence of 'low-budget, slightly edgier' films like *Kicks* within BBC Films' catalogue helps to make it seem more contemporary than its usual output would suggest, as these films are aimed towards a more 'youthful and cultural minority audience with whom the BBC has difficulty associating itself' (ibid: 129). Film London also set up its own micro-budget scheme linked to the BBC in 2006 with Microwave, an on-going scheme designed to support first-time filmmakers with funding, training and support (ibid: 128). Films supported by Microwave include *Freestyle* (Lee, 2010), a film about two teenagers who fall in love on the basketball court, and *Ill Manors* (Drew, 2012), a film centred around four London drug dealers, written and directed by Ben Drew, known as the rapper Plan B. The films supported by these micro-budget schemes, therefore, are consistent with the aims of the BBC as a public service broadcaster to pay attention to under-represented groups and 'create more regional and localized representations of Britain'; at the same time, these films were also expected to have global appeal in keeping with the aims of the film industry (Andrews, 2014: 127).[13]

With public funding providing support for a significant part of the film industry in this period, particularly the Lottery money dispensed by the UKFC, there has, rather unsurprisingly, been a huge amount of discussion about the 'quality and purpose of

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[13] Through Film4, Channel 4 also had its own low-budget digital filmmaking scheme in the form of Warp X in 2005. Warp X has now folded into Warp Films and with producer Mark Herbert is arguably most known for producing the films of Shane Meadows (Andrews, 2014: 123).

British films', not just by academics, but also journalists, government policy makers, audiences and filmmakers (Leggott, 2008: 5). As Leggott points out there was concern both inside and outside the British film industry about the quality of some of the films supported by Lottery funding, as well as 'anxiety about how a market-driven, target-led ideology might be shaping film culture' (Leggott, 2008: 3). This can be seen in some of the more notable British film failures at the beginning of the twenty first century. John Hill refers to the 'notorious example of *Sex Lives of the Potato Men* (2003)', which received £1.6 million of Lottery funding but was a critical and commercial failure. For Hill, this film is an example of how funding a film based on its commercial potential attracted 'considerable hostility from the very same newspapers that had previously lamented the lack of commercial success of Lottery-funded films' (2012: 339). Another significant failure from this period is Gillian Armstrong's *Charlotte Gray* (2001). Based on the popular historical novel by Sebastian Faulks and starring Cate Blanchett as the eponymous protagonist, *Charlotte Gray* had a total budget of £14 million and was expected to achieve the same kind of success for FilmFour as *Elizabeth* (Kapur, 1998), which made a star out of Blanchett (Andrews, 2014: 100). However, like many successful British films, *Elizabeth's* success was not anticipated before its release. Further discussion of the film and its influence within contemporary British cinema can be found in Chapter Four. Unlike *Elizabeth, Charlotte Gray* was a critical and commercial failure, and the film's lack of success reinforces the difficulty of predicting whether a British film will be a hit with audiences. FilmFour's disappointment was palpable and it is notable that the company scaled back its operations the following year.

In 2007 the UKFC released a study into the British film industry, which was – understandably – positive, but this was met with scepticism as it was widely acknowledged that while the range of films supported by the UKFC was 'eclectic', there was no "ground-breaking signature film" (Leggott, 2008: 7). The BBC also celebrated British cinema in 2007 with its 'Summer of British Film' season, which included the seven-part *British Film Forever* series, which surveyed the history of British cinema through genre. Billed as an 'enjoyable romp through the greatest films and stars' (BBC, 2007), the series aimed to explore what British films reveal about British culture, showcasing classics from the British cinema canon, as well as

highlighting new and upcoming releases, such as the *St Trinian's* remake (Parker and Thompson, 2007) as a means of promotion (Leggott, 2008: 6).

While British cinema's cultural heritage was being celebrated, new policies were being introduced that would impact upon the economics of the industry. At the turn of the millennium, the British film industry had a '100% tax rebate scheme' for production, as part of the government's plan to ensure a fully integrated film industry (Miller, 2000: 43). However, in 2007 the government introduced a new tax credit scheme whereby films costing under £20 million that passed the new 'cultural test' were allowed to claim back up to 25% of their UK expenditure (Leggott, 2008: 17). The introduction of new tax reliefs reinforced the blend of culture and economics that underpinned policy, as the "core aim of the tax reliefs" was to "promote the sustainable production of culturally British films" (Hill, 2012: 346). The cultural test was used to determine whether a film could be classified as British and was based on a points criteria that included the use of British actors, crew and location. In order to qualify as British, films had to score at least 16 out of a possible 31 points (Leggott, 2008: 8).[14] For Jack Newsinger, the cultural test 'represents a genuine attempt to carve out a recognisably British product – national cinema from Hollywood's investment capital and production practices' (2012: 137). However, the cultural test was in many ways quite arbitrary and films that would not necessarily be thought of as British often qualified for tax relief based on the points system, which, as Sarah Street points out, means that the difficulty of classifying British films still persists, despite the cultural test (2009: 126). According to Andrew Higson, the cultural test 'laid great emphasis on films that dealt thematically with national cultural heritage' (2011: 9). This is exemplified by the way in which films that are often thought of as Hollywood blockbusters – such the *Harry Potter* series (2001-2009) – can be classified as British films due to their adaption of British source material and British themes in the form of the use of the British public school system, albeit in a fantasy context. Moreover, as James Leggott notes, the notion of

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[14] In 2013 it was announced that a new cultural test was to be introduced in April 2014. Now films had to score 18 points out of a possible 35. The criteria was expanded to include characters from the whole of the EU, as long as the dialogue was in English, and an increase in the number of points available for special effects produced in the UK. This was all part of the Coalition government's plan for a more commercialised, global industry (BBC, 2013).

these blockbuster films' 'Britishness' is 'integral to their promotion and appeal' but it is a 'moot point whether these have any relevance to contemporary British society in the manner of, say, *This is England* (Meadows, 2006)' (2008: 9). *This is England* is a particularly interesting example given that it is set in the 1980s, not contemporary Britain. However, this points to the idea that genre plays an important role here, and that films in the social realist mode are perceived to have greater relevance to the society in which they circulate.

What is perhaps most noticeable about British cinema during this period is what James Leggott refers to as the 'mainstreaming of film culture' (2008: 21). According to Leggott, British film culture in the millennium experienced a 'shift to the middle ground' that was in keeping more broadly with the ideology of New Labour that 'prioritises target attainment over creativity (ibid.). This can be linked to the wider postfeminist, neoliberal culture that is largely depoliticised. For Leggott, this de-politicisation is evidenced in the way in which social realist films have an unexpected 'happy' ending that evades critique (he cites *Billy Elliot* (Daldry, 2000) as an example. In addition, Leggott highlights how 'stories about non-mainstream groups are addressed to broad audiences', undercutting any examination of the issues faced by these groups with universal themes and experiences (ibid.). A prominent example of this – and one that is highly relevant to this thesis – is *Bend It Like Beckham*. *Bend It Like Beckham* revolves around two teenage girls, Jess (Parminda Nagra) and Jules (Keira Knightley), who dream of becoming professional footballers but first must overcome the obstacle of discrimination. Jess' Pakistani mother wants her daughter to concentrate on learning traditionally feminine domestic skills, while Jules' mum worries that playing football will make her daughter become a lesbian. Justine Ashby notes how this 'girl power movie' frames 'questions of racial and sexual identity within an upbeat, postfeminist idiom' (2005:130). As such, as the narrative progresses it becomes clear that it is 'not so much social and sexual discrimination as *their mothers* who are the problem' because they are 'laughably prefeminist' (ibid.). The film's feel-good ending, in which Jess and Jules depart for their new footballing careers in the US, assuages a number of social issues, such as racism and sexism, in keeping with its 'upbeat postfeminist message' (ibid.). The film's inclusive multiculturalism is indicative of the 'New Labour' ideal of Britain that glosses over continuing problems of racial discrimination, such as the racially-

motivated riots in the north of England in 2001, the demonization of Muslims following 9/11 (and later the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005), as well as the increasing prominence of the British National Party in the early part of the decade, followed by the rise of UK Independence Party, who were granted so much media attention as an alternative to the mainstream parties that they were invited to take part in the televised leaders' debates during the 2015 General Election campaign.

Although one must bear in mind that *Bend It like Beckham's* status as a 'feel-good' film means it is somewhat unrealistic to expect it to critique contemporary social issues, the film can be viewed as part of contemporary British cinema's general reluctance to question the present government, preferring to investigate the legacy of previous governments (Leggott, 2008: 43). This can be seen in the number of films either set in the 1980s or films dealing with its after-effects that appeared during the late 1990s and 2000s, such as *This is England* and *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997).[15] As Leggott argues, while there are films that explore current concerns and anxieties within British society, these are often countered by poetic realist films that construct self-contained worlds and "capture moments", such as Pawel Pawlikowski's *My Summer of Love* (2004) and *Morvern Callar* (Ramsay, 2002) (2008: 45). However, as Chapter Three demonstrates though its discussion of *My Summer of Love*, it is possible to question the extent to which the film both fits and goes beyond or resists its poetic realist label through its critique of the British class system.

This section has traced the various changes within the British film industry during the New Labour administration. It has explored the relationship between policy, economics and cultural trends, and the influence these factors have had on British cinema's output since the millennium. Broadly speaking, these include a drive for a more commercialised, wholly integrated industry, with a 'mainstreaming' of British cinema's output designed to appeal to a broad audience, while also ensuring films are 'culturally British'. In 2010, Gordon Brown's Labour government was removed from office and replaced by a Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition, led by David Cameron and Nick Clegg. The following section will survey the most recent

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[15] These films also reinforce the idea that British cinema tends to explore ideas about society and the nation in relation to masculinity.

changes to the British film industry, while once again being mindful of the difficulty of such a task.

More of the same? British cinema since 2010

As Hannah Andrews states, 'the change in British government [in 2010] signalled a new approach to public culture exemplified by the closure of the UK Film Council' (2014: 4). The closure of the UKFC was announced in July 2010 in a speech by the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, Jeremy Hunt. In a follow-up speech, Culture Minister Ed Vaizey praised British cinema's 'record-breaking' year in 2009, where UK box office taking reached £944 million, and highlighted the critical success of films like *Made in Dagenham* (Cole, 2010) – about the women workers at the Dagenham Ford factory and their fight for equal pay – and *Tamara Drewe* (Frears, 2010), both notable examples of recent female-centred British films. Despite the success of these films, both of which received funding from the UKFC, it was announced that the BFI would become a 'new strategic body' responsible for 'delivering the Government's policy for film' (Vaizey, 2010). In this new role, the BFI was made responsible for distributing Lottery money, in charge of the certification of the cultural test to determine a film's eligibility for tax credit and supporting film in the nations and regions (ibid.) Furthermore, the Regional Screen Agencies in their current form were deemed 'no longer sensible or sustainable' (ibid.). They were therefore reconfigured into a single national body in Creative England, with 'hubs' in the north, Midlands and south of England (ibid.).[16] All of these changes were introduced with the aim of creating a more 'sustainable' film industry (ibid.), which in many ways echoes New Labour's desire for a more strategic, commercially-driven industry. This is highlighted by David Cameron's comments that the UK film industry should become more mainstream and make "more films that people want to watch", like *Harry Potter* (Cameron, quoted in Brooks, 2010). The unexpected closure of the UKFC 'sent shockwaves' through the industry (Andrews. 2014: 185) and was largely condemned by a number of figures from the industry, including filmmakers like Mike Leigh and actors such as Emily Blunt and Bill Nighy, who, in an open letter to *The Telegraph*, claimed the industry

[16] Film London was to remain outside of this structure, along with Creative Scotland, the Film Agency for Wales and Northern Ireland Screen (ibid.).

brought in £5 for every £1 of funding (Porter, 2010). As Hannah Andrews notes, the closure of the UKFC came as such a surprise because it was 'generally considered to be successful in championing British film and re-addressing some of the market's inequalities' (2014: 185).

The closure of the UKFC is evidence of the government's long-term plan for the film industry to reduce dependency on public funds (Adams, 2013: 122). This is emphasised in the government-ordered Film Policy Review of 2011, with a panel including Julian Fellowes and Tessa Ross and led by Chris Smith. John Hill notes how the presence of Chris Smith, who was also responsible for the review group that led to the formation of the Film Council, helped to 'legitimise' its closure, while also acting as a reminder that, despite the UKFC's closure, 'fundamental continuities within film policy remained' (2012: 335). The report highlights 2011 as an 'exception[al]' year that surpasses the previous 'golden years' (2011: 2), and draws on the success of *The King's Speech*, which held the position of highest-grossing independent British film of all time. The report deemed the film a 'fitting tribute' to the UKFC and its achievements at a time when many were pointing out the irony that this film, which received funding from the UKFC, was singled out as an example of British cinema at its most successful (ibid: 3). The report was titled 'A Future for British Film: It begins with the audience…' and, as its title suggests, was very much concerned with audiences, particularly how to increase audience demand for British cinema. The report draws on a recent consumer survey carried out by the Odeon cinema chain which showcases a good level of support for British film, with 92% of respondents saying they would like to see more British films released each year (ibid: 4). Perhaps most interestingly, respondents were also asked what they expected from British films. While it is unsurprising that the majority (58%) said they expected entertainment, the second expectation was 'an expression of British attitudes (47%), followed by 'an accurate portrayal of British life (37%) (ibid.). This expectation of 'Britishness' is particularly interesting because it suggests audiences expect, and indeed enjoy, the cultural aspect of British cinema; yet this raises the question of whether these distinctly British elements will become increasingly diluted in the push for a more commercialised British films with broad appeal, and just how will this 'Britishness' be negotiated? This question is particularly pertinent to Chapter One's discussion of *StreetDance 3D* (Giwa and Pasquini, 2010), which

examines a specific aspect of the film's critical reception that is largely concerned with the film's 'glossy' representation of London as a global city, which is seen as atypical within British cinema.[17]

Despite government attempts to introduce a new approach to British film, exemplified by the closure of the UKFC, as yet there is no significant change in British film culture since New Labour (Adams, 2011; Andrews, 2014; Hill, 2012). As Andrews states, there are more continuities in current practices than there are changes' (2014: 188). However, Andrews also draws attention to the ways in which current attempts to make British cinema more commercialised have manifested through British cinema's relationship with public service broadcasters. These include an increased keenness to produce with foreign investors, which has resulted in a number of films that deal with American themes, stories and characters, but with 'British personnel at the helm', such as Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011). This signals an attempt to reach a broader audience more accustomed to Hollywood cinema, as these films are arguably more international in scope than they are 'straightforwardly British' (Andrews, 2014: 187). In addition, while British cinema has always had a reputation for adapting classic literature, particularly BBC Films, it is more unusual for Film4, yet the company invested significantly in Andrea Arnold's adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* (2011). It seems, therefore, that current strategies dictate that in order to compete British films must 'either internationalize, or market themselves as distinctly "British" in knowable, sellable ways' (ibid).

While there are many similarities in approach and output, there have also been some noticeable shifts within British cinema culture. John Hill has highlighted the emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity in the New Labour period as a mark of contemporary British cinema (2009: 18). More recently, however, discussion has turned to the lack of diversity within British cinema. This can be seen through the critical reception for the 2015 BAFTA ceremony, which saw Eddie Redmayne win an award for Best Actor for his role as Stephen Hawking in *The Theory of*

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[17] The policy report takes this idea of emphasising British cinema's distinctiveness even further with calls on the BFI to establish a 'British film "brand", that includes 'an annual celebration in the form of a British film week' (2011: 7).

Everything (Marsh, 2014). The film also won the award for Outstanding British Film. In addition, Benedict Cumberbatch was also nominated for his portrayal of Alan Turing in *The Imitation Game* (Tyldum, 2014). This generated a number of opinion pieces which criticised the lack of diversity in the nominations, which included 'mostly white and posh men' and was a celebration of 'Etonian actors' (Moore, 2015). For example, Suzanne Moore notes how the industry seems to have gone beyond even the idea of 'tokenism' in a manner that suggests we no longer have to worry about the issue of diversity (Moore, 2015). Similarly, Natalie Haynes highlights how the BAFTA nominations were full of 'posh men and suffering women', referring to Felicity Jones' role as Jane Hawking (Haynes, 2015).[18] Discussion about the overwhelming whiteness and 'poshness' of the British film industry at the moment often makes explicit links to austerity and the idea that at a time of economic crisis, it is only those young people with economic security and/or parental support who can risk pursuing a career in an unstable industry like acting. This issue of class in particular has been highlighted by the older generation of working class actors Julie Walters, for example, emphasises the importance of the grants she received as a drama student and claims she would be unlikely to succeed today (Hattenstone, 2015). Walters emerged as part of a post-war generation (from the 1950s onwards) of working-class actors like Michael Caine and writers such as Alan Bleasdale who brought working class voices to British film and theatre and represented previously neglected groups and regions, such as the working classes from the north of England. For Walters, things are going "back the other way now" with a focus on "middle class dramas for middle class people" (ibid.). BAFTA Chair Anne Morrison has also expressed concern about the lack of diversity and opportunities for less privileged young people within the industry, saying: "We want a truly diverse industry" and acknowledges a "need to intervene and help those whose talents would otherwise be lost to us" (Morrison, quoted in Willgress, 2015). The intersection between class and gender is discussed throughout this thesis, such as the increased focus on aristocratic young women from history in Chapter Four, and the difficulties faced by ambitious working-class girls like *Fish Tank's* Mia and Shania (Lenora Crichlow) in *Fast Girls* (Clarke, 2012) in Chapter One.

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[18] A discussion of the critical reception of Felicity Jones' status as a 'posh, top girl' is included in Chapter One's case study of *Chalet Girl* (Traill, 2011).

Female authorship

While this thesis is primarily concerned with constructions of girlhood onscreen in British cinema, it is also important to acknowledge the role of women in film production. The beginning of this introduction highlighted the proliferation of films about girls and young women in recent years, including some of contemporary cinema's most commercially successful films. However, any celebration of this noticeable increase of (young) female-centred films should be met with caution. Research from a recent survey carried out by the Centre for Study of Women in Television and Film found that women are still significantly under-represented in Hollywood films, with 15% of the top-grossing Hollywood films of 2013 featuring female protagonist (Lauzen, 2014). Furthermore, there is also a discrepancy between on-screen and off-screen representation, where only 7% of directors are female. This figure is up 1 percentage point from 2013, but down 2 percentage points from 9% in 1998 (Lauzen, 2014). While the numbers of women working within the film industry have always been disproportionately low, recently a number of high-profile industry figures and organisations have begun to speak out about this discrepancy and the need to address the issue of gender imbalance within the film industry.

A great deal of the discussion of gender inequality within the film industry surfaces from and circulates around the annual Cannes Film Festival, which is often held up as representative of the industry as a whole. In 2011, a record-breaking four women filmmakers were nominated for the main prize, the Palme d'Or: Lynne Ramsay, Australian Julia Leigh, France's Maïwenn Le Besco and Japan's Naomi Kawase (Higgins, 2011). However, the following year it was lamented that not a single woman was included in the Palme d'Or nominations. Andrea Arnold, who was a judge on the Palme d'Or jury in 2012, called it a "great disappointment" and noted how Cannes is a "small pocket that represents how it is out in the world", but Arnold dismissed the suggestion of quotas, highlighting that films should be chosen on merit alone (Child, 2012). The situation failed to significantly improve by 2014 when only two of the 19 films nominated were directed by women, to the disappointment of that year's Jury President Jane Campion, who is still the only woman to have won the Palme d'Or for her film *The Piano* (1993) (Ivan, 2014). In 2015 the festival made headlines when it was reported that a group of women, some of whom had medical

conditions, were declined entry to a screening because they were wearing flat shoes rather than heels. The incident provoked much discussion, particularly via social media, as to whether the Cannes dress code was 'sexist', and drew attention to the limitations of ideal femininity in that the dress code that stipulates formal dress is interpreted to mean high heels for women (Barnes, 2015).

One particular high-profile example of an organisation working to address gender inequality within the film industry – and the media more broadly- is the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. In June 2015 it was announced that the Institute would be collaborating with Women in Film and Television (UK) and the BFI London Film Festival as the festival was to host the Institute's first global symposium outside of the US. In addition to this, the festival opened with Sarah Gavron's new film *Suffragette* (2015), starring Carey Mulligan (BFI, 2015). The symposium will provide the BFI with the opportunity to outline how it is aiming to tackle the issue of diversity within the UK film industry. The "three ticks" approach was introduced in September 2014 to be implemented on projects supported by the BFI Film Fund and rolled out to include all films supported by Lottery funding by July 2015 (BFI, 2014). The "three ticks" approach aims to ensure British films 'reflect and represent the diversity of the UK' (BFI, 2014). This includes diversity in terms of ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. The "three ticks" are made up of 'on-screen diversity', including diverse subject matter and at least one diverse lead character; 'off-screen diversity' in the form of 'diverse key creatives'; and 'creating opportunities and promoting social mobility' through internship and employment opportunities for 'new entrants from diverse backgrounds' (BFI, 2014).[19] In order to qualify for funding, films must have at least one 'tick' in a minimum of two of the areas outlined (ibid.).

The BFI's "three ticks" initiative highlights increasing attempts to address inequality within the UK film industry, and in doing so draws on work by groups such as Birds Eye View, which launched the UK's first major women's film festival in London in

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[19] The BFI's new "three ticks" policy was promoted using images from Amma Asante's film *Belle* (2013), about a mixed race aristocratic young woman in the 1800s. Further discussion of the film's representation of racial and gender inequality can be found in Chapter Four.

2005. Founder Rachel Millward established Birds Eye View in an attempt to address the issue of the significantly low number of women filmmakers working within the industry. The organisation also aimed to showcase the diversity of work by women filmmakers, and increase on-screen representation in the belief that 'to know equality in society, we need a balanced perspective in … film' (Millward, 2011). While women continue to be under-represented in the UK film industry, particularly in key creative roles like directing and writing, a recent report from the BFI (2013) has highlighted that a considerable percentage of the most successful and profitable UK independent films between 2010 and 2010 were written and/or directed by women, with 18.2% of the films having female directors and 37% of the films had female writers (Considine, 2013). In particular, the report emphasised the number of women attached to more than one project during the period, which points to on-going relationships with the producers and funders of films (BFI, 2013: 12).[20] There was also evidence of female writers and directors benefitting from association with female producers and public sector sources of funding for film investment, such as BBC Films, Film4 and Lottery funding (ibid.), something that is evident in many of the case studies in this thesis. Overall the report reflects a common theme of celebration mixed with caution that issues still need to be addressed that is apparent within much of the commentary on women's roles within the UK film industry, as well as a mix of optimism and concern that circulates around the contemporary UK film industry more broadly.

In the sections above have outlined the complex socio-cultural context in which this thesis is situated. I outlined postfeminism as the main theoretical framework, drawing on the work of Angela McRobbie (2004, 2007, 2009) and Rosalind Gill (2007). Particular emphasis was placed on McRobbie's idea of 'double entanglement' in which elements of feminism are 'taken into account' and converted into an individual discourse of 'choice' and 'empowerment' to ensure that a new women's movement does not re-emerge (2009: 1). It was also noted how young women have been invited to take part in a 'new sexual contract' through education

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[20] It is still very difficult for women filmmakers to establish a body of work, as highlighted by Amma Asante's comments that her second feature film, *Belle*, was not completed until ten years after her debut *A Way of Life* (2004) (see Chapter Four).

and employment and the beauty industries (ibid: 72). Rosalind Gill also draws on the idea of a 'double entanglement' of feminist and anti-feminist ideas in her theory of a 'postfeminist sensibility' that pervades contemporary media products with its set of defining characteristics, including an 'obsessive preoccupation with the body'; individualism, choice and empowerment; and ' a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference' (2007: 147).

It was also noted how, McRobbie specifically positions postfeminism within the context of New Labour, where young women were mobilised on the 'values of meritocracy' and aspiration on the back of second-wave feminist gains in line with government rhetoric (2009: 58). This introduction has also examined the socio-political landscape following the financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent recession. Once again, women were deployed to embody government rhetoric as female resourcefulness was positioned as the 'right kind' of response to the recession through a thrifty, 'make do' spirit that evoked discourses of British wartime as a way of managing insecurity (Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 171). At the same time, there has been a resurgence of feminism, particularly visible within celebrity culture. This new kind of feminism is highly individualistic, whereby feminist notions of sexual inequality are made compatible with neoliberal market values.

I have also explored the context of British cinema since the millennium. There has been an emphasis on a more sustainable, commercially-minded industry that also produces culturally British films in line with the aspirational rhetoric of New Labour. It has also attempted to trace the changes to the industry since the Coalition government in 2010, who were responsible for the closure of the UK Film Council, noting that continuities in film policy remain despite this. This overview of the context of contemporary British cinema was necessary as the films discussed in this thesis span the range of contemporary British cinema, from micro-budget films, independent films that evoke and question British cinema's social realist tradition, to commercialised films aimed at a mainstream (young) audience. In their constructions of young femininity, these films are situated within, and respond to, current trends within contemporary British cinema. Moreover, this overview of the context of British cinema in the twenty-first century has demonstrated that notions of Britishness are still closely linked to masculinity and male homosociality, as

demonstrated through the privileging of films like *This is England* and *The King's Speech* in discussions about contemporary British cinema, despite a number of successful female-centred films appearing during this time. This therefore reinforces the need for this thesis' intervention in highlighting how the girl-centred films I explore here are actually a significant part of British cinema's output in the twenty first century and should be included in academic discussions of Britain's national cinema.

Methodology

This thesis explores how young femininity is constructed in contemporary British cinema using a dual approach of textual analysis and critical reception study, with additional analysis of paratextual materials, such as production notes, interviews and press books where appropriate. The purpose of this is to examine how contemporary discourses of girlhood are mediated and circulate *within* the film texts themselves and also *around* the films within the wider culture. This enables me to explore how these films both contribute to, and are informed by, wider debates circulating around girls and young women today, as well as understanding the cultural context in which contemporary British cinema currently operates. There are a number of concepts and ideas here that need unpacking in order to do this. This thesis is centrally concerned with issues of identity and representation, specifically in relation to young femininity but this is also frequently interlinked with issues of class. As Kathryn Woodward notes, 'Identities in the contemporary world derive from a multiplicity of sources – from nationality, ethnicity, social class, community, gender [and] sexuality' (1997: 1). Identity allows us as subjects to explore the relationship between ourselves and the positions we occupy in the social world (ibid). This means that identity is inextricably linked with representation. Representation is one of the key concepts in Media and Cultural Studies. Representation is a set of practices through which meanings are produced and through which individuals can make sense of their place in society and construct places from which they 'can position themselves and from which they can speak' (ibid: 14). In looking at how discourses of girlhood are mediated in contemporary British cinema, this thesis follows a discursive approach to representation from a social constructionist perspective where identities are perceived as socially constructed rather than biologically determined, and are

constructed through language and discourse. Discourses are a way of 'constructing knowledge about a particular topic or practices: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices' which provide ways of thinking or talking about topics, groups or institutional sites within society (Hall, 1997: xxii). Therefore, this discursive approach is concerned with the 'effects and consequences of representation' (ibid). Moreover, the idea that identities are constructed through discourse means that they are historically specific. Within this thesis, discourses of girlhood are located within, and informed by, the cultural moment defined as postfeminist, as well as the landscape of British cinema in the twenty first century, meaning that the young feminine identities constructed within the texts I explore are contingent on this particular historical moment.

It is also necessary to consider British cinema as a specific site of representation. The question of what is British national cinema has long been highly contentious (Leggott, 2008: 1). As Sarah Street notes, 'On the one hand, there is a British film industry with relatively clearly defined economic boundaries and methods of classification' but there is also a 'cultural conception' of what we mean by British cinema and the extent to which the films 'participate in establishing nationhood as a distinct, familiar sense of belonging which is shared by people from social or regional backgrounds' (2009: 1). As such, 'British cinema is, and always has been, a complex site of representation' (ibid: 126). For Andrew Higson, cinema is a 'cultural practice that engages in complex ways with the world in which its audience lives' (2011: 12). Leggott similarly notes how contemporary British cinema has responded to wider debates around gender, class, race and ethnicity through representations that are 'merely the latest manifestations of a long-running dialogue between a cinema, its people and the world at large' (2008: 83). Leggott also calls for 'greater emphasis on how contemporary films chronicle and illuminate British lives, places and experiences in the new millennium' (ibid: 112). With this in mind, this thesis examines young femininity within British cinema over a fifteen-year period within a British socio-political, cultural and economic climate. In doing so, I am following figures such as Hill (1999), Harper (2000) and Murphy (2000), who all locate their work within a specific period. My examination of young femininity in contemporary British cinema spans 2000-2015. This fifteen-year cycle creates a manageable periodization, although, of course, I am aware that many of the ideas, themes and

debates discussed in this thesis predate this period started, and will no doubt persist. I could have alternatively begun in 1997, with the election of New Labour, or framed the study around the global shift that occurred in 2001 following the attacks on the United States in September of that year (commonly referred to as 9/11). Likewise, I could have ended in 2010 with the end of New Labour. However, in continuing after the first decade of the millennium I am able to go beyond the framework set out by Louise Wilks, who ends her study of female sexuality in British cinema in 2009. This allows me to take into greater consideration the impact of the 2008 economic crash and subsequent recession, as well as tracing the impact of the political changes that took place with the introduction of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. This includes changes within the British film industry itself, such as the closure of the UK Film Council in 2011, in order to provide a thorough understanding of how young femininity is constructed in British cinema in the twenty-first century. This approach is in line with Higson's assertion that cinema 'engages in complex ways with the world in which the audiences lives' (2011: 12). This also informs my use of the term 'mediate' in order to acknowledge the complex relationship between film and society, and the idea that, although British cinema engages with the world in which the audience lives, it is not a straightforward reflection of society (Chapman, Harper and Glancy, 2007: 5).

 I define 'young femininity' in British cinema as relating to female protagonists aged between fifteen and twenty-five. This is in line with the demographic categories used in areas such as advertising that define people under the age of twenty five as 'young people'. However, as Anita Harris points out, not only does this highlight the problem of implying a natural, fixed, state of being for that category' (2004: 191), but also that that the category of 'girl' extends beyond that which I have identified through the presence of the tween-age girl - aged between nine and fourteen - and the girling of older women in their thirties and forties within popular culture (ibid). Utilising this demographic category, therefore, enables me to create manageable research boundaries while exploring as wide a range of texts as possible.

In order to determine the most appropriate case studies for this thesis, I compiled a filmography using every issue of *Sight and Sound* published since the year 2000 as the publication is part of the British Film Institute and lists every film released in the

UK. Firstly, I sought to identify British films from this period, noting those that *Sight and Sound* identify as UK productions. *Wild Child*, discussed in Chapter Two, and *The Other Boleyn Girl*, discussed in Chapter Four, are listed as UK-US co-productions but they are very much rooted within a British cultural context. I then used the synopsis provided for each film to determine whether the film features a young female protagonist. I then viewed the films to discern the recurring themes, which informed the structuring of the thematic chapters. I identified the four strongest examples of each theme that would act as the case studies for each chapter and carried out textual analysis and critical reception study for these films. As part of the textual analysis, I considered the use of visual and audio elements, such as camera, lighting and sound, and how these form the mise-en-scène, and how this, in turn, contributes to the films' constructions of young femininity. The critical reception study allows me to gain a greater insight into the cultural context into which the films are received. These reviews act as types of 'social discourse' (Klinger, 1994: 69) that enable me to discern how contemporary discourses of girlhood circulate around the films in the broader media culture, and how the reviews are both informed by and produce ideas about young femininity in the twenty first century. In carrying out this critical reception study I used Nexis news search to obtain articles and film reviews for each of my chosen case study films. I limited my sample to UK newspapers only, as this thesis considers the films within a British cultural context and how this informs their production and reception. I then identified recurring themes and discourses, particularly relating to girlhood, in order to examine the films' production and reception discourses and how these impact upon contemporary British cinema's constructions of young femininity.

Thesis structure

Chapter One explores the figure of the ambitious girl in the contemporary British sports film. In doing so, this chapter examines how the dominant construction of twenty-first century girlhood – the 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004) - is mediated in three sports films: *Fast Girls* (Hall, 2012), *Chalet Girl* (Traill, 2011) *and StreetDance 3D* (Giwa and Pasquini). Although the range of sports depicted is diverse, including athletics, snowboarding and street dance, these films are considered sports films on the basis that they use 'sports themes as their plot dynamic' (Cashmore, 2000: 132).

'Can-do' girls are the 'girls with the "world at their feet", identifiable by their commitment to exceptional careers… their belief in their capacity to succeed, and their display of a consumer lifestyle' (Harris, 2004: 14), and this chapter begins by drawing on work by Leslie Heywood (2007) and Katherina Lindner (2013) in its discussion of how the neoliberal discourse of the 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004) can be incorporated into representations of women's sports. This chapter explores how this discourse is mediated in the aforementioned films both on-screen and in their respective production and reception discourses. I explore how neoliberal 'can-do' (ibid) discourses are conveyed through the films' glossy aesthetics, and the prominence of branding, which are positioned as antithesis of a 'typical' British film. This is particularly evident within the critical reception for *StreetDance*, which is praised for its unrecognisably aspirational presentation of London. These films also explore British class hierarchies, in which it is suggested the working-class protagonist will be hindered due to her lack of economic status, but this is eventually overcome in line with the neoliberal ideas promoted by the films.

The final case study in this chapter explores the can-do girl's unsuccessful counterpart, the 'at-risk' girl (Harris, 2004), through a study of Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank* (2009). I explore how Mia's (Katie Jarvis) dance ambitions are represented in relation to the discourses outlined above, and how Mia is constructed as an 'at-risk' girl who, unlike the other characters discussed in this chapter, is unlikely to achieve her dreams. In addition, I focus on how the film's critical reception constructs Katie Jarvis as an 'at-risk' girl who transitions into a 'can-do' girl through her successful performance. While *Fish Tank*, as a film in the British social realist mode, would not usually be considered in the same manner as the other films in this chapter, its inclusion here highlights the specific ways in which discourses of girls' ambitions are mediated as part of a dialogue about what it means to be a British ambitious girl.

Chapter Two asserts there has been a rise in the British girls' school film in the contemporary period, in line with British cinema's increased interest in girls and girlhood more broadly. The chapter begins by outlining some of the discourses surrounding girls' education in the twenty first century; particularly the idea that the figure of the ambitious, successful girl explored in the previous chapter exists alongside a competing moral panic over the 'sexualisation' of young girls (Ringrose,

2013: 142). In this chapter I argue that the enclosed space of the same-sex school functions as a site through which to explore anxieties about girls' sexuality and 'sexualisation'. Firstly, I discuss two contemporary-set films – *St Trinian's* (Parker and Thompson, 2007) and *Wild Child* (Moore, 2008) – both of which are aimed at young girls. The schools in these films are presented as relics from a past era, but often inherent within this is a critique of twenty-first century schooling concerning the limitations of the National Curriculum. Moreover, I explore how *St Trinian's* positions the idea of the rebellious and unruly St Trinian's girl in line with contemporary girl power discourses in its mediation of a British postfeminist feminine identity. *Wild Child* similarly constructs a specifically British postfeminist identity through the juxtaposition between the British schoolgirls and the American Poppy (Emma Roberts). While both of these films engage with ideas about girls' sexualisation, I argue the characters are not as sexually knowing or experienced as they wish to be, or as the 'sexualisation' discourse suggests, and films' reception discourses similarly demonstrate that the films are not viewed as colluding with these moral panics.

The second section of this chapter discusses two girls' school films set in the 1960s: *An Education* (Scherfig, 2009) and *The Falling* (Morley, 2014). These films explore girls' sexuality in relation to the changing mores of the 1960s, and concerns about promiscuity and increased female sexual autonomy. Despite their period setting, I demonstrate how a number of parallels can be drawn between these concerns in the 1960s and the contemporary discourses surrounding girls' sexuality discussed in this chapter. I explore how Jenny (Carey Mulligan) in *An Education* is depicted as having a twenty-first century attitude towards sex, and how engaging in sexual activity potentially costs her education. I end with a case study of *The Falling*, in which I explore how the film engages with the Ophelia narrative and the figure of the hysterical adolescent girl in its exploration of girlhood sexuality. I demonstrate how *The Falling* refuses to adhere to this notion of 'girl-as-victim', instead presenting the institution as a place that stifles female creativity.

Chapter Three looks at friendships between pairs of girls using Alison Winch's (2013) concept of the 'postfeminist sisterhood' as its framework. Winch argues that, despite postfeminist culture being 'theorised as being "anti-connectivity"'

(McRobbie, 2009; Negra, 2009), there has been a proliferation of contemporary media products that emphasise 'female sociality' (2013: 2). Therefore, Winch suggests, girlfriendship in postfeminist culture is strategic in that girlfriends 'support each other in striving for "representability" (Negra, 2009) and the perfect self' (ibid). This chapter examines the depictions of female friendship in four contemporary British films: *Me Without You* (Goldbacher, 2001), *Kicks* (Heymann, 2008), *Albatross* (MacCormick, 2011) and *My Summer of Love* (Pawlikowski, 2004) to examine ways in which these friendships are depicted as having an impact upon the formation of the characters' identities, and the extent to which these friendships help to produce the ideal postfeminist identity and the 'perfect self' (Winch, 2013: 2). The makeover trope is crucial here, and all of the films engage with this in some way. These films eschew the idea of the girl as 'empowered consumer' (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 2) as the makeovers are facilitated by hand-me-downs and clothes swaps. However, rather than producing the 'perfect' postfeminist self by revealing the 'true self' that has been there all along (Negra, 2009: 124), these makeovers are deemed to be temporary and inauthentic and fail to lead to the postfeminist 'perfect self' (Winch, 2013: 2). This is particularly the case for the working-class characters, such Nicole (Kerrie Hayes) in *Kicks* and Mona (Natalie Press) in *My Summer of Love*, who are shown to *know* that they will not achieve this, despite their best efforts. Moreover, this chapter also explores the importance of authorial discourse in these films in both their production and reception, constructing, what I refer to as, retrospective depictions of girlhood. I therefore assess the impact this notion of retrospective girlhood has on the films' depictions of teenage girl friendship.

Chapter Four draws on discourses of girlhood discussed in previous chapters in order to examine the construction of young femininity in the historical film centred around royal or aristocratic young women in the pre-1900s. I begin by briefly discussing *Elizabeth* (Kapur, 1998). Although *Elizabeth* falls outside this thesis' periodization, the film was a significant influence on the films studied here as part of a cycle of historical films 'filtered through the lens of the postfeminist movement' (Vidal, 2012: 105). I explore the production discourses for these films that emphasise the idea of a deliberate move away from the Merchant Ivory style of British heritage films as part of the films' attempts to construct these well-known historical figures as 'twenty-first century girls'. The first case study is *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Chadwick,

2008), in which I argue the film constructs Anne Boleyn (Natalie Portman) as an ambitious 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004). The film's critique of this is ambiguous as, on the one hand, it questions whether Anne's need to 'have it all' was the cause of her downfall, while also presenting her as a victim of controlling patriarchal forces. The next case study is *The Young Victoria* (Vallée, 2009), a film that is deliberately targeted at the teenage market. There is a particular emphasis on being and becoming, as Victoria (Emily Blunt) transitioning from 'ordinary' girl to 'Queen of England'. However, this chapter argues Victoria's power is ultimately neutralised through the idea of her 'modern' and 'equal' marriage to Prince Albert (Rupert Friend), whom she must let share her work.

The second section of this chapter explores depictions of two aristocratic young women. It begins with a study of *The Duchess* (Dibb, 2008), exploring the film's use of the Diana narrative, which, although evident in all these films, is most prominent here as the film's marketing and reception discourses draw on the ancestral link between Princess Diana and Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (Keira Knightley). This section also explores the importance of image construction through the film's evoking of ideas about postfeminist consumption and celebrity culture through the presentation of Georgiana as a fashion icon of her day. Although clothes are shown to be Georgiana's way of expressing herself, the film points to the deliberately constructed nature of Georgiana's image. Once again, this highlights the idea that clothes do not produce the 'true self'. In addition, as with *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Georgiana is unable to 'have it all', as she must give up love in order to perform her public duty, ensuring that she remains trapped.

The final case study is Amma Asante's *Belle* (2013). Here issues of race and gender intersect through the film's woman of colour protagonist Dido Belle (Gugu Mibatha Raw), who is presented as influencing the outcome of the Zong ship trial and highlighting the issue of slavery through her relationship with her uncle, Judge Lord Mansfield. Unlike the other films in this chapter, the productions discourses for *Belle* highlight a deliberate attempt to adhere to heritage conventions through the creation of a recognisably classic Jane Austen-style world in order to acknowledge that Dido's story is unusual within the genre. Dido also experiences a crisis of identity, but this is due to the fact that she cannot see herself represented within the 18th

century aristocracy, which in turn highlights the issue of lack of representation of people of colour within the genre more broadly. However, as with *The Young Victoria*, any political issues raised within the film are ultimately subsumed into a love story narrative. Overall, these films raise pertinent questions about women's freedom and power, and the idea that attempting to maintain postfeminist ideals leads to anxiety and a fragmented sense of identity. However, these become depoliticised through either being subsumed into a love story or merely accepted.

Finally, I conclude by summarising how the depictions of girlhood in these films help us to understand postfeminism within a specifically British context. I also highlight how, despite some elements of subversion, the majority of films depict young female identity as normative - that is white and middle-class - in line with postfeminist ideals.

<center>**Chapter One**</center>

<center>**'It's my time now': The Ambitious Girl and the British Sports Film**</center>

Introduction

This chapter will explore the construction of the figure of the ambitious girl in the contemporary British female sports film through case studies of *Fast Girls* (Hall, 2012), *Chalet Girl* (Traill, 2011) and *StreetDance 3D* (Giwa and Pasquini, 2010) and *Fish Tank* (2009). The types of sports represented in these films are varied, including athletics, snowboarding and street dance. In order to reflect this, I have chosen to define the sports film in an equally broad fashion. In using the term 'sports film', I am drawing upon Ellis' (2000) definition of the term as films that use 'sports themes as their plot dynamic' (Cashmore, 2000: 132). I have included dance within the category of sport due to the fact that street dance, as it is presented in the film, is a form of 'competitive dance' (Lindner, 2013: 245) in line with the other forms of competition evident in *Fast Girls* and *Chalet Girl*, while also acknowledging that dance has a particular focus on performance and spectacle.[21] Moreover, Cashmore's generous definition enables me to examine not only the films mentioned above but also Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank*. I am not claiming the film can be called a 'typical' sports film, nor am I ignoring the film's social realist elements. However, the fact that the film's narrative is centred around a girl who dreams of escaping her current situation through dance means the film falls in line with Cashmore's definition. As will be shown, *Fish Tank* is a particularly interesting film to discuss in relation to the ambitious girl as the film's protagonist can clearly be viewed as an 'at-risk' girl and the film provides an important point of contrast when considered in relation to this chapter's other case study films and their 'can-do' girl protagonists, who all achieve their dreams and desires. Its inclusion here highlights the specific ways in which discourses of girls' ambitions are mediated as part of a dialogue about what it means to be a British ambitious girl. Glen Jones asserts that 'Often the British sports film portrays sport as a means through which individuals attempt to overcome their social

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[21] The idea of the (female) dancer as spectacle is explored in more detail later on.

situation or problems' such as racism, sexism, class and gender (2005: 34). Therefore, this chapter will examine the figure of the ambitious girl within the contemporary British sports film, looking at how this figure is mediated within a specifically British context, and how this articulation of girlhood intersects with issues of race and class. This is particularly evident within this chapter's first case study, *Fast Girls*, where these issues are woven in amongst the film's feel-good, aspirational aesthetics.

The sports film has not nearly been as prominent within British cinema as in Hollywood (Barr, 2003: 630). However, the British sports film has become more prominent in the twenty first century, particularly the female-centred sports film.[22] This includes films such as *Bend It Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002), *Freestyle* (Lee, 2010), *Fast Girls* (Hall, 2012), *Chalet Girl* (Traill, 2011) and *StreetDance* (Giwa and Pasquini, 2010).[23] This increase in female sports films is clearly a response to the wider political and cultural significance of the figure of the girl in the twenty-first century, which was outlined in the introduction. Crucially, the female sports film is seen to exemplify the intertwining of neoliberal and postfeminist discourses that constitute contemporary girlhood (Lindner, 2013: 238). Gill and Scharff have highlighted how the 'autonomous, self-calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism' (2011: 7). This (false) idea of free 'choice' is particularly important. According to Ulrich Beck, in the contemporary era the individual becomes the 'agent' of their own livelihood through the 'historically unprecedented *do-it-yourself biography*' (original emphasis), where each person's life biography is seen as their own responsibility and removed from the influence of external factors such as race or class (1992: 135). It is this idea of the 'choice biography' that is crucial to postfeminist discourses, particularly those centred around young women, as she alone is held responsible for her individual success, or

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[22] This is not unique to British cinema, as Katherina Lindner also notes 'notable increase in female sports films over the last 20 years' in Hollywood cinema, which she attributes to 'the increased visibility of female athletes in the media landscape and with the emergence of postfeminist discourses' (2013: 238).
[23] I have chosen not to include *Bend It Like Beckham* as a case study within this chapter as it has been discussed extensively elsewhere. See, for example, Ashby (2005; 2010).

potential failure - although she is expected to ensure this does not happen (Gill, 2007: 154). Leslie Heywood explores how these postfeminist neoliberal discourses are successfully incorporated into representations of women's sport through an examination of US government sports programs, which promote the idea of the healthy and successful young woman. Heywood draws on the idea of the neoliberal 'choice biography' to argue that within these programs sport is presented as a place where 'young girls learn to take responsibility for their own lives – a responsibility that has care of the body for health and "success" at its core' (2007: 104). She also asserts that behaviours that could lead to the formation of an 'at-risk' girl, such as drugs, alcohol and pregnancy are risks that sport can 'solve' (ibid: 107). For Heywood, 'the ideal image of female athletes perfectly incorporates the ideal of the new, can-do, DIY, take responsibility-for-yourself subject' (ibid: 113). The female athlete is the 'perfect representative agency for this idea of success, the "can do" mapped directly onto her biceps' (ibid).

Heywood draws on Anita Harris' (2004) concept of the 'can-do' girl – and her 'at-risk' girl counterpart – outlined in the introduction to this thesis. It is worth reiterating these ideas briefly as they are central to analysis of the British female sport film in this chapter. The 'can-do' girls are the 'girls with the "world at their feet", identifiable by their commitment to exceptional careers… their belief in their capacity to succeed, and their display of a consumer lifestyle' (Harris, 2004: 14). The opposite of the 'can-do' girls are the 'at-risk' girls. These girls are considered to be 'failures in the making' (ibid: 25), vulnerable due to their circumstances, often living in poverty, with few opportunities and more likely to indulge in 'inappropriate consumption behaviours' such as drug or alcohol abuse. They are also more likely to become pregnant at a young age (ibid: 14). Moreover, Harris claims 'successful achievement' of 'can-do' status is 'constructed as a mainstream experience for young women, and failure is deemed to be the consequence of an individual limitation' (ibid: 16). Inherent within this is the idea that 'good choices, effort, and ambition alone are responsible for success' which separates the 'can-dos' from the 'at-risks' (ibid). Therefore, with their feel-good narratives of desire, determination and success, and typically aspirational aesthetics, the female-centred sports film is ideally placed to examine the dominant construction of 'can-do' girlhood.

'I look good and I run fast: *Fast Girls* (2012)

Fast Girls tells the story of Shania Andrews (Lenora Crichlow), an unfunded mixed race athlete who trains with her neighbour on the council estate where she lives. After narrowly beating middle-class Lisa Temple (Lily James) in the qualifiers for the World Championships in the 200 meters, Shania is 'spotted' and asked to join the relay team, where her rivalry with Lisa intensifies. *Fast Girls* was co-written by Noel Clarke, along with Jay Basu and Roy Williams. Prior to *Fast Girls*, Clarke had recently directed the crime-thriller film *4.3.2.1* (2012) starring Tamsin Egerton and Emma Roberts, which centres around four young women whose lives spin out of control after a chance encounter with a diamond thief. However, Clarke is arguably most known for his work writing, starring in – and later directing - the films *Kidulthood* (Huda, 2008) and its sequel *Adulthood* (Clarke, 2008), about gang culture in West London. *Fast Girls* is Reagan Hall's debut feature film; his previous work comprising of mostly fashion commercials. The film was produced with finance from the BFI Film Fund, Ageis and StudioCanal. Despite being a low-budget film, *Fast Girls* was clearly intended to have mainstream, commercial appeal. In the film's production notes producer Damian Jones discusses how it was important to highlight the film's 'universal' themes and appeal in order to convince the funding bodies that it could do well outside the UK (Optimum Releasing, 2012: 6). This is particularly evident in the film's narrative, which is keeping with the contemporary Hollywood sports film, as outlined in the introduction.[24] As such, *Fast Girls* – like *Chalet Girl* and *StreetDance* – is clearly aimed at teenage audiences, and the producers acknowledge the 'ground-breaking role that films like *Kidulthood, Adulthood* and *StreetDance 3D* have played in attracting those all-important youth audiences' (ibid) and in doing so, paving the way for *Fast Girls*. This acknowledgement of the importance of youth audiences is indicative of a seemingly more concentrated effort to attract younger audiences by the British film industry from the mid-2000s.[25] This was also evident in the deliberate choice of Reagan Hall

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[24] Despite this, the film did not achieve the levels of intended success in the UK or elsewhere.
[25] This deliberate attempt to attract younger audiences is also evident within the next chapter's discussions of *St Trinian's* (2007) and *Wild Child* (2008).

as director, whose background in commercials enabled him to create a very glossy aesthetic. As producer Damian Jones asserts, "It was never going to be a grimy version of Britain with Regan at the helm - it was always going to be heightened and celebratory" (ibid), a comment that is indicative both of the idea that social realism is British cinema's dominant mode, and that the film attempts to move away from this.[26]

Upon its release in June 2012, a release date that was carefully orchestrated to coincide with the London 2012 Olympics that summer, *Fast Girls* was billed as the 'sporty successor to *Bend It Like Beckham*' (Keogh, 2012). This comparison to Gurinder Chadha's hit film about two girls from different ethnic backgrounds who overcome various barriers to achieve sporting success is inevitable from a marketing perspective. However, there are a number of differences between the two films, particularly in relation to issues of race and class, that mark *Fast Girls* as a film that has been created and released during notably different political, economic and social climate from the moment of *Bend It Like Beckham*. In her article, 'Postfeminism in the British Frame' Justine Ashby describes *Bend It Like Beckham* as a 'girl power' film that reflects the 'snug fit' between postfeminism and the New Labour government in the UK during early part of the previous decade (2005: 128). For Ashby, 'girl power' is associated with the pop group the Spice Girls who used the phrase as their slogan during the late 1990s. She argues that 'girl power' came to be associated with Blair's Britain but was also depoliticised. It was also notably contradictory, linking 'being sexy with being ballsy' and celebrating 'female camaraderie while privileging individualism' (ibid: 129). In her analysis of *Bend It Like Beckham*, Ashby asserts that the film's 'upbeat, postfeminist message' assuages a number of more fraught social issues (ibid: 130). For the film's middle class female protagonists, the biggest threat to their sporting ambitions is their mothers, who are 'laughably *pre*feminist' (ibid). While *Fast Girls* contains a similar 'upbeat postfeminist message' to the one identified by Ashby in *Bend It Like Beckham* (Ashby, 2005: 130), as will be evident in my analysis of the film, the issue of class is

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[26] Vicky Ball also highlights this idea that British texts struggle with oversees audiences due to being associated with 'dark' and 'gritty' aesthetics and narratives (2012: 35), which reinforces the filmmakers' desire to move away from this and create something more 'universal'.

established as the biggest threat to Shania's ambitions from the outset, even if the barriers of class are eventually overcome. This emphasis on class, particularly economic disadvantage, acknowledges the film's place within a UK that is still experiencing the effects of a global recession. Despite the overall celebratory tone of the film, this renewed emphasis on class is indicative of the diverse range of media texts produced since 2008 where 'wealth and inequality emerg[e] as key themes' (Negra and Tasker, 2014: 10). In *Fast Girls* this is most apparent through the juxtaposition of Shania and Lisa.

At the beginning of the film, Shania is coded as one of Harris' (2004) 'at-risk' girls: She comes from a disadvantaged background, living on a council estate in London with her aunt following the death of her mother. Running is a means of escape for Shania; it provides her with something to aim for, even if she lacks suitable facilities, having to train on a derelict racetrack. By contrast, when we are introduced to Lisa she is in a brightly lit bedroom surrounded by trophies. Lisa clearly has, what Barbara Schneider and David Stevenson refer to as '*aligned ambitions*' (2000: 22) (original emphasis). Although Schneider and Stevenson explore young people's ambitions in relation to education, their ideas are applicable to the young women within this chapter. They claim that young people with aligned ambitions:

> know what type of job they want and how much education they need to get it. They are more likely to select a path or construct a life plan that enhances their chances of reaching their occupational goals…and…use familial and organizational resources (ibid).

This idea clearly references the aforementioned idea of the neoliberal 'choice biography' (Beck, 1992) whereby one is expected to plan one's life and take responsibility for one's own actions and choices. The numerous trophies in Lisa's room suggest that not only does she plan her goals by choosing the right competitions to enter to advance her career but she also meets her goals by winning. Her ability to achieve her goals is facilitated by the use of 'familial and organizational resources' (Schneider and Stevenson, 2000: 22), as her father is a former professional athlete. He is also head of the athletics funding body, and he constantly ensures that she meets her targets. In addition, her family's financial advantages enable her to own the best training equipment, unlike Shania. For

example, she is given new trainers, which enables her to improve professionally while also being able to participate in consumer culture, thus ensuring that the neoliberal ideal is met.

This construction of Lisa as ambitious is also evident within the film's critical reception. She is often referred to as 'ambitious Lisa', an epithet that more often than not followed by the words 'middle-class' or 'posh' (Bond, 2012; Keogh, 2012). Shania, however, is not referred to specifically as ambitious; she is viewed as 'feisty' or 'talented' (Bond, 2012). The emphasis on Lisa's ambition in a way that is specifically linked to her class suggests that ambition is a middle-class trait. This reinforces the idea that only girls who have access to the right resources can become ambitious 'can-do' girls, while those who don't are assumed to be future failures. As Harris asserts, 'at-risk' girls are 'unlikely to be middle class' (2004: 25). Her middle-class background and her status as a 'can-do' girl mean that Lisa's success is assumed and assured. However, the film is keen to point out that this is not the case for someone from Shania's background. A key scene in this respect is when Shania tells her sister Tara (Tiana Benjamin) about the funding event she is attending with the other girls in the relay team. When Tara tells Shania not to get her hopes up, Shania assumes that her concerns are to do with race and points out that 'lots of black athletes get funding'. Tara acknowledges this but adds that the funding event will be 'full of rich white men and you've got Primark written all over you'. Tara's comments here raise an interesting point about the film in relation to class and race. This exchange suggests the film acknowledges the relationship between race and sport, but ultimately prioritises class as the biggest barrier to success.

In associating Shania with Primark, a low budget high street clothing store, Tara is suggesting that it will not be her race that prevents Shania from securing funding but rather her class, as she is unable to participate in the consumer culture that separates the 'can-do' girls like Lisa from the 'at-risk' girls. The reference to low-budget clothing store Primark is interesting here. The following chapter references the UK's 'Primarni culture' (Wilks, 2012: 110), in which stores like Primark enable girls to participate in postfeminist consumer culture on a limited budget. As is evident throughout this thesis, in British cinema's girl-centred films the postfeminist 'makeover' is constructed via inexpensive or second-hand clothing. This is often in

opposition to American postfeminist culture, which is characterised by an emphasis on 'excessive' consumption and high-end branding. However, in this line the use of Primark to achieve 'appropriate' femininity is evoked negatively as an indicator of class and low economic status. There is also the acknowledgement that Shania's path to success is determined by patriarchal capitalism, because 'rich white men' will ultimately make the decision as to whether or not she can have a career in athletics. This remark emphasises the main problem with the postfeminist neoliberal 'choice biography', which assumes that the individual is responsible for their own success, without considering the impact of economic and social factors (Beck, 1992: 135). Moreover, the implication that race is not as much of an 'issue' within the film as class highlights one of the ways in which *Fast Girls* differs from *Bend It Like Beckham*, in which it is suggested that Jess' (Parminder Nagra) Indian background (and the notions of traditional femininity associated with this) that acts as a potential barrier to her footballing success and not her class, as she is from a middle-class background. In the film's production notes producer Damian Jones discusses the various 'challenges' that the film faced. This included having to "sell the idea of a mixed race lead actress", leading him to believe that *Fast Girls* is the "first major feature film in the UK to have a mixed race female lead" (Optimum Releasing, 2012: 5). Therefore, while the film may not present Shania's race as an issue, Jones' comments suggest that this is not necessarily the case within the British film industry itself, which, like the athletics funding body in the film, is led by 'rich white men'.

Shania's self-conscious awareness is all too apparent at the funding event, where she is seen drinking excessively in an attempt to become less nervous. She also worries about her appearance, suggested by the way in which she constantly tries to pull her dress down to make it seem longer. The implication here is that Shania is trying to make herself appear more respectable, bringing to mind Beverley Skeggs' assertion that 'Respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class… [and] is usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it' (1997: 1). Furthermore, Shania's excessive drinking the night before a race along with her aggressive attitude reinforce the idea of her potential to be an 'at-risk' girl because she indulges in 'risky behaviours' most associated with her class that could jeopardises her success (Heywood, 2007: 107). It also points towards a lack of the type of personal responsibility that is so important within the figure of the ambitious girl.

While the characters, particularly Lisa, are constructed as ambitious within the film, this discourse of ambition also runs through the film's promotional materials. In an interview for the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, actress Lorraine Burroughs, who plays Trix Warren, discusses the gruelling regime she and her fellow actresses were forced to adopt prior to filming. This included 'a six-week training camp, led by real-life sprinters Jeanette Kwakye and Shani Anderson… thousands of sit-ups', injuries and a rigid diet (Keogh, 2012). This emphasis on the sheer effort the cast displayed conveys a sense of their ambition and determination, implying that, as actors, they went above and beyond in order to give as realistic performance as possible as relay athletes. Similarly, the film's production notes devote a large amount of space to detailing the training they completed. In addition to this, the production notes detail how, as well as being able to move like professional athletes, the cast were expected to change their bodies so that they also *looked* like athletes. Director Regan Hall notes how 'Lily [James] worked incredibly hard to bring her body into sprinter-form… she was in the corner doing sit-ups just before going on camera' (Optimum Releasing, 2012). James' dedication to achieving the ideal athletic body reflects her own status as a 'can-do' girl, who knows exactly how to behave in order to reach her goal, while looking the part at the same time, further blurring the distinction between her character's ambition and her own. Furthermore, the production notes also include a section entitled 'Get as fit as the "*Fast Girls*"', with tips from on the best exercises and diet from Jeanette Kwakye and Shani Anderson, which also encourages the audience to, rather ambitiously, achieve the physicality of an athlete.

As well as achieving the physicality of an athlete, the cast of *Fast Girls* were also expected to look 'sexy'. This is incorporated within the film's narrative, as the girls are shown applying make-up before a race, with Belle (Lashana Lynch) proudly declaring, 'I look good and I run fast'. However, this idea of the 'glamorous athlete' is also firmly embedded within the film's aesthetics. This is facilitated in no small part by the choice of Regan Hall as director, who achieves a very glossy and stylised look despite the film's relatively small budget. This was achieved through the use of long lenses and high-key lighting, while also ensuring that that outdoor scenes were shot towards the sunlight to create a bright and glamorous aesthetic, even though filming took place in the middle of a typically British winter (ibid). This glamour

was also inscribed upon the actors, as Lorraine Burroughs notes how Hall had the ability to direct an actress to move their "chin in a certain direction and make [them] look like Cleopatra" (ibid). This is an interesting comparison as it implies that, as well as achieving a realistic athlete's bodies, the actresses could also convey an image of ultimate glamorous femininity, and that this was as easy to achieve as simply moving one's chin. This combination of athleticism and glamour points to what Lindner refers to as the 'careful monitoring of the female body' within the sports context (2013: 239), which serves to allay fears over the 'masculinization' of the female athlete's body. It also, Lindner suggests, can be linked to broader ideas within postfeminist culture about 'femininity as a bodily property that needs to be continually "worked on", monitored and controlled' (ibid: 244).[27] The idea that it is possible, and necessary, to achieve professional success while maintaining traditional beauty ideals is also evident within Angela McRobbie's work on 'top girls'. McRobbie argues that the construction of today's young women relies heavily on the upholding of the 'post-feminist masquerade' (McRobbie, 2007: 723). McRobbie draws on Joan Riviere's (1929) concept of the 'feminine masquerade', whereby women who wish to possess typically masculine traits put on a 'mask of womanliness' in order to avert feared retribution from men (Riviere, 1986: 35). McRobbie argues that the post-feminist masquerade is a way of ensuring that gender norms are adhered to by encouraging today's successful young women abide by the rules set out by the fashion and beauty industries, which act as a substitute for patriarchal authority within a modern context where male approval is not openly sought (McRobbie, 2007: 724). This is particularly evident within Belle's line mentioned above because it implies that her desire to look good through the use of make-up is both freely chosen and self-pleasing, and also arguably necessary for her to achieve success. However, in McRobbie's definition of the post-feminist masquerade femininity is excessively stylised in order to mute the threat posed by the independent young woman with a successful career (ibid: 725). This is not

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[27] This link between female athletes and the beauty industry is also evident in selecting of athletes such as Jessica Ennis as beauty brand ambassadors before and after London 2012. In promoting her work with cosmetics brand Olay, Ennis claimed she always wears make-up to compete, as it makes her feel more confident (Arthurs, 2012), implying that looking good – and appropriately feminine - is important for professional success.

wholly applicable to Belle, though, as her athletic body is constantly on display and as such its power is never entirely muted.

According to Katherina Lindner, in the postfeminist context of contemporary female-centred sports films, the protagonists 'tend to be rather isolated figures… [T]hey tend to be cut off from the other female characters and there is often no hint of a sense of community, female bonding or for shared achievement or fun that sports provide' (2013: 242). This, Lindner argues, is also the case with films featuring teams sports, and the figure of the isolated female athlete is in keeping with the postfeminist notion of depoliticised individualism (ibid: 243). *Fast Girls* seemingly adheres to this as Lisa and Shania are divided and ambition is presented as an individual endeavour. Shania marks herself out as an individual athlete by claiming she is 'not good with teams', which is the cause of the majority of narrative conflict within the film; while Lisa announces she 'doesn't come to make friends'. This individualism is also seemingly embedded within the sporting world of the film as it revealed that much of the relay team's funding problems stem from the fact that team sports aren't funded as much as individual pursuits. Although the idea of ambition as individualistic is very much in keeping with postfeminism's ideals, the film makes it clear that the girls can only be successful once they learn to work together. This is emphasised in a scene where Shania and Lisa practice exchanging the baton, with Lisa conceding that she should give up her preferred position as anchor in order to make the most of Shania's strengths. The scene plays like a training montage – a staple of the sports film – where the protagonist is shown repeating the same action over and over in order to improve in time for a competition (Boyd, 2007: 74). Shania and Lisa's training montage takes place in a car park at night, away from the glossy, corporate space of the stadium. The dark and empty car park is a marked contrast to their usual training environment, providing a neutral space in which class divides and rivalries are diminished in favour of teamwork and friendship. The importance of female bonding is also emphasised when the girls go for a night out in an effort to help Shania and Lisa put aside their rivalry. During this scene, which I argue can be read as a critique of sexist 'lad culture', they are subject

to unwanted attention from a group of men.[28] The men then surround Lisa in a threatening manner, claiming she has 'ice in her knickers' when she rejects their advances. The atmosphere turns hostile as the men attempt to chase after the girls but they take off their high heels and outrun the men by a considerable distance in a slow-motion celebratory sequence.[29] This scene is highlighted within the film's critical reception (Barnett, 2012; Bond, 2012), where it is remarked that the men are 'satisifying[ly]… relegated to the punchline' (Collin, 2012). The girls' rejection of the men and their novel way of responding to sexist comments is a refreshing way of critiquing the common postfeminist trope whereby young women are expected to be 'in on the joke' regarding sexist and sexualised comments due to postfeminism's reliance on irony and the idea that girls must constantly present themselves as sexually available and "up for it" (Gill, 2007: 151), while still retaining the film's 'feel-good' essence. Moreover, in running away together, this scene is a key moment in the film where the girls are truly united for the first time.

As well as individualism, the film is also critical of patriarchal structures, as exemplified by Lisa's father (Rupert Greaves). Keen that his daughter should replicate his success as an athlete he uses his position and wealth to prioritise her training and criticises her when she doesn't win a gold medal, telling her this is 'our last chance'. However, despite their previously close relationship, Lisa ultimately rejects his attempts to relive his success through her, assertively announcing 'It's my time now', and she ignores his advice in order to do what is best for the whole team. Lisa's only true support comes from her mother, who, unlike her father, doesn't pressure her, preferring that Lisa try her best, even if that means she isn't *the* best. She is also the person who Lisa turns to when the team wins the competition at the end of the film. This figure of the supportive mother is relatively unusual in texts centred around young women, as a number of films within the corpus of this research are notable for the fact that the mother is either absent or dead, and those that do feature within the lives of the young female protagonist are often shown to be so useless that their presence is not wanted – it is the father who usually provides

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[28] 'Lad culture' is defined as 'competitive male chauvinism disguising itself as "harmless banter"' (Phipps, 2014), and is often discussed in relation to higher education and university life.
[29] The film's title is also indicative of this as 'fast girls' can be interpreted literally as 'girls who run fast' but it also has connotations of sexual availability.

support for the postfeminist young woman and teenager. As Melanie Kennedy argues in her work on tween popular culture, in postfeminist texts, 'ultimately the father provides the best guidance in the teenage girl's "becoming" a young woman' (2012: 142). This emphasis on the father is also evident in Ashby's analysis of *Bend It Like Beckham*, where she claims that it is the 'laughably *pre*feminist' mothers' who present one of the biggest obstacles to the girls' sporting ambitions in their effort to coerce them into traditionally feminine activities (2005: 130). Therefore, like its emphasis on the collective rather than the individual, the film's representation of a supportive mother is another subtle example of *Fast Girls'* attempts to move away from certain postfeminist ideas, even if it does not entirely reject them. The film's stance is reinforced within its final image of the euphoric relay team standing together with the Union Jack flag draped over their shoulders – it is a celebration of Britishness, with Britain presented as a multicultural utopia, where issues of class and race are ultimately dissolved due to hard work and team spirit.

'Top girls', posh girls and *Chalet Girl*(s) (2011)

As with *Fast Girls*, issues of class are also prominent within *Chalet Girl*. 19-year-old Kim (Felicity Jones) is a former skateboarding champion who gave up competing after the death of her mother. With her hapless father (Bill Bailey) as an unemployed single parent, she takes a job as a chalet girl in an Austrian ski resort, where she rediscovers her competitive spirit through snowboarding and falls in love with the chalet owner's son, Jonny (Ed Westwick). The film was produced by the UKFC in association with the Ageis Film Fund. It was directed by Phil Traill. *Chalet Girl* is his second feature film following *All About Steve* (2009), starring Sandra Bullock.

Chalet Girl marks Kim out as a 'can-do' girl from an early age. The opening scene of the film show's T4 presenters Miquita Oliver and Rick Edwards discussing Kim's former career, where is it revealed she won a major skateboarding competition at just eleven years old.[30] Having achieved success at a young age, Kim was expected to

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[30] T4 was a weekend scheduling slot on Channel 4 that was aimed at the 16-34 demographic, which ran from 1998-2012 (Sheridan, 2012).

have a bright future as someone who works hard and achieves her (sporting) goals. The tone of the presenters' report then changes as they note sadly how Kim has not been seen in skateboarding competitions since the car crash that killed her mother. The scene ends with Oliver addressing Kim directly, with the line: 'Wherever you are, we hope you're living the dream'. The scene then cuts to a bored looking Kim at work in a fast food restaurant. The contrast is stark as it is immediately obvious that Kim is far from 'living the dream' as expected. The irony of the image created by the abrupt cut between the two worlds has a comical edge to it but the message is clear: girls as ambitious and talented as Kim should not be doing this kind of work. It is represented as unfulfilling and demeaning as Kim laments how her 'summer job became the rest of [her] life job'. These low-paying service sector jobs are viewed as temporary 'stop gaps' for young women as they work towards gaining qualifications and planning their careers and are not intended to be permanent. The film's attitude towards Kim's job is evident within Angela McRobbie's work on 'top girls' in which she notes that today's young woman is incorporated into governmental discourses 'as much for their productive as reproductive capacities'. This means she is 'encouraged to avoid low-paid and gendered jobs', such as Kim's (2007: 722).

While Kim initially is shown struggling to achieve 'top girl' status, the film's critical reception repeatedly emphasises the idea of actress Felicity Jones as a successful 'top girl'.[31] McRobbie's 'top girls' are defined in particular by their success in school and university, which, she claims, is a 'key feature of the process of coming forward into visibility' (ibid: 727). The young woman is understood as the 'bearer of qualifications', an 'active and aspirational subject of the education system' and she 'embodies the meritocratic values which New Labour has sought to implement in schools' (ibid: 722). Young women's educational success contributes to their status as 'subjects of capacity', and as such even young women from working class backgrounds are expected to obtain degree level qualifications more now than ever before (ibid). Jones' own 'top girl' status is articulated throughout her publicity interviews, with one interviewer notably describing her as processing a 'top-set-in-all-subjects charm' (Clarke, 2011). Others draw attention to the fact that Jones managed to successfully combine studying for a degree at Oxford University while

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[31] Jones also plays a 'top girl' in *Albatross* (MacCormick, 2011), where she plays Beth, a girl destined for Oxford University. *Albatross* is explored in Chapter Three.

continuing her role as Emma Grundy in Radio 4's *The Archers*, a role she acquired aged fifteen (Cadwalladr, 2011; Clarke, 2011; Driscoll, 2011). This reinforces the idea of Jones as a 'top girl' because she is shown to be a 'bearer of qualifications', with a degree from a renowned university no less, and a 'subject of capacity' who participates in the labour market through employment (ibid). She also has the "aligned ambitions" of a 'can-do' as it is evident she has been crafting her acting career from a young age (Harris, 2004: 14). In addition, the film's reviews praise Jones' successful performance, attributing her with the ability to single-handedly 'save' the film (Calhoun, 2011; Collin 2011; Jones, 2011; Zane, 2011: 2). She is marked as an actress 'heading for the top' (Pratt, 2011: 29) and a 'rising star' comparable to fellow young British actress Carey Mulligan (Robey, 2011: 29), who is also noted for her 'top girl' characteristics, particularly in relation to her role as Jenny in *An Education* (Scherfig, 2009), which is discussed in the next chapter.

Discussions of Jones' path to success via her education and employment present her as distinctly middle-class and privileged. Within the film, however, Kim's future success is initially much more uncertain, and it is suggested her working-class background could prevent her from achieving her goals. The film acknowledges the impact of the UK recession through the character of her father, who is unemployed after losing his job. As 'final demand' notices pile up on the doormat, it is up to Kim to run the household, combining employment with domestic tasks in order to support her father, who is presented as comically hapless. While comedian Bill Bailey brings humour to the role - conveying his character's uselessness through a series of comical scenes such as licking frozen food like an ice-lolly because he does not know how to work a microwave. This comical construction of William serves to gloss over the serious economic difficulties the characters are experiencing. These scenes also raise interesting points in relation to gender: despite the fact that William is the parent, it is Kim who is the responsible caregiver. It is therefore suggested that it is Kim's gender that determines her domestic role. However, as a postfeminist young woman, she is also expected to earn money through employment, highlighting the paradox of the 'post-feminist masquerade', in which young women are encouraged to take advantage of the gains of second-wave feminism while simultaneously exhibiting traditionally feminine characteristics (McRobbie, 2007: 725).

Kim's working class background is further emphasised during the scene in which she undergoes an interview for the post of chalet girl. The camera pans down the line as each candidate introduces herself. Each girl is dressed in a manner that conveys their stereotypical upper class femininity, with names like 'Henrietta', 'Isabella' and 'Patronella', eventually reaching Kim at the end of the line, who is casually dressed, wearing a t-shirt and trousers with no visible make-up.[32] The contrast between Kim's appearance, and even the sound of her name, in comparison to the other girls provides a visual and aural joke, which highlights the idea that Kim does not belong in this particular world due to her working class background. Jones' performance also reinforces this as she pauses slightly before speaking, giving the impression that she is considering giving herself a more 'appropriate' name because she is very aware that she does not fit in. This scene also foreshadows the class divide that Kim will experience in her work as a chalet girl that will also provide much of the film's conflict, particularly between Kim and Georgie (Tamsin Egerton). Georgie is coded as being from a very affluent background, and she is initially presented as a comical character who does not understand the concept of earning or saving money. Reviewers also frequently describe Georgie as 'posh totty', which alludes to her role as Chelsea in the *St Trinian's* films (Parker and Thompson 2007, 2009) and suggests Egerton is associated with a particular character type of the blonde girl who is posh and attractive but not very intelligent.[33]

When Kim arrives in the Austrian Alps she is in awe of the majestic-looking mountains and the imposing chalet. The film's bright and glossy aesthetics heighten this sense of wealth. As with *Fast Girls*, it was important to be able to create aspirational aesthetics on a limited budget. The world of chalets and ski resorts that Georgie and Jonny inhabit is far removed from what Kim knows as the 'real world'.

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[32] These types of very wealthy upper-middle class girls are reminiscent of the girls featured in the structured reality television programme *Made in Chelsea* (E4, 2011-), which focuses on the relationships between a group of wealthy young people living in the London borough of Chelsea. Their obvious wealth and consumerism provides a stark contrast to the lives of most people, and reinforces Negra and Tasker's observation that media texts produced during the recession era often highlight a renewed fascination with elite groups (2014: 10).

[33] Egerton's role as 'posh totty' Chelsea in *St Trinian's* is discussed in the next chapter.

As one client remarks: 'The global recession is just something that happened to other people', and the film's aesthetics certainly reinforce this. The wealth exhibited by Jonny and his family is attributed to economic neoliberalism, as Jonny's father (Bill Nighy) is a successful businessman, as are most of the male guests.[34] As such the film privileges wealth acquired through hard work rather than inheritance. Kim also works hard to earn money as a chalet girl and she dutifully sends her earnings home to her father. This leaves little opportunity for Kim to take part in the consumer culture that is so integral to postfeminist culture. As Diane Negra states, 'Postfeminism attaches considerable importance to the formulation of an expressive personal identity and the ability to select the right commodities to attain it' (2009: 4). Therefore, in order to achieve ideal postfeminist femininity, one must be able to afford the necessary products. Within *Chalet Girl*, this idea of ideal femininity is inextricably linked to class, as the contrast between Kim and fellow chalet girl Georgie demonstrates. Working-class Kim is initially presented as a typical 'tomboy'. She does not wear dresses or make-up, she has previously pursued 'active sports' as a former skateboarder and even her name is traditionally masculine. Jamie Skerski notes how in 'nearly all forms of hegemonic narratives' the tomboy is made to relinquish the boyish activities she enjoyed as a child and realise it is 'natural to eventually embrace her true womanhood' (2011: 467). Yvonne Tasker (1993) similarly argues that the tomboy can be read as a girl who has yet to accept the responsibilities of adult womanhood. No longer a child, Kim is in some ways caught between being a 'tomboy' and embracing her true womanhood' as she is also the domestic caretaker in the family since the death of her mother, which suggests she cannot escape fulfilling the traditionally feminine role. By contrast, Georgie's image

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[34] This environment is also presented as sexist. Kim is subjected to degrading comments from wealthy male clients who objectify her and try to guess her bra size. While Georgie initially accepts their comments as a consequence of her role as a chalet girl, Kim refuses to accept this and gets revenge on a sexist client by pouring hot tea into his lap. Like the girls in *Fast Girls*, Kim does not view these sexist comments in the playful and ironic way that postfeminism dictates. The men are made to look foolish, with the implication being that although these comments are commonplace, girls should not be expected to accept them, regardless of their position. This refusal to accept sexism has become more prominent in recent years, particularly online through campaigns like the Everyday Sexism Project (Bates, 2014), which aim to reignite feminist activism in the UK by undermining postfeminism's insistence that feminism has been 'taken into account' and gender equality has been achieved (McRobbie, 2009: 12).

is one of stereotypical middle class femininity, with expensive blonde highlights and branded clothes. The disparity between Kim and Georgie's respective appearances implies that Kim's status as a tomboy is very much linked to her working-class status. Although she may enjoy adopting this image, the film's engagement with postfeminist principles support the notion that – as mentioned above - the ideal feminine appearance has to be bought through the purchasing of the right clothes and cosmetics, something Kim cannot afford to do. Kim must therefore enlist Georgie's help to look more appropriate when working for the upper-middle-class chalet owners. Kim is forced to change her clothes and become more 'feminine'. Trainers are swapped for high heels and she gets rid of her leggings so that her long top is transformed into a short dress. Georgie also teaches Kim how to apply make-up. Kim's makeover enables her to become more feminised and integrate herself with her 'posh' fellow chalet girls and guests.

In her work on the television makeover programme, Brenda R. Weber discusses the significance of the makeover in the new millennium. Weber observes how, in the twenty first century, appearance 'functions as an indicator of professional competence' because in the 'increasingly globalized economy where the neoliberal subject can circulate the globe, such appearance-based citizenship is crucial for business success' (2009: 25). Indeed Kim's makeover is facilitated by the need to appear more professionally competent in her work as a chalet girl at the Austrian resort. In addition, Weber notes how female bodies 'must look and behave according to the terms of conventional femininity' and the makeover 'doesn't create but brings out one's inner woman' (ibid: 128). The makeover that Kim undergoes not only makes visible her conventional femininity, but also the fact that the makeover seemed to require very little effort – merely modifying the clothes Kim already owned and applying a bit of make-up – suggests that this femininity was 'inside' Kim all along and it just needed to be located.[35] This is similar to Diane Negra's claim that 'In postfeminist consumer culture, the makeover is a key ritual of female coming into being' (2009: 123) and it allows for a 'revelation of the self that has

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[35] Despite the film's emphasis on consumerism, it is notable that Kim does not buy new clothes for her makeover, she merely adjust what she already owns or borrows items from Georgie in a manner in keeping with British cinema's engagement with makeover culture that eschews branded consumption, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

been there all along' (ibid: 124). This idea that that her makeover revealed 'the self that has been there all along' (ibid) is evident when Jonny sees Kim post-makeover and remarks, 'And with that she became a swan'. Although seemingly said in jest, Jonny's comment alludes to the story of the 'ugly duckling' - whose 'true self' was a beautiful swan – and suggests that Kim's acceptance into this new affluent world is like a fairytale that is easy to achieve as long as Kim is able to demonstrate that she is suitably feminine.

Not only does Kim need to become more typically feminine in order to be successful as a chalet girl, she also realises that she needs to become an adept consumer if she is going to succeed in the snowboarding competition. She subsequently decides not to send her next pay packet home but instead use it to buy the 'right' equipment. Branding and consumption are integral to the film text, not least through the casting of Ed Westwick as Jonny, who is known for his role as Chuck Bass in the American teen series *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), a programme that focused on a group of highly affluent teenagers and was noted for its focus on 'education about, and consumption of, contemporary fashions' (Warner, 2009: 181). They are also central to the film's marketing and promotional discourses. The film was promoted using an 'innovative online campaign that integrates Facebook "like" buttons into an interactive trailer to drive social media engagement' (Brand Republic, 2011). Clicking on the 'like' button provides users with access to cast information and details of the locations used in the film. It also includes brands featured in the film, such as Roxy, Thomas Cook and Intersport. According to Jamie Schwarz, Vice President of Theatrical Marketing at Momentum Pictures, *Chalet Girl* was the first film to integrate the 'like' button functionality (ibid). The campaign uses the idea that audiences often are inspired by the lifestyles portrayed in films and takes this even further to encourage viewers to 'get involved' and to 'identify themselves with the cool brands it features' (ibid). One particular brand that appears prominently within the film is Roxy as Kim enters the Roxy Slopestyle snowboarding competition and the cast wear Roxy ski suits.

The use of the Roxy brand within the film and its marketing is particularly interesting. Writing about Roxy's advertising campaigns, Leslie Heywood explains how the brand embodies the idea of the neoliberal 'can-do' girl. She notes how the

sports associated with Roxy, such as snowboarding, require 'a body that can adapt to any situation', just as the global economy requires young women in particular to adapt to changing parameters (2007: 113). For Heywood, the athletic female body 'is representative of the success a young sporting girl will have in her life, and part of that success is as a member of the consumer culture who consumes' Roxy (ibid: 114). It is impossible to ignore here the links between Heywood's description of the 'Roxy girl' and Anita Harris' 'can-do' girl, who is noted for her 'display of a consumer lifestyle' (2004: 14). It would seem, therefore, that participation within a consumer culture is both necessary for young women's success and also a reflection of that success. This is also evident within the film as Kim's success is in many ways dependent on her ability to buy into the consumer culture by purchasing the right clothes and snowboarding equipment that will improve her chances in the competition. She can then maintain this investment in consumer culture with her prize money. Similarly, the film's interactive marketing campaign encourages the 'can-do' girl within the audience to aspire to participate within this consumer culture to ensure her own success.

Although Kim has taken steps to securing her success through consumption, it seems as if Kim's hard work could be in vain as flashbacks of the car crash that killed her mother prevent her from attempting the highest snowboarding jumps. *Chalet Girl* adheres to aforementioned trope of the 'absent mother' in postfeminist texts centred around teenage girls, but in the end it is not her father that guides Kim to the success that enables her to discover her 'true' self. This is evident when Kim recalls her mother's words: 'With brains in your head, feet in your shoes, you can steer yourself any way you choose'. She also imagines her mum in the crowd waving a 'Go Kim' banner, which enables her to complete the highest jump and win the competition. Kim's mother's words convey the sentiment of the neoliberal 'can-do' girl as they suggest that all a girl needs to succeed is determination because she is autonomous and responsible for her own life through the choices she makes. However, although, as this line shows, neoliberal culture upholds the myth that being a 'can-do' girl is straightforward – a matter of choice and determination – as Kim's journey within the film has demonstrated, a girl must be highly strategic in order to make the right choices, including exhibiting the correct consumer behaviour.

Kim's status as a 'can-do' girl is cemented when she wins the competition – along with its $25,000 prize money – and enters into a romantic relationship with Jonny. Within contemporary films centred around and aimed at teenage girls, the acquisition of a heterosexual romance is the 'prize' for successfully performing femininity (Gilligan, 2011: 167) and *Chalet Girl* is no exception, as it seems Jonny is Kim's true reward for being a successful 'can-do' girl. Kim also wins the approval of Jonny's parents and gains acceptance and entry into their affluent upper-middle-class world. Perhaps most significantly about the film's ending, however, is the idea that, through her determination, good choices and consumption, Kim has (re)discovered her 'true self'. Diane Negra observes how 'the postfeminist subject is represented as having lost herself but then (re)achieving stability' (2009: 5) and in the final scene of *Chalet Girl*, Kim is interviewed by Miquita Oliver in the T4 studio, who congratulates her for winning the competition and for having a 'hot boyfriend', thus for achieving ideal femininity. This scene completes the circular nature of the film because at the beginning of the film Oliver and Edwards lamented Kim's absence from the competition. Now Kim has been 'found' as she is present in the studio, complete with wealth and a boyfriend. Therefore, in entering this new middle-class world, the emphasis is not on the idea that she has abandoned her previous life, but that she has simply, and inevitably, rediscovered her status as a successful girl.

'Two worlds, one dream': *StreetDance 3D* **(2010)**

In her work on the female dancer on film, Katharina Lindner asserts there has been a 'remarkable increase in dance films within the last decade (2011: 1). There are a number of reasons for this, not least of all the increase in 3D films in recent years, which prioritise movement and spectacle (Ross, 2011). What is interesting in terms of this chapter is Jade Boyd's claim that 'dance is a medium through which agency and/or independence can be enabled' (2007: 67). This suggests that dance films provide an ideal vehicle for the figure of the 'can-do' girl, as a way of demonstrating her independence and determination that leads to her achieving her ambitions. Boyd (2007) explores the links between class, gender and popular culture within the popular dance film, specifically *Save the Last Dance* (Carter, 2001). Both Boyd and Lindner reflect the fact that much of the academic work that analyses dance films focuses on American films. However, a number of the points raised within their

respective articles are applicable to analysis of the British dance film *StreetDance*. Miriam Ross notes the similarities, particularly regarding narrative, between *StreetDance* and the American *Step Up* franchise, highlighting how both films are

> based on the premise of dance competitions during which the protagonists have to build partnerships, define themselves in opposition to other characters and achieve physical proficiency, all through their participation in dance (Ross, 2011).

Therefore, there is a strong sense of globalization within the contemporary dance film format. However, as Albert Moran points out, globalized formats still retain a sense of 'localization', in that even though the basic content of the text is global, elements can be 'customized and domesticated for reception and consumption by specific audiences in local or national contexts' (2009: 116). This will become evident within my analysis of *StreetDance*.

The film centres around Carly (Nichola Burley), who takes command of a street dance crew when her boyfriend, Jay (Ukwell Roach), leaves. When the crew cannot afford to rent a rehearsal space, Helena (Charlotte Rampling), the leader of the local ballet school, offers to let them rehearse in one of her studios on the condition that Carly includes her ballet dancers in her street dance routine. This inevitably leads to a clash of cultures as new crew struggle to prepare for a major street dance competition. *StreetDance* is an ambitious film. Produced by Vertigo Films, BBC Film and the UKFC, it is the first British film to be filmed entirely in 3D and it reached number one at the UK box office upon its release in 2010, reportedly making £11 million in five weeks at what was seen as a crucial time for BBC Films and the UK Film Council, who contributed towards the film's funding (Gant, 2010).[36] According to the film's production notes, it was important for the film to have an 'aspirational' style, although this is considered to be very 'un-British'. Inspired by the American dance films of the 1980s, *StreetDance* producer James Richardson "thought it would be great to do a dance film with the same aspirational feel of an American movie, but in a very British setting" (Vertigo Films, 2010). This

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[36] The film also benefitted from the presence of dance groups Flawless and Diversity, as well as street dancer George Sampson, all of whom were finalists on the popular talent show *Britain's Got Talent* (ITV, 2007-)

idea that the 'aspirational' dance film is a typically American concept and not associated with the British film industry is apparent throughout discussions of the film, with actress Nichola Burley notably remarking that she "never thought [the film] would get backing" because it's not "dark and gritty" (ibid). Burley's concern here articulates common beliefs about what constitutes a 'British' film and the idea that it is most often associated with the social realist style. This production discourse is similar to that of *Fast Girls*, as discussed earlier, where both films deliberately position themselves as atypical within British cinema through being deliberately aspirational and commercialised.

One of the ways in which this 'aspirational' style was achieved was through selecting Max Giwa and Dania Pasquini to direct the film. *StreetDance* is Giwa and Pasquini's first feature film, as their work focuses on directing music videos for music artists such as Girls Aloud. The decision to hire promo directors was a conscious one, as a way of ensuring the film's aesthetics were 'beautiful and glossy and aspirational' (Vertigo Films, 2010). The 'music video' style is evident throughout the film. While the idea that the dance routines are filmed in the style of a music video is to be expected, this also applies to narrative scenes within the film, where the action and soundtrack match perfectly to create a very specific mood in a way that feels quite stylised. This style is not unique to *StreetDance*, however, as Jade Boyd notes how the contemporary dance film 'resembles a prolonged music video because of fast cuts, elements of popular culture exemplified by the music and dance, and a sense that within the film exists a dual function to entertain and advertise' (2007: 74).

The film's glossy and aspirational style (Vertigo Films, 2010) is most apparent within its representation of London. The film opens with a shot of the London skyline with a distinctive red hue of a sunset. It is glamorous in a way that is more often associated with images of the New York skyline (Figure 2), indicating the filmmakers' desire to emulate American dance films like the *Step Up* series. This idea of London as glamorous is maintained throughout and is the focus of a number of reviews of the film. Catherine Shoard claims that, with *StreetDance*, 3D seems, 'finally, to have found its true calling: making London look cool' (Shoard, 2010), while Mark Adams claims the film 'makes great use of its London locations'

(Adams, 2010). Maria Duarte, meanwhile, asserts that 'London has never looked so good' (Duarte, 2010). There is a sense that London is almost unrecognisable as it has never before been presented in such a way. Writing in the *Sunday Express*, Henry Fitzherbert describes how it is a 'thrill' to see London presented in such an aesthetically pleasing way that reflects the film presents London as a 'place of aspiration… as opposed to knife crime' (Fitzherbert, 2010).[37]

Figure 2: The London skyline.

This idea of aspiration is evident throughout the marketing and critical reception of the film, as well as within the film itself. Actor Richard Winsor, who plays ballet dancer Tomas, claims the film represents the "90% of good kids… in the UK who really have an aspiration and a desire and a dream to push forward and do something with their lives" (Wales Online, 2010). This discourse of aspiration and inspiration is also conveyed through the appearance of UK street dance groups Diversity and Flawless and dancer George Sampson, who all previously appeared as contestants on *Britain's Got Talent* (ITV, 2007-). The *Britain's Got Talent* contestants feature heavily in the promotional material that accompanies the film in order to capitalise on their recent success. This in turn also demonstrates one of the main ways in which *StreetDance* 'localizes' the dance film, as they serve to highlight the idea that the British dance film can exhibit as much genuine dance talent as its American

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[37] While Fitzherbert's comment reflects a right-wing bias through the emphasis on London's knife crime, it also alludes to other contemporary British films set in the capital such as *Kidulthood* and *Adulthood*, and serves to reinforce the idea that *StreetDance* is not a 'typical' British film.

counterparts. Both Flawless and George Sampson reflect on their dedication to street dance and the idea that prior to their appearance on *Britain's Got Talent* they were doing all that they could to further their careers. They also note how the talent show provided them with 'life-changing' dream-like opportunities (ibid). In her work on reality pop programmes, Su Holmes notes how these shows are 'paradigmatic' of how fame and stardom are organised through Richard Dyer's notion of the "success myth" (2004: 156). The 'success myth' is made up of contradictory elements such as: ordinariness is the hallmark of the star; that lucky breaks may happen to anyone and hard work and professionalism are necessary for stardom (Dyer, 1998: 42). All of these elements are present in the discourse surrounding the *BGT* contestants as they are presented as 'ordinary' people who worked hard to achieve their dreams, while at the same time this success is dream-like and unimaginable luck.

Carly also draws on popular talent show discourse in the voice-over that opens the film with the line: 'Ever since I was a young girl, I've been dancing and dreaming in front of a mirror'. This type of phrase is frequently deployed by contestants on popular talent shows such as *The X Factor* (ITV, 2004-) in order to convey that success (and fame) has been a long-held dream that they have worked to achieve. As Kim Allen notes, celebrity culture, alongside popular media, is the 'key site in which the "successful girl" discourse of neoliberalism is reproduced' through the articulation of "have it all" femininity orientated around social mobility and compulsory success' (2011: 303-304). Anita Harris similarly argues the celebrity lifestyle is 'exemplar of the can-do experience', as the 'ordinary girl is able to work on herself as a celebrity project and gain some kind of public profile in the process' (2004: 127). Carly then explains how she wants to 'share' her dream. This line is particularly interesting in terms of the notion of female ambition because, as mentioned previously, within postfeminist culture ambition is seen as a personal endeavor that is the responsibility of the individual. However, like *Fast Girls*, the overall narrative of the film makes it clear that ambitions are something to be shared as they can only be achieved through teamwork.

When we are first introduced to Carly she is presented as overtly sexualised, framed in a manner reminiscent of fashion advertising (Figures 3 and 4). As can be seen in Figure 2, Carly is very much presented as, in Mulvey's (1975) terms, the subject of

the 'gaze' as she 'connotes to-be-looked-at-ness'. This sense of voyeurism is further heightened by the framing of the shot as Carly is initially filmed through the window, the billowing curtains and her posture suggesting she is unaware of the intrusion. However, Carly then shows her awareness of the presence of the camera's sexualising gaze as she stares knowingly directly into the camera at the audience (Figure 3). Carly's acknowledgement of her position as the subject of the gaze marks the start of the film's attempt to challenge the idea of the 'male gaze', because, while Carly may be represented in stereotypical fashion in the private sphere of the bedroom, a process of democratisation arguably occurs once she enters the professional sphere of the world of street dance. Here, although her body is still on display, particularly her toned stomach, she is mostly covered by the baggy, androgynous uniform of the street dancers, so the female body takes on the characteristics of an active athlete rather than a sexualised woman.

Figure 3: Carly (Nichola Burley) as the subject of the 'gaze'.

Figure 4: Carly's (Nichola Burley) knowing stare.

This 'democratisation' is enhanced further when Tomas becomes the subject of Carly (and the camera's) 'female gaze'. During this scene, Tomas is rehearsing alone in front of the ballet mirror while Carly secretly watches him from the doorway. Writing about ballet, Katharina Lindner claims:

> the emphasis on the male dancer's muscular and powerful physicality, functions in some ways, to negate the feminising implications of the gaze directed at the spectacularly staged display of the male body (Lindner, 2011: 6).

Tomas' muscular physique is clearly on display as an object of the gaze, which is arguably heightened by the fact that his performance takes place in front of a mirror (Figure 5). However, the idea that it is 'spectacularly staged' (ibid: 6) is questionable as it takes place not on stage but alone in a private rehearsal studio, which naturalises the image somewhat. Also, Tomas' body is arguably presented so that the emphasis is more on sexuality rather than male 'power'. This is suggested by the shot of Carly's face as she watches Tomas (Figure 6). The shot becomes tighter in close up, creating an intensity which suggests that her gaze is one of desire rather than one of professional objectivity. The fact that both Carly and Tomas are the subjects of the sexualised gaze at various points within the film reflects what Ross refers to as 'the almost equal division of labour within these films', which updates the 'focus on the body in a twenty-first century context whereby the body's commodification transpires across genders' (Ross, 2011). However, this is problematized slightly by the fact that Tomas is initially unaware of Carly's gaze, whereas Figure 3 suggests Carly is very much aware that she is the subject of a sexualised gaze, implying that the 'female gaze' should remain a secret because it is not a typical reflection of the power balance.
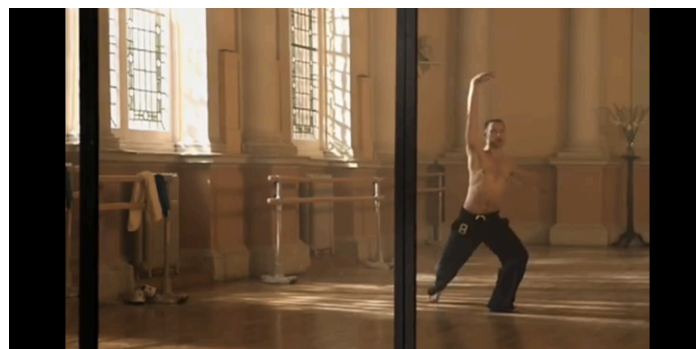

Figure 5: Tomas (Richard Winsor) rehearsing.

Figure 6: Carly (Nichola Burley) watches Tomas.

While the 'commodification of bodies' may work across genders in the film (Ross, 2011), once again, class is immediately established as divisive and the source of narrative conflict. The class difference is emphasised by the juxtaposition of the street dancers and the ballet dancers, where the image of the imposing, regal space of the ballet school, along with the use of classical music for the soundtrack, provides a stark contrast to all that has come before. This division is further emphasised by the sight of the street dancers and ballet dancers lined up on opposite sides of the ballet bar, which acts as a physical barrier between them and visually establishes confirms their rivalry, with both sides reluctant to see the other dance style as relevant or legitimate. The soundtrack that accompanies this image reinforces this as it uses classical music, which is associated with classical ballet remixed with the 'grime' music of street dance. Boyd, drawing on McRobbie (1997) notes how, 'tensions between high-culture and pop-culture are numerous in American dance narratives and function to reflect upper- and middle- class social divisions and racial disparities' (Boyd, 2007: 69). While this tension is clearly evident within *StreetDance*, this is mostly related to class. Unlike American dance films such as *Save the Last Dance*, race is never presented as a 'problem' within the film, just as is the case with *Fast Girls*.

As the film progresses both 'sides' learn that they have to accommodate the other. Carly initiates this after attending a production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the ballet,

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where she learns that conveying feelings through dance is the most important aspect, and that this is universal across all dance styles, regardless of whether they are part of 'high culture' or 'low culture'. Carly's costume also conveys the idea that the two dance 'worlds' will merge as she wears a smart dress with glittery trainers to the ballet, indicating her ability to incorporate ballet's formal aesthetics while maintaining her street dance image. Moreover, although the film emphasises collective ambition and successful teamwork, this ambition is figured through Carly's status as a 'can-do' girl. Her dedication and hard work are, once again, presented in the form of a training montage. This consists of alternate cuts between Carly writing choreography in her notebook at a variety of London locations and rehearsing alone in the dance studio. During this scene Carly is working in isolation, even though she is planning group choreography, which reinforces how the isolated female sporting protagonist 'feeds into postfeminist notions of depoliticized individualism' (Lindner, 2013: 243). Moreover, the soundtrack by Swiss ft. Music Kidz informs us she is 'one in a million', suggesting that, while collective ambition is important, it is Carly's individual ability to 'take charge' and 'achieve her goals' (Harris, 2004: 1) that will enable the group to win the competition. Only Carly can unite and lead the group because not only is she a 'can-do' girl but also, more than that, she is unique, a 'one-in-a-million' girl, which evokes Alison Winch's observation that within postfeminist culture, a girl must 'stand out from her peers… she must be normatively distinctive' (2013: 2-3).

Both Boyd (2007) and Lindner (2011) note the importance of the 'final number' in contemporary dance films. In *StreetDance*, the narrative of the final number reflects the overall narrative of the film. The routine begins 'Dance of the Knights' from Prokofiev's ballet of *Romeo and Juliet*, with Carly lying on a bed until she is lifted by Tomas. The soundtrack then merges into dubstep and the rivalry between the two sets of dancers is re-enacted, reflecting the blending of the two styles, along with Carly and Tomas' Romeo and Juliet-style narrative of love forming from opposing positions. According to Lindner, in the final dance number the female body, 'whose physicality is variously foregrounded in the early numbers, is gradually, and literally, converted from "active principle" to "form"' (2011: 11). This is true of Carly to an extent because she begins the routine motionless and is lifted by Tomas at various points. However, her 'active' power is emphasised as she leads the street dance

elements of the routine and ends the routine in a central raised position on a podium (that also functioned as the bed at the beginning). While all the dancers are on the podium, Carly is raised slightly above them. Therefore, the routine recognises heteronormative conventions with the idea of the seemingly passive female but challenges this by emphasising Carly's success as the group's leader [38]. Lindner claims the final dance number is a 'utopian' celebration of 'heterosexual romance' and the 'overcoming of seemingly (gender, class… and cultural) differences' (ibid). Boyd agrees that 'class mobility is romantically, yet unrealistically, presented as the obvious outcome of hard work' and differences are 'glossed over' (2007: 80). Boyd then takes this further by asserting that these films present a 'fantasy of achievement' because the 'semi-privileged dancer always succeeds' in a 'culture where it is very difficult to succeed, not only as a dancer, but as a woman' (ibid). These ideas are evident in the final number of *StreetDance* as the dancers' identical white, androgynous suits serve to present both the ballet and street dancers as 'the same' and minimize the idea of gender (and class) difference. Furthermore, the routine doesn't so much present the idea of class mobility but remove the idea of class entirely so the dancers become entirely classless as they achieve success. While the focus is on the group's success, Carly's individual success is also evident as she achieves her dreams and is further rewarded by heterosexual romance through her relationship with Tomas. The film's ending, therefore, reinforces how 'In these times of global recession, [dance media narratives] perpetuate the myth that… success is based on the neoliberal principles of self-discipline enterprise and productivity' (Boyd, 2012: 265), and structural barriers such as class cannot just be overcome but dissolved entirely through talent and hard work.

Ambition and the 'at-risk' girl in *Fish Tank* (2009)

Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody assert that 'social class… remains one of the most powerful factors in shaping our lives and dealing our "life chances"' (2001: 23). Unlike the previous films discussed in this chapter – where although class is initially presented as a 'problem', it can be overcome and does not prevent the young woman

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[38] This is taken even further when a female ballet dancer lifts a male street dancer with a knowing wink to the audience, acknowledging its overt subversion of conventional gender roles.

from achieving her ambitions – *Fish Tank* highlights the significant impact class can have on a person's life. *Fish Tank* is Arnold's second feature film, following the critically-acclaimed *Red Road* (2006). Like its predecessor, *Fish Tank* won the 2009 Jury Prize at Cannes and draws on similar themes of claustrophobia, lust and sexual obsession. According to *Fish Tank's* press book, this reinforces [Arnold's] reputation as a British auteur' as the film 'casts the same unflinching, unprejudiced gaze' as her previous work (Artificial Eye, 2009). *Fish Tank* is often referred to as a social realist film, with Arnold heralded by critics as the 'successor to Ken Loach' (Bradshaw, 2009). It is therefore much more reminiscent of a 'typical' British film as suggested by the production discourses discussed previously, such as the idea that British films are typically 'dark and gritty'. The film centres on fifteen-year-old Mia (Katie Jarvis) lives on a council estate in Essex with her mother, Joanne (Kierston Wareing) and younger sister, Tyler (Rebecca Griffiths). Mia dreams of becoming a dancer but lacks the resources or the knowledge to achieve her goals. Her mother's new boyfriend, Connor (Michael Fassbender) encourages her to pursue her dancing and they have a relationship that is part paternal, part sexual, which presents a number of potential dangers.

Arnold is known for having an 'unflinching, unprejudiced gaze' (Artificial Eye, 2009), and this is conveyed through the film's sympathetic treatment of its young protagonist as it is suggested Mia is trying her best in very difficult circumstances. In many ways, Mia is coded as a 'chav' figure. According to Imogen Tyler, over the past decade 'the world "chav" has become a ubiquitous term for white working-class subjects' in Britain (2008: 17). The figure of the chav is 'understood in the context of deepening economic inequality and class porlarisation in Britain (ibid: 18), as the chav figure has 'made class differences and antagonisms explicitly visible in contemporary Britain' (ibid: 20). Mia's appearance codes her as a chav figure as she mostly wears sports clothing such as jogging bottoms and trainers and large gold-hooped earrings, which as Tyler notes, are associated with the figure of the chav through their emphasis on vulgar consumption (ibid: 21).[39] For Tyler, the chav figure

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[39] This vulgar consumption is in opposition to the 'right' kind of consumption encouraged by neoliberalism and postfeminism, and as such is suggestive of failed femininity.

elicits disgust reactions but, as will be demonstrated throughout this case study, Arnold never vilifies her protagonist.

As well as being coded as a chav figure, Mia is also presented as an 'at-risk' girl, the 'girl as failure' (Harris, 2004: 25). Actor Katie Jarvis is also constructed as an 'at-risk' girl in the discourses that circulate within the film's extra-cinematic and paratexts. It is frequently noted that Jarvis, who had never acted before, was an 'unemployed school leaver with two GCSEs' (Bamigboye, 2009; Higgins, 2009). This emphasis on Jarvis' lack of qualifications highlights McRobbie's idea that the contemporary young woman is seen as a 'bearer of qualifications, an active and aspirational subject of the education system' and those 'two percent of girls who leave school without qualifications are singled out more forcefully as educational failures' (2007: 727). There is also a sense that Jarvis' success was 'unlikely' given her background and status as an 'at-risk' girl (Higgins, 2009).[40] This is confirmed within the film's production notes, where it is revealed that Jarvis was 'found on Tilbury train station arguing with her boyfriend' (Artificial Eye, 2009). This idea of Jarvis being 'found' in such ordinary circumstances suggests she had been given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and it was just luck, rather than hard work, that she was there at the right time. As cinematographer Robbie Ryan says, "she was plucked right out of nothing" (Hoyle, 2009: 29). While her route into the film may have been due to sheer luck, Jarvis' experience of filmmaking exemplifies the idea of meritocracy. She explains how:

> Whereas before I was doing nothing all the time, it made me learn I could do things if I wanted to. It was hard but it was fun and rewarding. Now I want to make the most of it (Artificial Eye, 2009).[41]

Jarvis' comment repositions her from 'failure' to a girl who recognises her own capacity for success and the benefits of working hard, being ambitious and "seiz[ing] chances" (Harris, 2004: 1) to make the most of this opportunity, as well as reinforcing the meritocratic idea that success is available to all who work hard,

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[40] Jarvis was almost unanimously praised for her performance.

[41] British social realist films are noted for the casting of unknown young actors, as demonstrated through films such as *Kes* (Loach, 1969) and more recently *This is England* (Meadows, 2006). Here, the casting of the unknown Katie Jarvis is co-opted into a meritocratic, neoliberal can-do discourse.

regardless of their background. However, it is noted in promotional articles, in a somewhat disappointed tone, that Jarvis was not able to make the most of her success in *Fish Tank* because she had to miss the film's premiere at Cannes as she had recently given birth to a daughter at the age of eighteen (Bamigboye, 2009; Higgins, 2009). Harris notes how 'at-risk' girls are more likely to 'become pregnant at a young age' (2004: 14), while McRobbie describes how a feature of the postfeminist 'sexual contract' is the provision of entitlement to sexuality and control of fertility' (2007: 731). Therefore, 'young motherhood… now carries a whole range of vilified meanings associated with failed femininity' and is often linked to working class girls in particular as 'respectable middle class status requires the refusal of early motherhood' because the construction of the young woman as 'productive' means she is 'more harshly judged for inappropriate reproductive activity' (ibid: 732). Similarly, Imogen Tyler argues the contemporary figure of the young, unmarried, working-class mother - the 'chav mum' - is vilified because this figure 'embodies historically familiar and contemporary anxieties about female sexuality, reproduction, fertility, and "racial mixing." (2008: 17).[42] In an interview Arnold reveals that Jarvis had to turn down new acting roles because of her pregnancy, casting doubt on Jarvis' future and arguably reinforcing the common belief within discourses of young womanhood that early motherhood is a barrier to further success (Higgins, 2009). Arnold also reinforces the idea that Jarvis' life is far removed from the glamorous world of Cannes by saying, "I don't think she really understands what this means… that's a whole other life" (Hoyle, 2009: 29). The implication here is that Jarvis' situation is somewhat inevitable because it is impossible to transcend one's background completely. This sense of inevitability is also reinforced by the subjectivity of the 'at-risk' girl because they are set up as 'failures in the making', which suggests they can never truly overcome their status because of their circumstances and the choices they make (Harris, 2004: 26). However, by the time the film was released on DVD Jarvis took part in a number of interviews where she revealed that she had returned to acting because she wanted to 'chase' the chances she'd been given and take on other acting projects (Ellen, 2009). This is an interesting conclusion to Jarvis' personal narrative within the film's promotional discourses. It is a story of transformation as Jarvis has seemingly gone from being an

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[42] Arnold explores the figure of the 'chav mum' in her short film *Wasp* (2003), whose protagonist is young single mother Zoe (Natalie Press).

'at-risk' girl whose fate, it was thought, was sealed to an ambitious young woman who is determined to make the most of her success with *Fish Tank* and use it to build a career.

Mia may not be as lucky as the actor who plays her but Arnold ensures there is some element of hope. The audience is introduced to Mia via the sound of her heavy breathing alone as the film's title fills a black screen. This sound of Mia's breathing immediately sets her apart from the other girls in this chapter, particularly Carly, because it emphasises the physical effort required by dancing, reinforcing the film's realism in contrast to the more 'aspirational' films where physical activity is made to seem relatively effortless. It is then revealed that Mia is in an empty flat looking out over her estate. Mia is clearly confined in the 'fish tank' of the film's title and looking for an escape, which takes the form of her secret dancing. The estate is grounded in verisimilitude, unlike, *StreetDance's* presentation of London. The camera follows Mia as she charges around the estate looking for a friend. This scene is highlighted in the film's critical reception as reviewers note the bubbling aggression as Mia determinedly 'ricochets' around the estate, swearing and head-butting anyone who gets in her way (Calhoun, 2009; French, 2009a; Ide, 2009). Moreover, critics note how the film is set in "broken Britain" (Bradshaw, 2009), echoing the phrase used by Conservative leader David Cameron in the lead up to the 2010 General Election (and occasionally after, such as following the series of riots in the summer of 2011) (BBC, 2010). Societal issues that seemingly reflect 'broken Britain' are teenage pregnancy and young single mothers, underage and binge drinking and violence and knife crime. Many of these issues are evident in the film and are particularly evident with Harris' (2004) aforementioned definition of 'at-risk' youth. Despite this, numerous reviewers single out cinematographer Robbie Ryan for making what could be a grim social realist story of life on a council estate seem beautiful. This is conveyed by the mobility of Ryan's camera, particularly in this early scene, which captures the unexplored energy of the estate, and the way in which he captures light in unexpected places in order to elevate mundane situations and make them beautiful (Aftab, 2009; Calhoun, 2009; Gilbey, 2009: 47; Robey, 2009: 27; Stawtell, 2009). The film's aesthetics, therefore, take the film beyond 'typical' social realism towards what Claire Monk (2012) refers to as 'poetic

realism' marking the film as something particularly special, contributing to the overwhelmingly positive critical reception.

As Mia charges around the estate it becomes clear that underlying ambitions and a desire to escape are commonplace. The camera settles on a group of teenage girls dancing in a car park. They perform a song with an obviously self-choreographed routine in an attempt to copy the style of popular music videos. This scene is reminiscent of Carly's assertion that she has been 'dancing and dreaming in front of a mirror', where emulating dancers and pop stars is a form of escapism for girls. However, within the utopian, aspirational world of *StreetDance*, Carly's comments reflect her dedication to dance, as the audience is given very few reasons to doubt Carly will achieve her dream. For the girls on Mia's estate, on the other hand, it is clear they will remain dancing in a car park, as they are unlikely to be able to access the resources needed to achieve their dream. In addition, the girls dance in a sexualised manner, and the camera lingers on their exposed stomachs that showcase their piercings. They are also visibly objectified by a group of teenage boys who watch them dance and point at certain girls as they discuss which ones they would 'have'. The girls' outfits of crop tops and shorts reflect what Rosalind Gill refers to as 'commercial sexualization'. Gill argues that within postfeminist culture there is a 'commercially driven sexualization' of young women, which, amongst other things, involves clothing companies targeting young girls with 'belly tops', body jewellery and clothes with 'sexually provocative slogans' (2007: 151).[43] This, Gill claims, is due to postfeminist media culture's move towards portraying women not as straightforwardly objectified but present themselves as 'desiring sexual subjects': 'The sexually autonomous heterosexual young woman who plays with her sexual power and is forever "up for it"' (ibid). This figure of a young woman present in numerous contemporary music videos by artists such as Rihanna, but it has arguably gone beyond the representational into the realm of everyday experience as a 'popular way of constructing the self' (ibid: 152). The ubiquity of this is evident in the girls on the estate as they aspire to emulate these videos, showing off sexualised dance moves and sing suggestive lyrics. There is also an implied criticism of this culture as the sexualised image they are keen to portray sits at odds with their child-like faces

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[43] Contemporary anxieties over the sexualisation of young girls are explored in detail in the next chapter.

and the fact that it is highly unlikely they are as sexually knowing as they pretend to be, highlighting the falsity of the identity they are trying to construct for themselves. Mia, however, is positioned outside of this culture as she watches the girls scornfully, showing no desire to be involved.

The constant presence of an 'aspirational' media culture is also evident later on in the film when Tyler is shown watching the MTV reality show *My Super Sweet 16* (MTV, 2005-). The programme follows affluent teenagers as they plan extravagant parties for their 'sweet sixteen' birthdays. Programmes such as this are excessively aspirational and are often watched 'ironically' as the viewer recognises that these lifestyles are not achievable but this is often mixed with a certain level of desire for these lifestyles (Douglas, 2010: 14). It is implied Tyler gets pleasure from viewing these shows ironically as she is dismissive of the girls featured, describing them as 'rank'. Participation in consumer culture is mandatory in these programmes, and indeed the 'can-do' girl is also expected to be able to successfully participate in consumer culture. The image of Tyler watching *My Super Sweet 16* highlights the sharp contrast between the life she is supposedly meant to want, and is potentially able to have, according to media culture, and the life she actually has. As an 'at-risk' girl, she is unlikely to be able to successfully participate in consumer culture and is more likely to display 'inappropriate consumption behaviours' (Harris, 2004: 14) such as smoking and drinking alcohol, both of which she does, even though she is a child. However, her dismissiveness shows she is aware of her own position and the fact that the lifestyles presented are highly unrealistic and exaggerated.

Unlike the girls who dance in the car park, Mia's dancing is not deliberately sexualised. Also, unlike Carly, Mia's dancing is not polished because she is just an average dancer rather than a potentially successful one. Mia is shown standing in front of the television, secretly attempting to copy the music video she is watching. This, once again, reinforces the contrast between Mia and Carly as, due to *StreetDance's* glossy aesthetics, Carly is filmed as if she could be *in* the music video Mia is watching. Unbeknown to her, Mia is being watched by Connor while she is dancing. It is ambiguous at this point as to whether Mia becomes sexualised from Connor's gaze, but Mia then becomes the 'bearer of the look' (Mulvey, 1975) as she watches a half-dressed Connor walk back up the stairs and her gaze turns from initial

curiosity to desire. As film critic Kevin Maher notes, Arnold 'shoots Fassbender in particular with a fantastically lusty eye' (Maher, 2009: 37), while Ryan Gilbey, claims the shot, viewed through Mia's eyes, 'feels positively transgressive' as it makes 'you realise how strongly the "male gaze"… still informs what we see on screen (Gilbey, 2009: 47). This scene is just one example of the way in which the gender gaze switches throughout the film.[44] Moreover, Mia's dancing and movements also seem to change as her feelings for Connor develop. They become more graceful as she undergoes, what Kaleem Aftab refers to as her 'sexual awakening' (Aftab, 2009) (Figure 7). This sensuality is also reinforced by the fact that Mia is wearing earphones, locked in her own private world, and the only sound is her slow breathing. In addition, the darkened mise-en-scène alludes to the increased sense of tension and danger within the film as Mia becomes caught between a need for fatherly attention and growing sexual desire, feelings that she is ill equipped to manage (Bradshaw, 2009).

With regards to her dancing, Mia is unlike the other girls featured within this chapter as she has 'misaligned ambitions'. Unlike the 'can-do' girls, girls with misaligned ambitions have ambitions cannot plan them so that they are achievable. 'They are drifting dreamers who have limited knowledge about their chosen occupations… Without such information, their life plans are neither realistic nor well informed' (Schneider and Stevenson, 2000: 22). The idea that Mia's ambitions are 'misaligned' is very evident. She does not seem to consider her future initially, merely using dancing as a way of escaping her surroundings. She also stumbles across the advert for the auditions by chance, suggesting she has not planned for it. Similarly, she is only able to film an audition tape because Connor lends her his camera on his suggestion, implying she is not 'well informed' and lacks the necessary resources (Schneider and Stevenson, 2000: 22). Mia's lack of resources is further highlighted by the fact that she must travel to an Internet café to even be able watch videos of other street dancers, whilst her 'can-do' counterparts can access high quality resources very easily, even if this is initially not the case. For example, both Kim and Carly's lack of money initially limits their access to resources but this is overcome very quickly within the films' narratives.

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[44] This idea of the 'female voyeur' is also evident in Andrea Arnold's debut feature film *Red Road* (2006), while female sexual desire is also highlighted in *Wasp* (2003).

Figure 7: Mia (Katie Jarvis) lost in her own world.

Mia's lack of knowledge is reinforced when she arrives at the audition and it becomes clear that the style of dancing required – seemingly stripping and pole dancing – is not what she expected. In an echo of the scene where the girls dance in the car park, a sharp contrast is established between Mia's style and the sexualised appearance of other girls. The female club owner attempts to rectify this by telling her to wear her hair loose and asks if she has any shorts to wear, as this would be 'lovely, a lot more feminine'. This evokes Gill's (2007) aforementioned ideas about 'commercialized sexualization' and, more specifically, Ariel Levy's (2006) work on 'raunch culture'. According to Levy, young women who participate in 'raunch culture' display a very specific and limited 'male fantasy' version of female sexuality, typically derived from the porn industry. They do this because it is 'fun' and 'empowering', and includes both watching and performing activities such as stripping and pole dancing, with an increasing number of young women working in these roles (2006: 4). What is significant for Levy is the idea that women themselves facilitate their participation in this culture, whom she refers to as 'female chauvinist pigs: women who make sex objects of other women and of ourselves' (ibid). This is not glamourized within the film, taking place in a dark and seedy looking back room, and Mia soon realises that this is not the way in which she will fulfill her ambition and leaves disillusioned.

Mia doesn't get to fulfill her ambition within the film but dancing does provide a positive outcome of sorts. Music and dance provide something for Mia and her mother to bond over, and the way in which they begin to mirror each other's movements hints at some sort of reconciliation between them. As the soundtrack says, 'life's a bitch', and while this is true for Mia there is some hope for her future as she manages to escape the estate with her boyfriend, even if the film does not offer the utopia seen in the other films discussed here. This sense of hope is also conveyed in the symbolic connection between Mia and her boyfriend's horse, who is also trapped. Mia is told that the horse was put down because 'she was sixteen, it was her time'. This has echoes of Lisa's line in *Fast Girls* when she asserts 'It's my time now', and while the line itself is used negatively as it refers to the death of horse, it is possible to read this line positively. As Mia is symbolically connected to the horse within the film, it could be said that, like the other ambitious girls that form the case studies of this chapter, where it is believed that certain moments should be seized for success, it is also Mia's 'time'. While it is unlikely that Mia will be as successful as the other girls, there is always the hope that her life will, in some way, get better.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which the figure of the ambitious young woman is articulated within the contemporary British sports film, using Anita Harris' (2004) concept of the "can-do" girl and Angela McRobbie's (2007) 'top girls'. One of the ways in which films such as *Fast Girls*, *Chalet Girl* and *StreetDance* convey the notions of ambition and success is through their 'aspirational' aesthetics. Despite their relatively small budgets, these films exhibit glossy and aspirational aesthetics, often achieved through the very deliberate decision to hire fashion commercial directors and music video directors to direct the films, even though they have not previously directed a feature film. These glossy and aspirational aesthetics are often discussed within the films' critical reception in a way that suggests that these films do not look like a 'typical' British film. Reviewers of *StreetDance*, for example, frequently remark that London looks so beautiful within the film it is barely recognisable. Furthermore, in the case of *Chalet Girl*, this

idea of aspiration is also evident within the film's marketing. Audiences are encouraged to interact with the brands featured within the film that embody the ideas of aspiration and success, such as the sports brand Roxy. The ability to participate in consumer culture is also crucial for successful 'can-do' girls.

The issue of class is highly prominent within these films. There is often a clear distinction between the working-class protagonist and other characters who are middle class, and this provides much of the narrative tension within these films as two very different 'worlds' clash. However, this is overcome by the end of the film, usually with the working class girl gaining middle class status through her success and the acquisition of a middle class romantic partner. *StreetDance* takes this even further as Carly doesn't enter a middle class world so much as the unification of the two 'worlds' means generates a certain classlessness. In addition, while these films may acknowledge the economic climate in which they were made and exhibited, with references to money/funding issues and unemployment, these problems are swiftly overcome and do not inhibit the young woman's success overall. By contrast, unlike class, race is not posed as a 'problem' that needs to be worked through within films' narratives.

The 'can-do' girl has the "desire, determination and confidence" to 'achieve her goals' (Harris, 2004: 1) and this is certainly evident within these films, as many of the girls have been working towards their sporting ambitions for a number of years. Their dedication and determination is typically encapsulated within a training montage showing repeated effort combined with an 'inspirational' soundtrack. While postfeminist ambition is seen as an individual endeavor, films that portray team sports such as *Fast Girls* and *StreetDance* emphasise the importance of collective work in achieving success. However, while co-operation leads to team success, the individual is also rewarded through the fulfillment of their personal goals and a heterosexual romantic relationship, so the notion of the individual is still present. For example, while street dance is a collective effort, it is suggested that it is Carly's unique abilities as a 'can-do' girl that will ensure the team's success. Moreover, the discourse of the 'can-do' also circulates within the promotional materials for the films. Interviews with the films' lead actors frequently highlight how hard they have worked to achieve their professional goals. Felicity Jones, for example, is embodies

'top girl' characteristics as she has achieved both academic and professional success simultaneously, while the girls from *Fast Girls* discuss how they had to 'become' athletes by adopting strict training regimes and changing how their bodies look and perform.

The notion of the body plays an important part within these films. While the films' aesthetics may mean the female body is glamourized to an extent, it is rarely overtly sexualised. In some cases, the postfeminist 'lad culture' is specifically criticised, particularly the idea that women must be seen, and present themselves, as constantly "up for it" (Gill, 2007: 515), with more emphasis being placed on the physical ability of the female body. Furthermore, in *StreetDance* and *Fish Tank*, female desire is consciously foregrounded through the complication of the 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975). In direct contrast to the other girls, *Fish Tank's* Mia is explicitly constructed as an 'at-risk' girl with 'misaligned ambitions' and in this case, class barriers cannot be easily overcome. However, the film's poetic realism, which finds beauty in the most mundane things, ensures there is always hope for Mia, even if she cannot be provided with the utopian ending found in the other films. While *Fish Tank* is a very different film compared to the other case studies, a number of similarities can be discerned. For example, as with the other films, discourses of female ambition run through the promotional materials for film as actress Katie Jarvis is first aligned with her character's 'at-risk' status and then subtly transformed into a 'can-do' girl who is determined to make the most of her opportunities. The film is also critical of 'commercialized sexualization' (Gill, 2007: 151) and Mia is positioned outside of this culture. Therefore, despite its obvious differences, *Fish Tank* provides an interesting contribution to the discussion of young female ambition, particularly when discussed in relation to more mainstream films, as its inclusion within this chapter highlights how the figure of the ambitious young women in often articulated in very specific ways in contemporary British cinema.

'Standards of behaviour must be kept': Education and 'Sexualisation' in the British Girls' School Film

Introduction

The previous chapter focused primarily on the individualised 'can-do' girl in recent sports films. In this chapter, the focus is on films featuring groups of girls set within the all-girls school. The boarding school film long been thought of as a quintessentially British genre. Films such as *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (Wood, 1939) presented the boarding school as a safe and unchanging world that promoted the 'wisdom of the traditional value system' (Roberts, 2007). The boarding school film genre had virtually disappeared by 1965, with Lindsay Anderson's *If* (1968) appearing to signal a violent end to the genre with postwar rebellion against public school order and tradition (ibid). Historically, girls have been largely absent from British boarding school films, and school films more generally. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Neame, 1969), which tells the story of the charismatic Jean Brodie (Maggie Smith) and her select group of girls at a school in the 1930s, is a notable exception.[45]

However, the twenty first century has witnessed a rise of girls' school films as part of British cinema's increased interest in girl culture more broadly, as argued more fully in the introduction to this thesis. These films are mostly set within boarding, public or grammar schools, which are typically same-sex environments, rather than modern comprehensives. These films span a variety of genres and intended audiences and include contemporary-set films such as *St Trinian's* (Parker and Thompson, 2007), *Wild Child* (Moore, 2008) and *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (Chadha, 2008) and *The Hole* (Hamm, 2001), as well as films set in the past, such as *An Education* (Scherfig, 2009), *Cracks* (Scott, 2008), *The Falling* (Morley, 2014) and – arguably – *Never Let Me Go* (Romanek, 2010). In many of

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[45] A rich tradition of girls' boarding school stories can be found in literature, however, such as Enid Blyton's *Mallory Towers* series and the work of Angela Brazil.

these films, the same-sex school is presented as a confined and regulated space, and occasionally tensions, passions and jealousies destabilise the school's order. Writing about British female prison films in the 1950s, Melanie Bell notes how British cinema has traditionally been more 'hospitable to the female group film than Hollywood' due to British cinema's history of ensemble playing, which Bell attributes to film's relationship to theatre in Britain and the lack of 'star system' in comparison with Hollywood (2009: 99). As Vicky Ball notes, the female ensemble is also prominent within British television, as the female ensemble drama is a distinctively British form of 'feminine gendered fiction in the way it focuses upon… communities of female characters' (2012: 256). Moreover, Melanie Bell also claims a 'case can be made for the female group film as a type of "woman's film" that finds particular expression in mainstream British cinema' beyond the 1950s, citing *Bhaji on the Beach* (Chadha, 1993) and *She'll Be Wearing Pink Pyjamas* (Goldschmidt, 1985) as examples (ibid).[46] For Bell, the British prison films of the 1950s:

> dramatised female relationships across a backdrop of incarceration, foregrounding the connections and differences between women and providing a space where anxieties about female desire could be confronted and worked through (ibid: 101).

Similar points of comparison can be made with the recent British girls' school films explored in this chapter, which contain a similar sense of confinement, and the school, like the prison, provides a space for engaging with anxieties about girls' sexuality. With this in mind, Charles Gant's observation in his review of *Cracks* that 'Boarding school movies are essentially prison flicks populated by posh, pretty people (Gant, 2009)' is particularly pertinent. This idea of the boarding school as consisting solely of a particular type of 'posh' person is also evident within the films discussed here, as all of the girls are noticeably middle-class. *St Trinian's* has historically provided an antidote to this by featuring shabbier genteel girls or nouveau riche girls. However, as will be discussed later on, although still presenting a more ambiguous class status, the characters in the recent revival were considered to have 'gone posh' (MacKichan, 2007) in comparison with the girls from the original films in the 1950s and 1960s.

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[46] Justine Ashby (2010) also draws on these films in her work on the contemporary British woman's film, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis.

This recent spate of girls' school films in cotemporary British cinema emerged in a period when girls featured prominently within educational discourses. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, McRobbie argues that within postfeminist culture, young women are offered a notional form of equality in the guise of the 'new sexual contract'. One of the main sites in which this new sexual contract operates is within education (the other being consumer culture). Young women are encouraged to 'come forward' and gain qualifications in order to earn enough money to participate in the consumer culture (2009: 54). As such, girls today are 'marked by the procession of grades, qualifications and occupational identities', more so than their male counterparts (ibid: 73). These 'top girls' are girls' are presented as hard-working, high-achieving girls – often white and middle-class girls – who are often destined for Oxford or Cambridge (ibid: 15), often pictured in the press clutching their exam certificates and jumping in the air come results day.[47] Moreover, within the UK in particular the figure of the 'top girl' was mobilised on the values of the new meritocracy promoted by New Labour (ibid: 57-58). However, girls' increasing educational success has led to a 'backlash' in the form of a moral panic about boys' failure, specifically the idea that girls' success has come at the expense of boys – working-class boys in particular (Ringrose, 2013: 20). For example, in 2011 Conservative minister for Universities and Science, David Willetts, claimed that feminism was the "key factor" contributing to economic decline in the UK, as the increase in education and employment opportunities for women since the 1970s has led to a lack of social mobility for working-class men (Prince, 2011).

In her book *Postfeminist Education* (2013) sociologist Jessica Ringrose highlights a 'contradiction in relation to the "successful girl" thesis; namely, if girls are so successful, that is they have escaped the oppressions of their "sexed" body, why do we have a competing moral panic about girls sexuality and "sexualisation" (ibid: 42). Ringrose notes how concern over the sexualisation of girls has been 'brought to a fevered pitch' (ibid: 43) over the past decade. This panic includes a 'consistent

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[47] More recently the media's reliance on this stock image of the 'leaping blonde' to indicate girls' success has suffered a backlash and is mocked on social media in particular through Twitter hashtags like #waronblondes and the 'Sexy A-Levels!' Tumblr.

stream of newspaper headlines' (ibid: 47), government reviews such as the 'Review on the Sexualisation of Young People' (Papadopoulos, 2010) and campaigns such as Mumsnet's 'Let Girls be Girls' campaign, which was concerned that 'an increasingly sexualised culture was dripping toxically into the lives of children' (Mumsnet, 2010). This concern over the sexualisation of girls in particular exists alongside the rise of 'raunch culture' (Levy, 2006), a strand of postfeminism that emerged in the early years of the twenty-first century that promotes a 'pornified' version of female sexuality that is upheld as the dominant mode to aspire to (Levy, 2006: 5). Within raunch culture, Levy argues, women are encouraged to make sex objects of themselves in the name of female empowerment (ibid). As Louise Wilks notes in her work on raunch culture and the British tween film, the incorporation of young girls into raunch culture through media images and consumer culture – such as retailers selling clothing with 'sexy slogans' – has incited concern over the premature sexualisation of girls within the press through the idea that they are encouraged to become sexually active at a (too) young age (2012b: 104).

This chapter will explore how young femininity is constructed within recent British girls' school films. It has been demonstrated that the prominent 'successful girl' discourse within education has emerged alongside, and been undercut by, a moral panic over the sexualisation of young girls. Therefore, this chapter will examine contemporary British cinema's engagement with discourses around girls' education more broadly, but also, crucially, the ways in which ideas and concerns about girls' sexuality underpin all of these films. This chapter is therefore concerned with how the same-sex school functions as a site through which to explore anxieties about girls' sexuality and sexualisation. The first section will examine two contemporary-set boarding school films: *St Trinian's* (Parker and Thompson, 2007) and *Wild Child* (Moore, 2008). Both these films will be considered in relation to the ways in which they engage with contemporary discourses around girls' education and sexuality, and how they construct a (nationally-specific) postfeminist identity as the ideal. The fact that both these films are explicitly aimed at young girls – tweens and teens – will also be considered in relation to how this impacts upon the films' constructions of femininity. The second section will analyse two girls' school films set in the 1960s: *An Education* (Scherfig, 2009) and *The Falling* (Morley, 2014). After very briefly introducing the social and cultural context of the 1960s, this section will go on to

explore how the specific historic setting engages with discourses around girls' education and sexuality through drawing on the concern about the changing sexual mores of the period.

Postfeminist (school)girl power in *St Trinian's* (2007) and *Wild Child* (2008)

In 2002 it was announced that Ealing Studios, which was at the centre of a £50 million redevelopment plan, would be reviving the iconic *St Trinian's* films. Based on the cartoons of Ronald Searle, the *St Trinian's* series began in 1954 with *The Belles of St Trinian's* (Launder, 1954). The original series of films consisted of five films produced between 1954 and 1980 and dealt with the exploits of the unruly pupils of the infamous St Trinian's School For Young Ladies. The original series 'plays on the postwar decline of the British upper class' (Bell, 2012: 115) with its depiction of a crumbling relic of a boarding school, the elitist 'cradle of the British class system' (ibid). More than this, however, the films were an 'expression of unruly womanhood', offering the 'spectacle of the destructive female group' that challenged established social order (Bell, 2010: 100). Indeed, much of the humour arose 'from the incongruity of young ladies behaving in such a brutal and *unladylike* fashion' (Williams, 2015: 9). The legacy of the films and their depictions of law-breaking schoolgirls who liked to drink, smoke and gamble mean that 'St Trinian's has become shorthand for anarchic female subordination (Bell, 2012: 115).

It is hardly surprising, then, that one of British cinema's most iconic girl-centred film franchises should be revived as part of contemporary cinema's fascination with girls and young women, capitalising on *St Trinians'* "peculiarly British" representation of girlhood (Adams, 2006: 16). *St Trinian's* (2007) was directed by Oliver Parker and Barnaby Thompson and produced by Ealing Studios with support from the UKFC, with a budget of £7 million (Skegg, 2007: 93). The film stars Rupert Everett as headmistress Camilla Fritton and Talulah Riley as new girl Annabelle Fritton, who arrives at St Trinian's as an ex-pupil of the prestigious boarding school Cheltenham Ladies' College. In order to revive the school's finances and prevent its closure, the girls devise a heist to steal Johannes Vermeer's Girl with a Pearl Earring from the National Gallery. The film was a surprise success, taking around £12.5 million at the UK box-office (Fitzherbert, 2009a: 21). Thompson attributes the film's success in part to the fact that the film targeted girls aged 10-16, which he views as an

underserved demographic within British cinema – "For them to see other girls up on screen leading the story was something they found thrilling that they could relate to" (Lodderhose, 2008). *St Trinian's* was also reviewed rather favourably by the somewhat surprised critics upon its release in December 2007, although this was not universal. Writing in *The Express*, Henry Fitzherbert thought that 'In terms of potential for national embarrassment, a new *St Trinian's* movie seemed right up there with the 2012 Olympic Games' but the film was actually a 'hoot' rather than a 'great British balls-up' as expected, which celebrated 'several British traditions – public schools, quiz shows [and] cross-dressing' (Fitzherbert, 2007: 54). Christopher Tookey claims the film is 'not a Christmas turkey' (Tookey, 2007). While the film does maintain much of the 'Britishness' of the original films, as will be discussed further later on, it also employs certain tropes evident within contemporary American high school comedies. In promotional interviews Talulah Riley describes the film as "Hogwarts meets *Mean Girls*" (Lawrence, 2007), which points to the film's mixing of British and American characteristics.[48]

One of the most significant aspects of *St Trinian's* is the way the anarchic, rebellious spirit of the original films has been subsumed into the language of 'girl power'. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the term 'girl power' has come to stand for female empowerment and success. Within the UK, girl power is most commonly associated with the '90s girl group the Spice Girls. According to Justine Ashby, 'the language of "girl power", as it was popularized by the Spice Girls, promoted a boisterous, even aggressive, attitude towards gender politics' (2005: 129). For Ashby, 'the logic of "girl power" 'somehow managed to link being sexy with being ballsy, to celebrate female camaraderie while privileging individualism.' (ibid: 129). In order to reinforce this point, Ashby highlights a line from the film *SpiceWorld* (Spiers, 1997), which proclaimed that all girls needed were "strength and courage and a Wonderbra"' (ibid). *St Trinians'* engagement with the girl power discourse can be partly attributed to the fact that producer Barnaby Thompson was also the

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[48] It was hugely important to Ealing that St *Trinian's* was an international success because, as mentioned, Ealing's reputation relied upon the film. Ealing's Head of Sales Natalie Brenner highlighted the 'challenges' of selling a very 'British' film series that has a 'history of being successful only in the UK' to an international audience (Brenner, 2007), so the inclusion of transatlantic elements is intrinsic to this.

producer of *SpiceWorld*. In his review of the film, Chris Tookey claims the 'movie [*St Trinian's*] most resembles is… *SpiceWorld: The Movie*, which had very much the same mixture of high spirits, camp and cheerful trashiness' (Tookey, 2007). *St Trinians'* emphasis on 'girl power' is also highlighted by actress Gemma Arterton in promotional interviews. Speaking to the *Evening Standard*, Arterton says:

> Our film is more about girl power. It's the message we really want to push. I don't think there's a point in the film where the girls aren't in control: they're doing the trampling rather than being trampled on (Arterton, quoted in Hoggard, 2007).

Arterton's comment that the St Trinian's girls are 'doing the trampling' (ibid) evokes the 'boisterous' attitude of girl power (Ashby, 2005: 129), and sits nicely with the idea of the fearless and assertive St Trinian's girl.

However, the notion of girl power has become so embedded within popular culture that the boisterous attitude demonstrated by the girls of St Trinian's means that they are no longer viewed as anarchic or subversive because one of the attractions of the original films was the spectacle of girls behaving in such an incongruously aggressive – and decidedly unladylike – manner, which is now commonplace. Within the film's critical reception it is noted how unlike the 'naughty hockey stick-wielding minxes' of the original films, the new St Trinian's 'don't seem fearsome at all' (Smith, 2007: 25). Similarly, Catherine Shoard highlights how, unlike the original girls, 'they're misbehaving not to be wily, but for female empowerment (Shoard, 2007). There is the explicit sense that not only have the St Trinian's girls lost their shock value, but also that they could not possibly behave in that is any worse than some real-life modern girls. Here the critical discourse draws on the idea of aggressive behaviour as a sign of girl power taken too far. This is situated within 'postfeminist panics' about girls' education, such as the middle-class 'mean girl' school bully (Ringrose, 2013) and the working-class 'at-risk' girl who leaves school without any qualifications and is thus an 'educational failure' (Harris, 2004). For example, Damon Smith, writing in the *Daily Post*, writes: 'keeping in mind the nightmarish headlines about drugs, violence and bullying in our classrooms, the pranks of these girl cliques are now rather tame' (Smith, 2007: 25). While the *Daily Mail's* Chris Tookey claims that the original girls were 'refreshing' and different, the

contemporary pupils look like 'girls at any inner-city comprehensive, but with fewer knives and pregnancies'.[49] This discourse of girl power gone too far is also discussed in relation to society more broadly, not just within education. Cosmo Landesman claims the original films were a 'celebration of English eccentricity [and] non-conformity' but the remake is *St Trinian's* for the 'Bratz/ Girls Aloud generation. That is, girls who think getting drunk and acting like a moronic ladette is a form of female empowerment… We see St Trinian's excess all over England, and it's not a pretty sight' (Landesman, 2007). In his criticism, Landesman evokes the media panic around female beahviour and 'ladette' culture was common during the late 1990s and into the millennium, which condemned 'unruly' behaviour. Angela McRobbie details the principles of 'ladette' culture when she writes about figure of the 'phallic girl'. While the figure of the phallic girl within popular culture is not new, for McRobbie the figure that emerged in the late 1990s existed on the assumption that gender equality had been achieved and was no longer in question (2007: 732). The 'phallic girl' (or ladette) was now able to 'emulate the assertive and hedonistic styles of sexuality associated with young men, particularly in holiday locations, and also within… weekend heavy drinking culture' (ibid). Of course, within postfeminism, this 'freedom' is carefully limited to ensure that male hegemony is maintained, such as the notion that female sexuality is conveyed in line with 'the tabloid language of masculinist pleasures', disguised by 'the language of personal choice' (ibid: 733). However, as Louise Wilks argues in her work on the British tween film, the question of how far the St Trinian's girls can adhere to this is significant because as teenagers they do not have a large amount of freedom with which to pursue this hedonistic lifestyle of casual sex and heavy drinking (2012b: 117), as their transgressions are mostly confined to the boarding school.

While many reviews liken St Trinian's to real life classrooms that – particularly within the right-wing press - are constructed as lawless, the film itself is implicitly critical of the UK education system. On arriving at St Trinian's from Cheltenham

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[49] The right-wing *Daily Mail's* use of the film to highlight the 'problems' with twenty-first century schools was also evident in pre-production discourses with the assertion that the original St Trinian's films 'predicted, with disconcerting accuracy, the lawlessness of many 21-century classrooms' where 'discipline [is] almost non-existent' (Letts, 2002: 11).

Ladies College, Annabelle registers her disgust with St Trinian's, describing it as 'creepy', 'low-rent' and 'like Hogwarts for pikeys',[50] a line which acknowledges that a certain traditional idea of Britishness still exists within the British boarding school film, even with films as recent as the *Harry Potter* series, which, as Andrew Roberts claims, present a 'curiously retro-1950s world' (2012: 126). This line also points to *St Trinian's* reputation historically for representing the British boarding school as an institution that is past its prime, and for showcasing greater diversity in its representation of class compared to the majority of boarding school films which tend to focus on middle-class pupils. The lessons at St Trinian's are highly unorthodox, including making counterfeit alcohol in science and evading prosecution for drug smuggling in Spanish. St Trinian's is, as Miss Fritton passionately argues, a 'place for girls who find shelter nowhere else', and she refuses to let the Department of Education 'strangle us with your limited curriculum'. The implication here is that mainstream education policies stifle creativity and individuality. This idea that a limited education is detrimental to girls' creativity is present within many of the films discussed in this chapter. Writing in the far left newspaper *Morning Star*, Jeff Sawtell views the film's representation of the girls' education as a 'direct attack on New Labour's ideas of academy schools and being subjected to soul-destroying excessive exams and league tables designed to dull the creative mind' (Sawtell, 2007). A similar criticism of New Labour's education system is found in Henry Fitzherbert's review for the *Sunday Express*, where he views the film as celebrating the 'British tradition' of the public school system, suggesting that education was in some way 'better' before the introduction of the National Curriculum (Fitzherbert, 2007). It is interesting to note how the left and right wing critics meet here to criticise the centre-left education policies of New Labour.

Despite this, many critics felt the stinging critique of the original films was missing, with the updated film relying on a 'series of social clichés' (Landesman, 2007) and 'over-familiar caricatures' (Tookey, 2007) through the division of the girls into

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[50] According to Urbandictionary.com, the word 'pikey' is a derogatory term for a Traveller or someone who exhibits negative stereotypical behaviour often associated with the Traveller community, such as 'stealing'.

'cliques' or 'tribes'.[51] These include: geeks, chavs, emos and 'posh totty'. While some critics viewed the groups as clichéd, directors Barnaby Thompson and Oliver Parker justified the use of cliques by explaining how they visited a number of schools, "including posh public schools and comprehensives" as part of their research (Thompson, quoted in MacKichan, 2007). The fact that the filmmakers visited both public schools and comprehensives points to the film's democratic image as it contains a diverse mix of pupils, whereas traditionally boarding school films have focused on the upper classes. According to Parker, "Girls at modern schools today are divided into gangs and cliques. By visiting a number we were able to plug into the mindset of today's girls" (ibid), reinforcing the filmmakers' desire to 'update' the series in a way that represents and appeals to contemporary audiences. Furthermore, Thompson claims that the "difference between now and the old films is the girls' look is more defined and the dress more tribal" (ibid). It is highly evident within the film that the girls' identities arise from the sense of belonging they acquire from dressing to reflect a particular clique rather than class. In her work on the 'chav' figure, Imogen Tyler notes how the term 'chav' signifies 'class disgust' towards the poor, white working class (2008: 21). Tyler also notes how some of those demonised as 'chavs' within the music industry in particular have now 'reclaimed the term as an affirmative sub-cultural identity', using teenage rapper Lady Sovereign – who features on the film's soundtrack - as an example (ibid: 31). I would argue that the use of the 'chav' identity in *St Trinian's* both adheres to this while also going beyond it. While 'chav' is an 'affirmative sub-cultural identity' (Tyler, 2008: 31) in the film, the representations of the 'chav' girls exceed this because their identity is based mainly around adopting the fashion markers of chav identity and is not so much a reflection of their working class status. This is because when 'chav' is used in a derogatory way in the film, it is implied this is more to do with rivalry and the idea that the girls are part of a different clique compared to the 'emos' etc., rather than a criticism of a girl's social/ class background. Moreover, critics have noted how the distinction between classes has blurred considerably compared to the original films. Jane MacKichan claims the 'jolly-hockey-stickwielding wildcats [have] gone posh' and that the girls look 'a lot richer and

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[51] These comments highlight middle-class male reviewers' misunderstanding of girl-centred films, which reinforces arguments made in the introduction to this thesis about the denigration of films aimed at teenage girls.

tidier' (MacKichan, 2007). This is indicative of the postfeminist cultural context in which the film was made, which emphasises affluent middle-class femininity as normative.

In keeping with its postfeminist context, the film also includes a pivotal makeover scene.[52] Diane Negra asserts, 'In postfeminist consumer culture, the makeover is a key ritual of female coming into being' (2009: 123). The makeover is the 'scene par excellence of postfeminist identity making' that allows for the 'revelation of the self that has been there all along' (ibid: 124). The scene begins with Kelly and the other girls menacingly leaning over Annabelle's bed as she sleeps over a sinister non-diegetic soundtrack. They then drag her out of bed, tie her to a chair and shine a lamp in her eyes, suggestive of an interrogation. Kelly whispers, 'You've had this coming since the day you arrived' but when the camera zooms in it becomes clear the 'weapons' they are brandishing are actually beauty implements such as tongs and eyelash curlers. The mood then changes as Kelly cheerfully replies, 'Give you a makeover, silly!' and members of each clique take it in turns to style Annabelle their own image. The change in tone from intimidation to celebration of the makeover is indicative of the nature of the film itself. For example, the beginning of the scene nods towards the idea of St Trinian's girls as 'wild' and 'dangerous', while the makeover aspect positions the film in line with contemporary teen films. In a music video-style sequence, Annabelle is transformed into various identities, with each look captured in a glossy Polaroid-style photo reminiscent of fashion advertising. On the final image, Annabelle is not dressed as belonging to a particular clique and when Kelly asks her how she feels, she replies, 'Like a St Trinian'. The makeover has thus enabled the 'revelation of the self that has been there all along' (Negra, 2009: 124). Through the makeover, Annabelle has discovered her 'true' St Trinian's identity that is individual, as it doesn't conform to a particular clique. However, this individuality is limited as Annabelle's image still conforms to typical beauty ideals of glossy red lips, big hair and a short dress with stocking and suspenders, although

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[52] The makeover scene is a common trope within contemporary teen films. This is particularly true of American films such as *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004) but, as is highlighted in this chapter's discussion of *Wild Child* and films discussed in the following chapter, British films also adhere to this but in slightly different ways.

of course the image of the sexy St Trinian's girl has featured throughout the series'
history (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Annabelle (Tallulah Riley) becomes a St Trinian.

St Trinian's has engaged with moral panics about young women's sexuality
throughout its history. The films of the 1950s and 1960s, for example, were
produced during a period of concern about an increasingly permissive society, with
female sexual autonomy a particular source of anxiety.[53] However, as discussed in
the introduction, concern over girls' sexuality and 'sexualisation' has been
particularly prominent over the past decade. As such Emma Bell claims the revived
St Trinian's 'colludes with moral panics about "bad girls" and disturbing sex
fantasies about "naughty schoolgirls" and "strict mistresses"' (Bell, 2012: 115).
However, while the film's critical reception highlights this 'naughty schoolgirl'
aspect, it is suggested that the film acknowledges but does not incite further anxiety.
For example, Liz Hoggard claims there are 'a few dodgy gymslip moments'
(Hoggard, 2007), while Mark Adams says the film occasionally 'lapses into a bit of
simplistic salaciousness with lingering shots of short skirts and suspender belts'
(Adams, 2007). Chris Tookey claims the costumes cater to the tastes of 'middle-aged
men so sad they can't even work out how to download porn from the internet'
(Tookey, 2007) while James Christopher says the 'raunch factor barely exceeds
Carry On Tease' (Christopher, 2007: 14). Louise Wilks notes how British tween
films such as *St Trinian's* engage in contemporary debates about the sexualisation of

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[53] This will be explored further in the next section, which examines contemporary
girls' school films set in the 1960s.

girls (2012b: 119) but, as mentioned previously, they do so in somewhat contradictory ways by both critiquing the idea of 'empowerment' through raunch culture while also celebrating the 'commodified young woman's body' (ibid: 100). When talking about the 'posh totty' girls, Wilks argues that while they may dress in the most sexualised manner compared to the other girls, wearing sexy underwear and feather boas, this contained within their dressing room at the all-female boarding school, suggesting their dress is part of a 'bonding regime rather than representing an aim to appeal to boys' (ibid: 117), suggesting that sex is not really a concern. Wilks also claims the girls are not as sexually empowered as they seem. She cites a scene where it appears the 'posh totty' girls are running a sex chat line from their bedroom, as Chelsea (Tamsin Egerton) says, 'I did really well in my last oral, although I did find it a bit of a mouthful at first'. Education terms here are used as innuendo, suggesting Chelsea aims to titillate her caller, but it becomes clear this was not her intention when she innocently ends her conversation by explaining how much she likes Greek lessons. This scene shows there is a marked contrast between the girls' sexualised appearance and their sexual experience, suggesting that media panics about the sexualisation of girls do not always take into account the idea that appearance is not directly linked to sexual activity (ibid).

The image of the 'posh totty' girls also makes them the perfect pupils to represent St Trinian's on the fictional television quiz show, School Challenge. As the girls progress through the competition they seek advice on how to manage their growing celebrity status from ex-head girl and PR guru J.J French (Mischa Barton). French advises the girls that if done properly, their appearance on School Challenge could lead to them appearing on a reality TV show 'and before you know it you've married a footballer and bought the Bahamas'. This line alludes to the UK's 'WAG' culture, which is discussed in the next chapter in relation to the film *Kicks* (Heymann, 2008). It also draws attention to the moral panic around young people's ambitions and the idea that girls in particular just want to be famous. The posh totty girls are stunned by J.J's plan, and their seeming lack of knowledge of PR stands in marked contrast to *Kicks'* Jasmine, who knows how to strategically plan her route to fame. While the *St Trinian's* girls are not entirely removed from media culture, their limited knowledge is indicative of British cinema's representation of the same-sex school as a hermetically-sealed environment. Moreover, the girls' limited awareness of

celebrity culture is also presented as nationally-specific, as indicated by the casting of American actor Mischa Barton. The film capitalizes on Barton's reputation from her role as Marissa in *The O.C* (2003-2007), a series about affluent teenagers in California's Orange County. Barton's image is therefore associated with affluence, fashion and consumption, which the 'posh totty' girls aim for. The fact that Barton plays the only identifiably American character within the film, and she is brought in to teach the girls about celebrity, implies that celebrity culture is something that Britain has 'learnt' from America, which has a reputation as a particularly extreme example of a 'consumer capitalist society' (Wilks, 2012b: 110).

The 'posh totty' girls are heavily invested in their image and appear initially to believe the 'dumb blonde' stereotype that they are associated with, relying on earpieces to feed them the answers during the School Challenge quiz. When this fails, their teacher, Miss Dickinson (Lena Headey), convinces them to believe in their own answers because 'smart is sexy'. Miss Dickson is coded as a stereotypical 'feminist spinster' teacher, who dresses plainly and provides a stark contrast to the postfeminist girls. While the film suggests that knowledge leads to empowerment as the girls eventually win the quiz without assistance, this is significantly undercut. For example, they correctly give an answer as 'chocolate', and they only know the capital of a particular country because, we're told, one of the girls 'had a boyfriend from there'. Their knowledge is therefore highly gendered, gained from their consumption of women's magazines and investment in heterosexual relationships, rather than having learnt it at school, suggesting that maintaining a postfeminist identity is more beneficial than an academic education. Therefore, while *St Trinian's* seemingly celebrates freedom and creativity within education, ultimately the film upholds the notion that success and empowerment can only really be gained from investment in ideal, normative (postfeminist) femininity.

The success of *St Trinian's* led to a 2009 sequel, *St Trinian's 2: The Legend of Fritton's Gold* (Parker and Thompson, 2009). The film is very much in the same vein as its predecessor and as such I shall only discuss it briefly here. In *The Legend of Fritton's Gold*, the girls must retrieve the lost gold of Miss Fritton's pirate ancestor. However, in order to get their fortune, they must outwit Lord Pomfrey (David Tennant), head of the AD1 Brotherhood, a misogynistic secret society that

believes 'women are cattle'. During their quest, the girls discover a number of secrets, including that Miss Fritton's ancestor wrote the plays of William Shakespeare – and that Shakespeare was a woman. Unlike *St Trinian's*, the sequel was poorly received by the majority of critics, and words such as 'clunky' (Young, 2009: 43), 'laboured' (Sandhu, 2009) are used often in the film's critical reception.

The sequel still retains many of the expected features, such as references to British film history, cliques and postfeminist tropes. In interviews, director Barnaby Thompson describes how the cliques have changed since the first film: "We have new tribes: the Flammables and the Ecos. The last film's Chavs have evolved with a bit more sophistication into the Rude Girls" (Thompson, quoted in Sewards, 2009). As with the first film, Thompson emphasises that the cliques are based upon changes in real-life schools, which were discovered through "market research" by the costume designer's niece, who told the filmmakers how the cliques had changed over time (ibid). Thompson also reinforces the film's investment in postfeminist consumer culture by describing how:

> The girls are more empowered. They know what they want and will go out to get it, but they still all have push-up bras, iPods, mobile phones, curling tongs and hair straighteners (ibid).

While the film is still predominantly defined by this postfeminist ideal that links empowerment with image and consumerism, there are some instances where this appears to be undercut. For example, when the St Trinian's girls are defending the school from AD1 intruders, posh totty Chelsea lounges on the stairs and greets them with the line, 'Hello boys'. They stop stunned, giving another girl the opportunity to pour gunge over them from the landing. Chelsea's seductive pose combined with the line 'Hello boys' mimics the 1990s Wonderbra advert, which, for McRobbie, exemplifies postfeminism. According to McRobbie, this advert is an example of postfeminism's 'undoing' of feminism through the use of irony as the advert relies on overtly sexist imagery, so as to take feminism 'into account' by showing it to be a thing of the past while also putting viewers at ease with such objectification by calling on their 'visual literacy' and knowledge of feminist criticism such as Mulvey's (1975) idea of the 'male gaze' (McRobbie, 2007: 33). However, the fact that this leads to the men getting gunge thrown over them suggests that, unlike the

original advert, there are consequences for the men who look upon this image. Whereas the original advert invited men to gaze at the woman without condemnation because the visually literate female viewer also "gets the joke" (ibid), the men here are depicted as foolish for thinking that they are being invited to objectify Chelsea without any repercussions.

Perhaps the most significant difference between *The Legend of Fritton's Gold* and the previous film is the way the girls are positioned in opposition to boys by the film's 'battle of the sexes narrative', which highlights issues of gender and class inequality. [54] In doing so *The Legend of Fritton's Gold* taps into ideas discussed in the introduction to this thesis about how, since the 2008 economic crisis, 'wealth and inequality [have] emerg[ed] as key themes across numerous media genres and modes' (Negra and Tasker, 2014: 10). This is interlinked with a resurgence of feminist activity that highlights on-going issues of sexism that postfeminism denied. This is most evident when, the girls go undercover at the boys' school to find the lost ring, dressing up as boys in Eton-style uniforms. The scene consists of the girls walking in split-screen slow motion over a soundtrack of Susannah Hoff's cover of 'Boys Keep Swinging', which contains the line 'Nothing stands in your way when you're a boy'. Issues of gender and class intertwine here as the boys' school is depicted in stark contrast to St Trinian's, as it signifies wealth, (male) privilege and traditionalism. This world is mocked within the scene as girls use stereotypes to fool the boys, such as through telling them that they 'know Wills and Harry' and that they 'ski'. This mockery of the upper classes also links the film to the original *St Trinian's* films, but there is the implication that, although out of touch, the privileged upper classes are far from in decline in Britain today. Indeed the image of the Etonian male became increasingly prominent with the election of Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010. The issue of male privilege is also evoked through the girls' discovery that the plays of Shakespeare were written by a woman, who was also Miss Fritton's ancestor. This raises questions of authorship and acts as a reminder to the girls that women have struggled to gain prominence throughout history. While the narrative resolution celebrates the girls' success, their battle with AD1 and the ancestral link between Miss Fritton and the female 'Shakespeare'

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[54] The previous film was arguably more self-contained within the all-female environment of the school and boys were rarely visible.

suggest that feminism's fight for gender equality might not be as confined to the past as they thought.

This section shall now explore the film *Wild Child*, but will do so briefly as the film has been discussed in detail elsewhere – see, for example, Gwynne (2013), Kennedy (2012) and Wilks (2012). These works all discuss *Wild Child* in relation to tween culture, and while this certainly informs my analysis I am primarily concerned with situating the film within contemporary British cinema's trend for girls' school films in accordance with the aims of this chapter. I am also particularly interested in *Wild Child* as a film that constructs a specifically British representation of postfeminist girlhood. *Wild Child* is produced by Working Title Films and is the directorial debut of Nick Moore, who had previously worked on a number of Working Title films as an editor. With a screenplay written by Lucy Dahl, daughter of children's author Roald Dahl, *Wild Child* is the first Working Title film produced for and aimed specifically at teenage girls (Working Title, 2008: 5). The film stars American actress Emma Roberts as Poppy, a spoilt sixteen-year-old, who lives in Los Angeles with her widowed father. When her latest prank aimed at preventing her father's girlfriend from moving in goes wrong, her father's patience is pushed to the limit and he sends her to an English boarding school. Poppy immediately clashes with her sensible British classmates and plans her escape by getting expelled for kissing the headteacher's son, Freddie (Alex Pettyfer). However, she comes to realise that life in an English boarding school is not as bad as she thought – in fact, it is the best place for her.

Wild Child was released a year after the *St Trinian's* revival and the relationship between the two films dominates the critical reception. *Wild Child* is described as 'yet another film set at a British boarding school' (Calhoun, 2008a: 73) and an 'attempt to relocate an American high school comedy to a British public school' (Tookey, 2008: 53), comments which highlight not only the prominence of the girls' boarding school film at this time, but also the way in which these films aim to a appeal to a teenage audience through combining elements of the American high school film within a distinctly British setting, as outlined in the discussion of *St Trinian's*. *Wild Child* is discussed comparatively with *St Trinian's*, both positively and negatively. It is said to follow a 'similar narrative garb' *to St Trinian's*

(Beckwith, 2008: 4), but resembles the 'leftovers' of *St Trinian's* (Edwards, 2008: 2), and 'a not entirely successful blending of St Trinian's, Mean Girls and Dead Poets Society' (Tookey, 2008: 53).[55] Moreover, 'clichéd' *Wild Child* is noted for its appeal to only the very youngest and uncritical of teenagers (Adams, 2008; Bacon, 2008: 33; Tookey, 2008: 53).

Abbey Mount Boarding School for Girls is presented as a typically old-fashioned, grey-walled boarding school, which is met with horror by 'Malibu Princess' Poppy. She expresses her distaste by asking, 'What is this place, Hogwarts?' This line is reminiscent of Annabelle's reaction to St Trinian's, although Abbey Mount is more noticeably middle-class. The comparison to Hogwarts once again draws attention to the role the *Harry Potter* films have played in maintaining and perpetuating a stereotypical image of the British boarding school as 'charmingly behind the times in a manner consistent with Hollywood depictions of contemporary Britishness that refuses to escape from the shadow of its illustrious heritage (Gwynne, 2013: 82). As critics have noted, *Wild Child* is situated within an 'England of rolling hills, quaint villages and Prince William lookalikes in sports cars' in line with Working Title's key tropes (Edwards, 2008: 2). Abbey Mount is a 'boarding school straight out of the 1950s', where 'fresh air, common sense and team-based sporting activities will cure the most determined delinquent of their antisocial behaviour' (Ide, 2008: 10). Ben Walsh similarly agrees that the film suggests 'a spot of lacrosse and some English boarding-school discipline will sort out any rebellious nonsense' (Walsh, 2008). Abbey Mount is therefore presented as an anachronistically traditional boarding school that emphasises discipline and regulation in its attempts to produce 'fine young lad[ies]' with manners (Working Title, 2008: 1), a discourse that is highly reminiscent of the 1960s-set school films in the next section of this chapter where the schools emphasise the importance of conservative femininity. Abbey Mount is an enclosed world, where mobile phones are confiscated until the licensed – but limited - freedom of the weekend and the girls are largely cut off from media culture, which

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[55] As with *St Trinian's*, references to the American high school comedy *Mean Girls* can be found throughout the film's critical reception. In addition to *Mean Girls*, *Wild Child* is also linked to *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (Chadha, 2008), a British tween film that was released the same year.

makes designer-clad 'empowered' postfeminist consumer Poppy a source of fascination.

The film presents a stark contrast between Poppy and her British peers, so that 'national tensions are central to the film' (Gwynne, 2013: 80). For Gwynne, these tensions 'embody the divergent ways that postfeminism has emerged in American and British popular culture since the 1990s' (ibid) Gwynne highlights the consumption and hypersexualized femininity within US texts of the period such as *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) and *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) in contrast to the growth of "ladette" culture in the UK during the same period with its rejection of 'hyperfeminine grooming routines' (ibid). Although postfeminism within a UK context is not entirely removed from this idea of consumption and hypersexualized femininity, as work by figures such as McRobbie (2007, 2009) and Tasker and Negra (2007) has shown. However, within *Wild Child* there is certainly a distinct contrast between Poppy and her British peers, who would rather have a Wagon Wheel chocolate biscuit than a Rolex watch suggest they are not concerned about consumerism or diet. Louise Wilks also notes how the film positions the idea of consumption as a particularly American concern when she says the film 'endorses a perception that the *American* media and the country's consumer capitalist society represent a particularly extreme source of pressure for young girls (2012b: 110) (original emphasis). Abbey Mount School, then, is presented as the perfect remedy to Poppy's excessive fashion consumption and narcissism because both the school itself and its pupils are largely 'disconnected from the postfeminist imperatives of twenty-first century girls' (Gwynne, 2013: 81).

However, the Abbey Mount girls are not entirely removed from notions of postfeminist femininity (Kennedy, 2012: 50), they just have to achieve it via the means available to them, as demonstrated by the scene where they scour the local charity shop for outfits for the upcoming dance. Louise Wilks highlights this as an example of the UK's "Primarni" culture, in which a suitably feminised appearance can be acquired through relatively inexpensive clothing through stores like Primark in contrast to the use of American designer brands as signifiers of the economic affluence of the postfeminist consumer (2012b: 110). However, as will be explored in the next chapter, makeovers via the customisation of second-hand clothing are

common within teen texts, highlighting their lack of spending power. Moreover, in this scene, Drippy (*St Trinians'* Juno Temple) describes the type of outfit she is looking for: 'I want something that says "elegant", but at the same time, incredibly slutty and available. In fact, I'm not that bothered about elegant'. Drippy's comment conveys her internalization of postfeminist 'raunch culture' (Levy, 2006), which commands that a young woman should be a 'desiring sexual subject', who 'plays with her sexual power and is forever "up for it"' (Gill, 2007: 151). For Gwynne, this scene 'tests the sensibilities of the audience' because 'representations of sexually expressive teenagers often elicit acute moral anxiety' (Gwynne, 2013: 86). Allusions to this anxiety were present within the film's critical reception, where it was felt the film contained too many sexual references that were inappropriate for its tween audience and 'probably should have been omitted' (Tookey, 2008: 53). There is an element of surprise that the film, 'which bears the hallmarks of a fun teenage Disney flick… is liberally littered with swear words and sexual references' (Parkin, 2008: 28). While the characters might adopt the language of female sexual empowerment, this is in stark contrast to their knowledge and experience, as they admit they are all virgins and often appear comically misinformed about sex, talking in euphemistic terms about 'doing it', which, as with *St Trinian's*, suggests that talking about sex and adopting a 'sexy' image does not equate with being sexually active as the sexualisation panic suggests. At the same time, however, the critics' concern about the use of sexual references highlights the paradox within *Wild Child* where the film 'reassuringly depicts females whose "innocence" is maintained' but the tween girl audience is 'assumed to get the joke' (Wilks, 2012b: 111).

Moreover, Wilks reads the characters' lack of knowledge about sex as an 'implicit comment about the lack of information about sex imparted on youngsters by the education system' (ibid). Jessica Ringrose has demonstrated the limitations of the UK's highly gendered Sex and Relationship Education policies in the twenty first century, which continue to construct sex as 'natural for boys and a risky burden for young women to delay for as long as possible' (2013: 43). The film takes this even further, in which the 'boarding school's approach to sex is seemingly one of denial, separating the girls from the media sources which might potentially ignite their curiosity' (Wilks, 2012b: 111), highlighting the 'failure of the institution that should be responsible for educating children about sex' (ibid). The school's attitude towards

sex is not simply just one of denial, however, as the school's 'honour court', which consists of students and teachers, 'regulates girls behaviour' and imposes 'punishment for the transgressions of institutional and social rules, particularly in the realm of sexual propriety' (Gwynne, 2013: 84). This means that not only is the school itself a source of regulation but there is also peer-to-peer regulation indicative of how, as Renold and Ringrose argue, 'girls are socially sanctioned to express this meanness through subtle and direct regulation of other girls' sexuality' as a way of constructing idealised femininity (2010: 585). This meanness is indicated within the film when Head Girl Harriett (Georgia King) reminds Poppy that the school's motto is 'scholarship, fellowship, loyalty, not be a slutty, whore-y shit brain'. Ultimately, the film serves to uphold this notion of idealised (traditional) femininity, as attempts to partake in raunch culture are disregarded in favour of Poppy and Freddie's heterosexual romance and dating in a manner that is not overtly sexual, and Poppy rejects postfeminist consumerism and hyperfemininity, returning to a more 'natural' look. She also overcomes her individualised selfishness to lead the lacrosse team to victory in a display of 'fellowship and loyalty' that shows the supposed empowerment offered by postfeminist femininity to be hollow and false.

Schoolgirls in the not-so-swinging sixties: *An Education* (2009) and *The Falling* (2014)

An Education and *The Falling* are set in the 1960s, at the beginning and end of the decade respectively. The 1960s in Britain has been characterised as a decade of change, and of increased sexual freedom encapsulated in the term 'swinging sixties'. While the decade was not quite as permissive as the image that has captured the cultural imagination suggests, significant changes took place, such as the introduction of the contraceptive pill and the legalisation of abortion and homosexuality. One key moment was the Chatterley trial of 1960, in which D.H Lawrence's novel was absolved of all charges after being banned under the Obscene Publications Act. For Dominic Sandbrook, the trial was 'one of the greatest set pieces of the 1960s', a symbol of the old order versus 'frankness and freedom' (2005: xvi) that 'caught the mood of a society on the brim of a new era of hedonism, liberation and excitement' (ibid: xvii). However, the films discussed here are far

removed from the liberation and excitement that supposedly characterised the decade in which they are set.

An Education (Scherfig, 2009) is based on the memoirs of journalist Lynn Barber, who attended The Lady Eleanor Holles School, an independent school for girls during the 1950s and early 1960s. *An Education* is set in 1961 and tells the story of sixteen-year-old Jenny (Carey Mulligan) who looks set to go to Oxford. That is until she meets David (Peter Sarsgaard), an older man who introduces Jenny to a culture of art galleries and classical music that she has always dreamed about. When David asks her to marry him, Jenny must decide whether her academic education is more important to her than the seemingly cultured education offered by David and his glamorous friends. The film is directed by Danish director Lone Scherfig and the screenplay was adapted by Nick Hornby from an article written by Barber for literary magazine *Granta* (Barber, 2009). The film was produced by Amanda Posey and Finola Dwyer in association with BBC Films. As a 'prestigious' British period film, An *Education* differs from the films discussed so far in this chapter as although it revolves around a young girl's education, it is not specifically aimed at a young female audience.

As mentioned previously, what is striking about the contemporary British girls' school films set in the 1960s is how far removed they are from the image of the 'swinging 60s' that persists within popular culture, and this is particularly central to *An Education*. The film's very specific setting dominates its production and reception discourses. The opening line of the film's press book describes how the film is set 'on the cusp of the straight-laced, post-war period and the free-spirited decade to come' (Mongrel Media, 2009), while the critical reception emphasises how the film depicts the 1960s as 'more square than swinging' (McCahill, 2009: 16), a country on the brink of change (Fitzherbert, 2009b; French, 2009b; Rowat, 2009: 17; Young, 2009b: 13). Moreover, Philip Larkin's 'Annus Mirabilis' (1974) and its assertion that 'Sexual intercourse began/ In nineteen sixty-three…/ Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban/ And the Beatles' first LP' is referred to throughout the production and reception discourses, encapsulating the film's depiction of a Britain stuck in post-war austerity and yet to 'swing'.

Jenny's home environment is presented as a microcosm of the film's pre-swinging world. There is a clash of cultures and generations, as much of the film's comedy arises from the contrast between Jenny as a 'modern' post-war girl and her father, Jack (Alfred Molina). Jack is determined Jenny should have an Oxford education, even though it costs him a lot of money, as he constantly reminds her. From Jenny's subjective viewpoint, her parents' world is small and uncultured, and while for her parents' an Oxford education presents a broadening of opportunity in the post-war period, for Jenny it is a chance to escape her dull life. Jenny's desire to escape her suffocating life is conveyed when she listens to Juliet Greco on a record player in her bedroom. This escapism is signified through the way the music alternates between being part of Jenny's subjectivity and also part of the film's non-diegetic soundtrack. A close-up of Jenny's tapping foot reinforces the romanticised image as she swoons to the music, while the continued tap of rain on the window acts as a reminder of reality. For Jenny, a university education will enable her to escape to freedom, where she can 'read what I want, and see what I want'.

The school environment is depicted as equally stifling for Jenny. The film's animated opening credits set to Floyd Cramer's 'On the Rebound' (1961) have a child-like appearance, featuring sketches of hopscotch, skipping ropes and other various items traditionally associated with schoolchildren, but the music hints at what is to come for Jenny as the schoolgirl has her eyes opened to a seemingly brighter world. We then see a montage of Jenny's current education, with girls learning to balance books on their heads in etiquette class and making cakes in cookery class. It's a scene of dull, monotonous traditionalism, serving to provide a contrast between the film's present and the world that Jenny will come to experience. It also serves to highlight the limited education given to girls in the 1960s that emphasised domestic skills. This idea of limited possibilities is reinforced later on the film when Jenny's headmistress (Emma Thompson) outlines Jenny's possible graduate positions as teaching or the Civil Service. Within the school environment, Jenny is presented as distinct from her peers. This is highlighted by Barber herself who, in the film's press book, refers to her own group of school friends as her "disciples", (Mongrel Media, 2009) suggesting that she took on the role of the leader that the other girls looked to learn from and emulate. In comparison with Jenny, the other girls are depicted as giggling schoolgirls, who are

far from sophisticated, and not as ambitious, aiming not for university but secretarial college.

Jenny's status as an individual, a girl who rises above all others, makes her attraction to David - his lifestyle in particular - all the more understandable. David opens up a new world for Jenny, including trips to classical concerts and jazz clubs, and this is reflected by a change in mise-en-scène, which becomes much brighter. Consumption is key in this new environment, and, as in *St Trinian's*, makeover plays an important part in Jenny's changing identity. David's friend Helen (Rosamund Pike) exemplifies female consumption within the film, as she is glamorous and concerned only with fashion. Seemingly lacking intelligence, Helen is portrayed as the opposite of Jenny. She does not understand why Jenny wants to go to university because she thinks female students are 'ugly'. Helen's attitude, combined with Pike's performance, present Helen as a comical figure, the implication being that the audience can laugh at Helen and her stereotypical femininity because girls today seemingly have more options available to them than being a 'trophy girlfriend'. Moreover, as with the postfeminist films in this chapter - and others throughout the thesis -, Jenny's change in identity is initiated with a makeover scene. With Helen's help, Jenny emerges styled as Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (Edwards, 1961). This is followed by a trip to Paris where David and Jenny, dressed as Audrey Hepburn, are filmed in a montage of images around various Parisian landmarks (Figure 9). The sweeping camera movements and French music give a romanticised feel to the scene, playing on the stereotypical notion of Paris as a romantic city, and help to create the impression that Jenny and David are a glamorous couple who are in love. However, like the makeover scene in *St Trinian's*, the montage is highly stylised, which also lends it a slightly comical tone as it includes the pair posing for photos, which are captured in monochrome stills.[56] The fact that the montage is so stylised in comparison with the rest of the film suggests that although the makeover is the 'scene par excellence of postfeminist identity making' (Negra, 2009: 124), this is a false identity that Jenny will not be able to maintain.

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[56] This once again evokes comparisons to the makeover scene in *St Trinian's* as Annabelle also posed for photos, although while these had connotations of glossy fashion advertising, the photos in *An Education* help to create the idea that Jenny is a 'picture perfect' version of femininity.

Figure 9: Jenny (Carey Mulligan) and David (Peter Sarsgaard) in Paris.

Moreover, this likening of Jenny, or rather, Carey Mulligan, with Audrey Hepburn is also evident within the film's critical reception. Mulligan is praised for giving an 'a-star-is-born performance' (Fitzherbert, 2009b) and Allan Hunter claims she has the 'fairytale enchantment of Audrey Hepburn' (Hunter, 2009: 48). The use of Hepburn's image within the film is particularly interesting. On the one hand, it is used to establish the period in which the film was set, but, as Rachel Moseley has argued, Hepburn's image has a number of connotations. For Moseley, Hepburn's image, both on and off-screen, is 'marked by the "Cinderella" motif'. While, as Moseley explains, the 'Cinderella' motif has always been a 'staple of feminine culture', it is arguable that its presence is even stronger in contemporary postfeminist culture, which emphasises the transformation of the self through a proliferation of women's magazines, makeover lifestyle television, and, as discussed, 'makeover scenes' in films (2002: 39). What is perhaps most significant in relation to Jenny, however, is Moseley's idea that Hepburn represents a 'democratic standard of beauty' which 'produced her as a star whose looks and style were potentially available to and achievable by any young woman' (ibid: 44). This makes Jenny's transformation all the more believable as Hepburn's 'democratic' beauty can even be achieved by schoolgirls who borrow their friend's clothes, allowing Jenny to adopt a more sophisticated and typically feminine image.[57] Furthermore, with regards to

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[57] This idea of 'democratic' beauty in relation to celebrity culture is taken up in more detail in the next chapter.

wanting to adopt Hepburn's look, Moseley notes how 'women in the 1990s are as invested in the elegant tiara-clad Hepburn' as they are in any of her more 'simple' images from the 1950s (ibid: 49). Moseley argues that 'nostalgia is the key mode' here, aided by the postfeminist cultural context which shapes these British women's understandings of Hepburn, because postfeminism offers the 'revaluation of the pleasures offered by conventional modes of feminine self-presentation' without compromising their 'equality' (ibid). Jenny's use of the 'elegant, tiara-clad image of Hepburn' (ibid) then also speaks to a postfeminist audience, who are constantly exposed to nostalgic images and are perhaps more aware of this particular image of Audrey Hepburn. For director Lone Scherfig, "the story could *only* take place [in the 1960s] if the audience were expected to identify with it now" (Mongrel Media, 2009) (original emphasis), and the nostalgic use of 'the tiara-clad image of Hepburn' (Moseley, 2002: 49) helps to achieve this due to its significance within postfeminist culture.

In all of the films discussed in this chapter, girls' education is framed in and around discourses on girls' sexuality and this is also evident within *An Education*. As Jenny becomes more involved with David her work noticeably begins to suffer, leading her concerned teacher, Miss Stubbs (Olivia Williams), to warn Jenny that she is 'ruining' her life in getting engaged. Miss Stubbs, with her sensible clothes and glasses, is coded as a typical 'feminist spinster' whose education has left her unfulfilled in a boring job, meaning that Jenny refuses to listen to her advice as it means giving up her glamorous lifestyle. In both the 1960s-set films in this chapter, fear of changing sexual mores underpins the schools' approach to education, and girls' sexuality is both covertly and overtly regulated in an attempt to ensure 'appropriate' feminine behaviour. Jenny's relationship with David acquires legendary status within the sheltered school, and she is called to the headmistress. She describes how there has been the 'odd sixth-former, who has lost part of herself – perhaps the best part of herself – while under our supervision, regrettably' and if the school is made aware of this happening then the girl must take her A Levels elsewhere, 'if she even has any further use for them'. This euphemistic speech presents the school as a site in which girls' sexuality is strictly regulated, as the school assumes a significant amount of responsibility in ensuring there are no 'regrettable' incidents. Girls' sexuality is constructed as a 'risky burden' (Ringrose,

2013: 43) in that pregnancy would mean the end of a girl's ambitions and confine her to the role of wife and mother, so virginity and innocence must be kept as long as possible, not least of all to uphold moral standards and avoid scandal.

Although the school implements a strict moral code, where sex is to be avoided, the girls are depicted as more knowing, particularly in contrast to the girls in *Wild Child*. On hearing about Jenny and David's forthcoming trip to Paris, one friend sardonically remarks, 'All those suppers you've had off him… Ouch', implying that David will expect sex in return for the money he has spent on Jenny, an attitude Jenny denounces as 'Victorian'. Jenny's attitude towards sex is more romanticised, as she intends to wait until her seventeenth birthday to lose her virginity, but she also depicted as in control, as she dictates when and where it will happen. In his review of the film for *The Times*, Toby Young describes Jenny as 'sexually self-confident', adding, 'She has a down-to-earth, matter-of-fact attitude to sex that is more like that of a contemporary teenage girl than someone born in the 1940s' (2009: 13). While it would be impossible to suggest Jenny's 'contemporary' attitude towards sex positions her within postfeminist raunch culture, the idea that she is 'sexually self-confident' is reminiscent of Gill's (2007) idea of the 'desiring sexual subject'. Certainly, Jenny's attitude towards sex does seem modern when positioned in relation to the male characters, who all seem to uphold the notion that sex had not yet been invented. For all his charm and cultural sophistication, David's displays a immature and peculiar attitude towards sex, as demonstrated when initiates sex by presenting Jenny with a banana and suggests that they 'get the messy bit over with' first. He also insists on using child-like pet names, all of which clearly makes Jenny uncomfortable and makes David look ridiculous. When it comes to sex, David is just as naive as the teenage Graham (Matthew Beard), Jenny's hapless suitor, who stutters and stumbles through their interactions.

Although set in the past, *An Education* was released during a period of intense anxiety over the 'sexualisation' of young people. Within this context, a film about a teenage girl who gets seduced by an older man is a cause for concern. However, many critics engaged with this panic by emphasising how, although problematic, *An Education* should not be viewed as contributing to this discourse. For example, Alison Rowat highlights the potential danger of a young girl accepting a lift from a

strange man, saying the film should have a children's television-style warning of 'Don't try this in real life' (Rowat, 2009: 17). Rowat also places the incident within the context of the 1960s as a way of side-stepping the moral panic, as she says, 'to misquote Hartley, the past is a foreign country: they viewed dodgy behaviour differently there', acknowledging that the incident would be taken more seriously today. Moreover, the deftness of Hornby's script is also praised for undercutting any potential anxiety. Peter Bradshaw notes how, 'Seen from a certain angle, that could look like misery-lit, a story of sex abuse and class shame, were it not for the fact that it is extremely funny' (Bradshaw, 2009c), while Toby Young similarly agrees the film sounds 'like a depressing film about a sexual predator, but it plays more like a fleet-footed comedy' (2009b: 13). In addition, Jenny's aforementioned confident attitude also serves to negate the idea of girls as victims of their own sexuality because 'Jenny never seems the innocent victim' (Hunter, 2009: 48), and 'The reason it doesn't play like a morality tale is because Jenny is largely complicit in her own seduction' (Young, 2009b: 13).

According to Peter Bradshaw, 'The story, as it is played out, is not too far from the kitchen-sink dramas from the 60s' (Bradshaw, 2009c). Anxiety about growing female sexual autonomy in the 1960s meant that films from the period were 'haunted by the trope of unintended pregnancy' (Williams, 2015: 6). In kitchen-sink dramas, such as *A Taste of Honey* (Richardson, 1961), it is typically the working-class girl who 'gets into trouble' by becoming pregnant outside of marriage. *In An Education*, however, Jenny is a middle-class girl, where the repercussion of her relationship is not pregnancy but the potential loss of her education. Alison Rowat describes the film as a 'hymn' to education (Rowat, 2009: 17), while Lone Scherfig similarly highlights the importance of education when she describes what she hopes young women would gain from watching the film, saying, "I hope they come away from it knowing that if they're in doubt about what they should do, they should have an education!" (Scherfig, quoted in Hoby, 2009b: 5). Although Jenny is sceptical about the value of an academic education once she experiences a more cultural life with David, the film inherently values education in keeping with twenty-first century discourses outlined in the introduction to this chapter, as it is possible to view Jenny as having 'top girl' (McRobbie, 2009) attributes as the middle-class high-flying girl headed for Oxford. Jenny's teachers also encourage this 'can-do' ethos, as Miss

Stubbs reminds her, 'You can do anything, be anything. You know that' and the headmistress informs her that 'no-one does anything without a degree'. However, Jenny's retort that 'no woman' does anything *with* a degree[58] serves as a reminder that in the pre-second wave era of the film, girls' opportunities were more limited than they are for educated girls today.[59]

After discovering David's deceit, Jenny goes to Miss Stubbs for help, having left school without taking her exams. In Barber's memoir, her father goes to the headteacher to beg for his daughter's place at the school. However, Jenny takes charge of the situation herself by going to see Miss Stubbs and asking for tuition, reinforcing Jenny's 'can-do' attributes as a girl who "takes charge of their life" (Harris, 2004: 14). Jenny's reformed attitude is most apparent in a montage whereby she is shown reading and studying as she prepares for her exams. This is in direct contrast to the earlier montage in Paris, as it is not romanticised and stylised. Rather, it is dull and grey, filmed as though rain-soaked windows. While it is not as exciting, it is realistic, reflecting the idea that Jenny must work hard to succeed. Furthermore, the fact that it is filmed through windows creates a distancing effect, whereas the previous montage invited the audience to get 'swept up' in the glamour and culture that Jenny was experiencing, just as she was, whereas now she is more measured and sensible. This is also conveyed through Jenny's returned to more muted clothing, which provide a stark contrast to her previous image of glamorous femininity. While it may be 'hard and boring', Jenny ultimately realises that gaining an academic education, rather than a personal one, is the key to her achieving the life she wants. The final scene shows Jenny at Oxford, cycling alongside a boy as the camera lingers on Oxford's spires with a sweeping orchestral score, an idyllic image that suggests Jenny is exactly where she should be as a typical student, having relationships with 'boys' rather than men, but her experience has made her wiser. It

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[58] The lack of opportunities for educated women in the 1960s is also highlighted in *Made in Dagenham* (Cole, 2010). Here Rosamund Pike plays Lisa, who, in sharp contrast to Helen, has a degree from Cambridge and yet she is confined in the role of wife and mother, and as such is not expected to convey her opinions to her husband's colleagues.

[59] The idea of drawing on cotemporary discourses of girlhood within a historical setting to highlight how audiences should appreciate increased opportunities for women today is taken up in Chapter Four's discussion of historical films.

is therefore the combination of an academic education and wisdom that is deemed most valuable.

Carol Morley's *The Falling* is also set in the 1960s, this time at the tail end of the decade in 1968. The film was produced by BBC Films and the BFI. Despite following the so-called 'Summer of Love' the era of free love has yet to arrive at the strict English girls' school in which the film is set. At the centre of this closed world are two best friends: charismatic Abbie (Florence Pugh) and the more serious Lydia (Maisie Williams). The steady rhythm of the school is shattered when a seemingly pregnant Abbie dies following a seizure. As the girls try to come to terms with Abbie's sudden death, an outbreak of mass hysteria occurs at the school, characterised by twitching, fainting and vomiting. Morley 'seeded in possibilities' (Morley, 2015) as to the cause of the hysteria, most of which are related to the girls' increasing sexuality, such as pregnancy, masturbation and sexual intercourse, and incestuous feelings and behaviour. In discussing the ideas behind the film, writer-director Carol Morley says:

> I decided to set *The Falling* in the 1960s because much of the research I had carried out… suggested sexual guilt, or a preoccupation with sexual matters as a factor. I felt it would be an interesting way of looking at the complexity of young female identity and sexuality and the changing nature of sexual morality for women in particular, so the outbreaks could be linked to cultural and social stresses (ibid)

Indeed this preoccupation with sexuality and sexual guilt characterises the film as a whole, from the curious schoolgirls to the seemingly repressed teachers who try and maintain order within a changing world. Morley's decision to focus on young female identity in relation to gendered sexual morality points to a feminist stance that underpins her work. Morley is "committed to telling stories about the female experience" (Carpenter, 2015), and at a time when gender inequality in the film industry is under scrutiny, *The Falling's* largely female production crew is notable in its rarity. This includes Morley as writer-director, Cairo Cannon as one of the producers, cinematographer Agnès Godard, and Tracey Thorn as sole soundtrack composer. For Morley, having a "strong female presence on set is a political act" (ibid.).

The Falling's critical reception evokes a discourse that is typical of girl school films that draws on other notable girl school films. It is described as eerie and ethereal like Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) (Bradshaw, 2014; Kermode, 2015; Macnab, 2015, Muir, 2015; Rose, 2015; Walsh, 2015) coupled with the 'passion' of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Neame, 1969) (Muir, 2015).[60] As well as referencing schoolgirl films, the critical reception also drew on certain British films of the 1970s such as Ken Russell's *The Devils* (1971), about a priest who was accused of bewitching a convent into hysteria (Kermode, 2015; Macnab, 2015; Rose, 2015). The film is also said to have an 'otherness' reminiscent of Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973) linked to the presence of Roeg's son Luc as one of the film's producers (McCahill, 2015: 22). Moreover, *The Falling's* aesthetic 'otherness' is described as 'supernatural' (Macnab, 2015) with ''near-subliminal flashes' (Kermode, 2015) and a 'dreamlike otherworldliness' (Muir, 2015). This positions Morley as a contemporary of Lynne Ramsay as a filmmaker who can 'combine the authentic grit of British realism with the heady ambition of European experimentalism' (Kermode, 2015). However, Morley herself rejects the idea that the film draws on British social realist conventions, preferring the term "magic realism" due to the way she only shot "what felt necessary" and lived "in the moment" (Morley, quoted in Beaumont-Thomas, 2015). The opening scene of the film perfectly conveys the aesthetic qualities highlighted above. The film does not have an opening credit sequence; instead the film begins as Mary Hopkins' Voyage to the Moon (1968) plays over the BBC Films and BFI logos, drawing the viewer immediately into the closed world of the film. This is followed by a shot of trees reflected in water and the sound of ambiguous breathing that implies both sex and fear is introduced into the soundtrack, with an extreme close-up of (Abbie's) long blonde hair and a bruise as Abbie, through voice-over, reads Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Mortality From Recollections of Early Childhood* (1807), which evokes the idea of rite of passage and draws on images of 'meadows, groves and streams' and 'celestial light' that are all present within the sequence. This series of mostly abstract, flashing images and sounds encapsulates the film, establishing the

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[60] These intense, passionate and mysterious schoolgirl films were also evoked in the critical reception of another contemporary British schoolgirl film, Jordan Scott's *Cracks* (2009), which, like *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, was set in a boarding school in the 1930s and told the story of the mysterious Miss G (Eva Green) and her select group of favourite pupils.

period setting through music and highlighting themes such as sex and nature in a disjointed, disorientating manner.

We then enter the school through the ominous ringing of the imposing school bell. The school is a drab, brown, crumbling institution, with woodchip peeling off the walls, which Abbie and Lydia pick at during various points in the film, adding to the film's haptic quality.[61] Here feelings and individuality are repressed as the girls travel around in straight lines and the strict teachers strive to maintain order. In one scene in particular, Abbie is called to the front of the class and made to kneel on the floor to have the length of her skirt measured, which must be 'two inches off the floor when kneeling'. The mini-skirt, as a signifier of female sexuality and freedom, was at the height of fashion during this period, and the strict monitoring of school skirt hem lines conveys the school's attempts to regulate the teenage girls' behaviour more broadly and keep burgeoning sexualities at bay. Recalling her own school days at an all-girls school, Annette Kuhn describes how 'it was the unruly feminine side of [a girl's] individuality that had to be most forcibly held in check if order were to prevail (1995: 92). The high levels of regulation deployed by the staff, particularly the middle-aged female teacher Miss Mantel (Greta Scacchi) and headteacher Miss Alvaro (Monica Dolan) lead the girls to believe their teachers are from another, pre-war world that renders them, at best, unable to understand what its like to be a teenage girl, and at worst inhuman. However, Miss Mantel and Miss Alvaro are not the unworldly women the pupils believe them to be. Miss Mantel, for example, is haunted by her own teenage pregnancy.

Within the repressive school environment, Abbie and Lydia's friendship is constructed as particularly intense in a way that typical of depictions of teenage girl friendship. Abbie and Lydia spend all of their time together, smothering each other in hugs and kisses and sharing the same piece of chewing gum. Their friendship is what Karen Hollinger, in her study of female friendship in Hollywood cinema, refers to as a 'sentimental female friendship' in that it is a 'close, emotionally effusive, dyadic same-sex unions, exhibiting 'a fervent passion that is reminiscent of heterosexual romantic love' (1998: 7). This is emphasised further when, in a

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[61] This haptic aesthetic quality is also apparent within the discussions of *Kicks* (Heymann, 2008) and *My Summer of Love* in the next chapter.

typically romantic gesture, they carve their initials into the oak tree and agree to meet 'in the same place, on the same day, every year for the rest of our lives'. As Kate Muir notes in her review for *The Times*, Abbie and Lydia's friendship is 'so intense practically sears the screen' (2015: 52). *The Falling's* depiction of a particularly intense girl friendship within a dark and unsettling film led to many reviewers likening the film to Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) (Adams, 2015; Kermode, 2015; Walsh, 2015).[62]

Moreover, Abbie and Lydia are depicted as binary opposites, a common trope within films centred around girl friendship that is explored further in the next chapter. Clever, blonde and middle class, Abbie has the outward appearance of ideal femininity that is only slightly marred by her rebellious nature. She is the founder of the 'alternative school orchestra' and enthrals her classmates with her impassioned reading of Wordsworth's *Ode*, which is met with the scornful response of 'Try not to be *quite* so emphatic' from Miss Alvaro. This is indicative of the school's repressive atmosphere and the idea that creativity is something to be stifled rather than encouraged. One of the main ways in which the differences between Abbie and Lydia are articulated is through their attitudes towards sex. Abbie is a source of fascination as she is the only girl with any sexual experience - her loss of virginity is depicted in flashback in the film's opening scene - which is valuable currency within the repressed school environment. Her descriptions of sex as 'like blacking out' and references to 'le petit mort' create a somewhat glamorous and intriguing account of sex, which at the same time rings hollow due to her reliance on vague clichés that betray the limits of her sexual experience. Lydia, by contrast, is depicted as repressed, dismissive of Abbie's constant talk of feelings and proudly asserts her status as a virgin. She doesn't understand why 'doing it' is so important to Abbie. Lydia's lack of interest in sex compared to Abbie is further emphasised when Abbie later sleeps with Lydia's brother Kenneth (Joe Cole) and the scene is intercut with

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[62] Maisie Williams, who plays Lydia, has described how "During shooting, we all lived in a house together. We were sharing rooms and sharing beds, and we'd have heart-to-heart talks all the time" (Williams, quoted in McDonagh, 2015). The extension of female friendship signifiers into the off-screen relationships between the actors that is then invoked in paratextual discourses to convey authenticity is also prominent within the case studies in the following chapter, particularly in the discussion of *Kicks*.

shots of Lydia sitting in a cupboard reading a book, although Lydia is also seemingly jealous of Abbie's relationship with Kenneth. Their respective differences create tension within their friendship and Lydia feels she is being left behind now that Abbie is more interested in boys. As Abbie tells Lydia: 'There's a real world out there, Lamb', to which Lydia replies, 'Yeah and you're the centre of it'. 'Lamb' is Abbie's nickname for Lydia, as her surname is Lamont, but lamb also has connotations of innocence that reinforces Lydia's status in relation to Abbie. While it is evident that the enclosed and static school environment is not part of the 'real world' that Abbie refers to, the idea of Abbie at the centre of the world highlights the elevated position she occupies within the school and acts as an explanation for the way in which her death triggers the outbreak of mass hysteria.

The beginning of this section highlighted Carol Morley's decision to set the film in the late 1960s in order to explore the 'changing nature of sexual morality for women in particular' at this time (Morley. 2015). While, as with *An Education*, the 'swinging sixties' have yet to make their way into the repressed school environment, ideas about sex and sexual curiosity are creeping in to the girls' everyday lives.[63] They share and dispel stories and myths about sex and seek to establish each other's 'status' (i.e. virginity). Through Abbie's apparent pregnancy, the film highlights attitudes towards pregnancy in various ways. For example, Lydia refers to Abbie's pregnancy as a 'situation', employing a euphemistic way of talking about pregnancy that avoids using the term. In addition, when considering her options Abbie talks about 'gin and a knitting needle', an old-fashioned, 'back street' method of termination used when abortion was illegal in Britain. Although, as one of the characters points out, 'abortion is legal now' – through the 1967 Abortion Act – Abbie replies that it is not available 'to the likes of us'. Although abortion was legalised, only a doctor could decide whether to perform an abortion, and Abbie's comment points to the high degree of bodily regulation, lack of access to services

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[63] This repressive atmosphere also exists outside the school, as indicated by Lydia's home life. Her mother Eileen (Maxine Peake) is unable to leave the house, so she works from home as a hairdresser, where all the women leave with identical beehive hairstyles and she watches news items about the preparations for the moon landings on television. The repetition of the beehive hairstyle and the way in which the television is her only connection to the outside world show that she is also suspended in time, unable to adapt to a changing world.

and the way in which sex was still – despite the increased availability of the contraceptive pill - predominantly conceived as something that took place within a marriage. The visible, physical signs of Abbie's pregnancy, such as vomiting and fainting, mark her – and her body – out as unruly and disruptive, particularly when she vomits over Miss Mantel as she is telling her off. However, Abbie's pregnancy is left unconfirmed as she dies during a seizure. Vomiting and fainting are also symptoms of the subsequent hysteria, which heightens the ambiguity. Attitudes towards pregnancy outside of marriage are further highlighted when a young, unmarried teacher is revealed to be pregnancy and subsequently quietly 'let go'. Significantly, she is also the only teacher who experiences the hysteria, further linking it to the idea of 'unruly' female sexuality. Abbie's pregnancy also draws on the aforementioned trope of unintended pregnancy that was common in British cinema in the 1960s. The 1960s was a period of growing sexual independence for some women but this supposed freedom existed alongside a moral panic about young people's permissiveness. While the British 'New Wave' films of the 1950s and 60s were noted for their social realism and sexual frankness, this really only applied to the male characters. Women's sexuality was contained within, what Carrie Tarr (1985) refers to as, the 'boundaries of permitted pleasure', both on and off screen. In her discussion of two films from the period centred around young, single women – *Sapphire* (1959) and *Darling* (1965) – Tarr notes how within these films the 'problem' of permissiveness is 'displaced on to the terrain of female sexuality' (1985: 64). Therefore, despite these films' focus on women, 'the foregrounding of issues relevant to women's lives is obscured by a deeper need to appropriate and contain the threat of female sexual autonomy' (ibid), so the 'female discourse is both foregrounded and recuperated' (ibid: 65). Narratives of unintended pregnancy during the 1960s, therefore, served as a way of appropriating the 'threat of female sexual autonomy' (ibid: 64) by highlighting the consequences of this female sexual independence.

Although *The Falling* positions the concern over teenage female sexuality as a part of the changing morality of the 1960s, as emphasised by Morley's authorial discourse, lines of comparison can be drawn with contemporary moral panics about girls' sexuality discussed earlier in this chapter. As Ringrose argues, this discourse is problematic because in 'desiring to return girls to the mythical sate of sexual

innocence and purity the sexualisation [discourse] denies any space of the expression of sexuality from girls' as such expressions are viewed as evidence of them as victims of sexualisation (ibid: 51). Moreover, Ringrose's account of Sex and Relationship Education policy evokes comparisons with the film's depiction of attitudes towards sex in the 1960s. For example, Ringrose claims Sexual Relationship Education policy in the UK since 2010 is 'organised around principles of sexual risk and protection in highly gendered ways… there is a focus on disease and pregnancy… that constructs sexual activity as natural for boys and a risky burden for girls to delay as long as possible' (ibid: 43). This policy also 'mystifi[es] and repress[es] female sexual pleasure' by only referencing the male orgasm (ibid: 50).[64] This postfeminist panic that positions girls and young women as the beneficiaries of feminist gains while simultaneously constructing young female sexuality as a source of anxiety recalls Tarr's discussion of the way in which concerns about morality in the 1960s are mapped on to the terrain of female sexuality (1985: 64).

The Falling engages with the positioning of girls' sexuality as both risky and at-risk through the various ways in which sexuality is suggested as a cause for the hysteria. For example, one girl starts displaying symptoms after a brief shot of her masturbating, while Lydia's symptoms worsen as she explores her relationship with her brother Kenneth. Lydia and Kenneth's incestuous relationship is particularly interesting. The sexual undertones are first hinted at through the holding and touching of hands, but it is suggested that rather than being overtly sexual, this touching allows Lydia in her grief to feel closer to Abbie, as Abbie also had a sexual relationship with Kenneth. The sexual aspects of their behaviour seemingly stem from Lydia's desire to be more like Abbie, and her exploration of her sexuality arises out of her confusion and emotional distress. The film does not 'blame' Lydia for this as Kenneth is constructed as someone who preys on teenage girls.

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[64] Ringrose also identifies a further 'turning back of the clock' within sex education policy as sex education 'emerged as a new space of controversy in the UK' when Conservative MP Nadine Dorries introduced a new sex education bill in 2011 that focused on teaching abstinence to teenage girls in particular (2013: 55).

The concept of hysteria has historically been highly gendered and linked to female sexuality, often referred to as the 'wandering womb'. A Clinical Paediatrics article from 1968 explicitly links hysteria to young girls, suggesting they are susceptible because emotional and unable to regulate their bodies: 'Impressionable, peer-orientated, emotionally immature, and self-conscious as they are about their changing bodies, the introduction of fear into such groups may spark a spreading wave of histrionics' (Faigel, 1968: 377). A particularly interesting finding within the article is the observation that 'Societies in flux in which people continue to practice the old in the face of the new seem particularly prone to have hysteria epidemics' (ibid). This is pertinent *to The Falling's* school setting, as not only does it contain large numbers of so-called 'impressionable' teenage girls, but it is depicted as a site where 'people continue to practice the old in the face of the new' (ibid) as it is a repressive environment where those in charge are reluctant to adapt to a changing society, preferring to maintain tradition and stifle expressions of creativity. Miss Mantel's order that 'standards of behaviour must be kept' despite the hysteria epidemic conveys the regulatory nature of the institution, as well as implicit notion that 'behaviour' is understood to mean appropriately *feminine* behaviour. As Annette Kuhn recalls of her own time at a girls' school, 'unladylike fervour' must be avoided 'above all' (1995: 88).

Although set in the 1960s, *The Falling's* exploration of girlhood hysteria to an extent recalls the contemporary discourse of the Ophelia. Emerging during the 1990s, this figure is the figure of the hysterical adolescent girl who is deemed vulnerable and weaker than her male counterparts. This construction of girlhood came to prominence with (American) texts that Elizabeth Marshall (2007) refers to as 'Ophelia narratives', such as Mary Pipher's (1994) *Reviving Ophelia* and Peggy Orenstein's *Schoolgirls* (1994), which argued that girls were increasingly vulnerable and suffering from low levels of confidence and self-esteem in comparison with boys in a world where eating disorders and promiscuity are the norm (Pipher, 1994). These texts employed psychological discourse positioned as feminist intervention that ultimately shore up essentialist notions of gender and 'unintentionally reinscribe the schoolgirl as victim' (Marshall, 2007: 724). As Catherine Driscoll claims, 'Ophelia has become an icon of feminine adolescence repeatedly invoked as emblematic of girlhood difficulties and passions' (2002: 25). The contemporary

Ophelia narrative emerged alongside the 'girl power' discourse of the 1990s, constructing girls as both powerful and weak. However, as Aapola et al. argue, this vulnerability was a 'more dominant feature in North American discourses of girlhood than in other regions', certainly more so than the UK (2005: 40). According to Elizabeth Marshall, 'contemporary Ophelia narratives echo [the] late-nineteenth century fascination with the definition of hysteria as manifestations of psychological trauma written on the bodies of adolescent girls (2007: 712). Here the 'girl's psychological crisis represents a failure to take charge of her life, to harness her inner girl power and the many opportunities available to her' (ibid: 714-717). Therefore, it is the girl's failure to be a 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004), which is constructed as normative femininity, that places her in a state of crisis.

Moreover, Marshall notes how the hysteric 'represented an ambiguous subjectivity that marked the woman as wounded while at the same time allowed her to resist norms of femininity' (2007: 711-712). In *The Falling* it is significant that Lydia's hysterical symptoms start to manifest as she becomes more resistant to the school's regulation and control, and also the regulations of normative femininity. Lydia is marked out as rebellious following Abbie's death. When prayers are held for Abbie during school assembly, Lydia does not pray, holding her head up and eyes open, occupying a distinctive space in the centre of the frame as everyone around her bows their heads. In addition, one of the first symptoms Lydia displays is when her eye twitches, an ambiguous gesture that creates the impression she is inciting rebellion in the other girls. The idea that hysteria is a manifestation of the girls resisting normative femininity is most overt, however, during a special assembly on 'accidents in the home', led by a woman from the 'Stockshire Women's,, an organisation seemingly reminiscent of the Women's Institute. This conveys the idea that the girls are educated on the assumption that they will fulfil the traditional feminine role of housewife. This is a pivotal scene within the film as the hysteria reaches a crescendo, and it is significant that this display of mass hysteria takes place during this assembly about domesticity. According to Elizabeth Marshall, in Ophelia narratives 'the school surfaces as one of the primary sites in which bodies are regulated through the inculcation of gendered competencies which train and discipline the body until an "identity" is etched below the surface' (2005: 724). This reinforces the regulatory nature of the school and its desire to inscribe and maintain

ideal femininity onto its pupils, such as through emphasising their domestic role and limiting creativity and individuality. Likewise, Valerie Walkerdine notes how the 'fictions' and fantasies of femininity and masculinity that are 'deeply embedded in the social world which can take on the status of fact when inscribed in powerful practices, like schooling, through which we are regulated' (1990: xiii). At the start of the scene Lydia placed outside of this, as she has been isolated from the other girls for being a 'bad influence'. Lydia's isolation constructs her as both 'wounded while at the same time allowed her to resist norms of femininity' (Marshall, 2005: 711-712) because her status as a hysteric means she is removed from the school body, and the conformity within it, further enabling her to rebel. She watches from outside, tapping her foot against the door to create disruption. Girls then start to faint en masse, stopping the woman in her tracks. The scene then takes on the qualities of a theatrical performance, as the girls faint slowly and gracefully like dancers as the camera swoons over them. This effect is heightened by the use of Tracey Thron's repetitive, melodic, almost wordless soundtrack that is a recurring motif throughout the film.[65] Lydia then enters the hall to survey the scene and walks down the centre aisle. As she faints she is lifted upwards with her arms outstretched in a Christ-like formation, an image that further inscribes her as the leader and an icon of rebellion for the girls (Figure 10).

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[65] Thorn's soundtrack contributes to the idea of the film being set within the enclosed world of the school, as it consists entirely instruments that are played by the girls in the alternative school orchestra, such as xylophones and piano, and the characters also play some of the music on screen. The purpose being to only use the type of music the characters could potentially play themselves (Bradshaw, 2015).

Figure 10: Lydia (Maisie Williams) as an icon of rebellion.

This scene is followed by a jarring and disorientating cut to a close-up of a girl gasping for air as the girls are hospitalised as a result of the hysteria. The soundtrack contributes to this sense of delirium by featuring a mix of sounds and voices, including lines from the aforementioned speech on 'accidents in the home'. The most prominent voice, however, is a woman in a Jean Brodie-esque tone, saying, 'Now girls, let's talk about the devil. The devil can enter in many ways, so please cross your legs'. This line not only hints at the possibility of hysteria caused by possession, but also reinforces the idea of girls' sexuality as making them both vulnerable and dangerous and highlighting the need for abstinence. The instruction for girls to 'cross their legs' further renders sexual activity as a burden for girls that they must take full responsibility for. The link between hysteria and sexuality is further explored when the girls are interviewed by a male psychologist, whose voice is heard off-screen for the majority of the scene, as he asks them questions about their sexual experience. With the psychologist as a largely disembodied voice, the girls directly address the camera, asserting their presence, with the male psychologist unable to infiltrate their closed world. Here, as throughout the film as a whole, power belongs to the girls. Although they experience hysteria, the film is keen to

demonstrate they are not really victims and they are not mad, they are simply too creative and rebellious for the confined roles the school tries to force them into. As Kate Muir writes, *The Falling* is 'a tale of grrl power long before the term existed' (Muir, 2015: 43). Muir's use of the term 'grrl power' rather than *girl power* conjures up suggestions of the riot grrl movement and their DIY, punk philosophy rather than the normative femininity promoted by girl power, which emerged alongside the Ophelia figure in the 1990s, adding to the idea that the film is more feminist than postfeminist.

The film further rejects the idea of Lydia as a victim in its final scene. During this scene Lydia discovers the reason why her mother is so distant with her is because Lydia was conceived through rape. Lydia then runs to the oak tree by the river, shouting, 'What's wrong with me? Who am I?' throwing herself in the river in an image reminiscent of the drowning Ophelia, lit by the full moon as a symbol of female madness. The image of Ophelia is also evoked in the film's critical reception as Peter Bradshaw writes in *The Guardian*, 'The film comes from the heart of a certain kind of Englishness: as murky, wet and luxurious as the water in which Millais drowned Ophelia' (Bradshaw, 2015). However, Lydia is saved from drowning by her mother, who overcomes her fear of the outside world to rescue her. As she pulls Lydia from the water she reassures her that 'There's nothing wrong with you'. In saving Lydia she saves herself and their relationship is seemingly restored as mother and daughter rescue each other. Although *The Falling* hints at the many typical discourses surrounding girls' hysteria, the film never fully commits to any of these, refusing to entirely construct the girls as weak and vulnerable, examples of failed femininity. It refuses to let Ophelia drown.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored representations of girls' education and sexuality in recent British girls' school films. During the twenty first century girls have featured prominently within governmental and media discourses around education, as symbols of the new meritocracy, which in turn has contributed to a moral panic about 'failing boys' – working-class boys in particular. During this period, British cinema has produced a number of films set in single-sex girls' schools centred

mostly around groups of (middle-class) teenage girls, where boys exist outside of the institution. These schools are presented as confined, often highly regulated, spaces. They are relics of another era entirely, such as the crumbling St Trinian's or the drab and old-fashioned Abbey Mount in *Wild Child*. Despite being set in the present, the characters in *St Trinian's* and *Wild Child* are largely cut off from postfeminist celebrity culture. This isolation is taken even further in *Wild Child,* where the absence of technology is noticeably anachronistic. These contemporary films are noted for their attempts to incorporate generic elements from the American high school comedy into a distinctly British setting, as exemplified by the idea of *St Trinian's* as "Hogwarts meets Mean Girls" (Lawrence, 2007). As such, the postfeminist makeover trope features prominently within these films. Indeed, both *St Trinian's* and *Wild Child* engage with the postfeminist culture in which the films are set and received. In *St Trinian's* the figure of the rebellious and anarchic St Trinian's girl is co-opted into the boisterous and assertive language of postfeminist girl power, a concept that significantly informs both the film's production and reception discourses, while *Wild Child* engages with postfeminist 'raunch culture' (Levy, 2006). What is striking about these films is the way they construct a nationally-specific postfeminist identity. This is most evident in *Wild Child*, where the British characters are positioned as less consumerist than American Poppy, who is heavily invested in her appearance cultivated with designer brands. This idea of a British postfeminist identity in opposition to American postfeminism is also evident - albeit to a lesser extent – in *St Trinian's* when the 'posh totty' girls look to an American PR expert to help them make the most of their TV appearances, suggesting America, as an overtly consumer-capitalist society, is best placed to give advice on how to participate in both contemporary consumer and celebrity culture. However, *Wild Child* also seems to undermine its construction of postfeminist femininity through Poppy's 'make-under', which emphasises a more natural appearance, and its concern with maintaining traditional femininity through the school's 'honour court' system in an attempt to produce 'fine young ladies'. The film's critical reception also highlights how the film promotes the importance of more traditional values like discipline, loyalty and teamwork in contrast to postfeminist individualism.

Wild Child's emphasis on traditional values also demonstrates an implicit critique of the twenty-first century education system in suggesting that these values are

somehow missing outside of the boarding school environment. This critique is also evident in *St Trinian's* through the idea of St Trinian's as a school that provides an educational space for girls who would not benefit from being elsewhere, and the school's emphasis on unorthodox lessons. This educational critique was also present within the film's critical reception, where both left- and right-wing journalists viewed the film as critical of New Labour's education policies. Moreover, as Louise Wilks has similarly argued, the implicit critique of the education system within *Wild Child* is specifically linked to sex education, and the idea that the girls are so comically misinformed about sex due to the institution's failure to inform them, choosing instead to isolate the girls from any media sources that may ignite their interest (2012b: 111).

Concern about girls' sexuality and sexualisation are evident throughout this chapter. The studies of *St Trinian's* and *Wild Child* have drawn on work by Louise Wilks, who, through textual analysis, argues that the films incite concern over girls' sexualisation while celebrating the commodified woman's body (ibid: 100). While this is true to an extent, the films were not necessarily received in this way and they were not viewed as colluding with moral panics. Despite the linking of referencing the idea of the sexy schoolgirl in relation to *St Trinian's*, their image was deemed rather tame and unthreatening. There was some concern raised in the case of *Wild Child* in relation to the film's use of sexual reference, but this was on the basis that it was inappropriate for the intended audience for the film – ten and eleven-year-olds – which was younger than the audience for *St Trinian's* and younger than the characters within the films. Despite their use of sexual language, however, the characters' lack of knowledge about sex suggests that this does not equate to sexual activity.

The 1960s-set films discussed in the second section of this chapter – *An Education* and *The Falling* – both engage with cultural anxieties over the so-called permissive society and growing sexual autonomy for women, while undermining the dominant perception of the 1960s as 'swinging' through their presentation of the highly regulated school environment. These films also highlight the limited educational and career opportunities for girls at the time in comparison with the twenty-first century. However, unlike the other films in this chapter, *An Education* celebrates the value of

an academic education. Within the film and its critical reception, Jenny is positioned above and beyond her peers through the idea that she is a 'modern' girl, with 'top girl' (McRobbie, 2009) attributes. It is this perception of Jenny as 'modern' and in control that enables the film to alleviate any anxiety about a teenage girl engaging in a relationship with a much older man. The film also side-steps the common trope within 1960s British cinema of unintended pregnancy by presenting the loss of education as the potential consequence for Jenny's actions, but ultimately she is not punished.

The idea of unintended pregnancy does, however, haunt *The Falling*. Through its narrative of girlhood hysteria and visual imagery, the film draws on the Ophelia narrative, which re-emerged in the late 1990s as a symbol of femininity in crisis. However, the film refuses to uphold the idea of girl-as-victim. Instead, the school is presented as an institution that stifles female creativity and rebellion. The regulation of girls' sexuality is also seen as detrimental to their sense of identity. *The Falling's* exploration of hysteria is centred around the intense friendship between Lydia and Abbie. The next chapter will explore depictions of teenage girl friendship in British cinema in more detailing, looking in particular at the impact the formation and development of the characters' identities and the extent to which they help to produce the ideal postfeminist identity.

Chapter Three

'I don't know who I am when I'm not us': Girl Friendship and the Formation of Identity

Introduction

Many of the films explored throughout this thesis highlight relationships between young women in their depictions of girlhood to varying degrees, such as those explored in the previous chapter. This chapter will specifically explore depictions of girls' friendships in contemporary British cinema. Films exploring female friendship have been viewed as the 'hallmark' of the contemporary British woman's film (Bell and Williams, 2010: 15). Melanie Bell and Melanie Williams note how these films explore the 'pleasures and perils of female friendship', citing a number of examples such as such as *Crush* (McKay 2001), *Me Without You* (Goldbacher, 2001) *Anita & Me* (Hüseyin, 2002), *My Summer of Love* (Pawlikowski, 2004), *Notes on a Scandal* (Eyre, 2006) and *The Edge of Love* (Maybury, 2008) (ibid). Similarly, James Leggott notes how contemporary female-centred British films are concerned with the 'complex dynamics of female relationships' (2008: 101). Justine Ashby traces the changes and mutations within the British 'woman's film' since the 1980s and notes how female friendship, alongside the theme of liminality and the desire to escape, remains a central theme within the genre (2010: 164).[66] In her analysis Ashby discusses three contemporary women's films that explore female friendship: *The Land Girls* (Leland, 1998), *Bend It Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002) and *Morvern Callar* (Ramsay, 2002). All of the films feature young female protagonists and –with the exception of *The Land Girls* – are included within the parameters of this research. Ashby notes how *Bend It Like Beckham* 'shifts the key generic themes of female friendship and liminality into a post-feminist idiom' (ibid.), while films like *Morvern Callar* and *My Summer of Love* explore female friendship through 'psychologically brittle girls who undergo painful, emotionally ambivalent rites of passage' (ibid: 166) in a way that continues the trend that began in the late 1990s with films such as *Under the Skin* (Adler, 1998) and *Stella Does Tricks* (Giedroyc,

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[66] Yvonne Tasker notes that, by contrast, Hollywood cinema has historically tended to isolate its female protagonists (1998: 139)

1998), which, as Charlotte Brunsdon (2000) claims, centre upon trapped 'desperate girls'. The depictions of girl friendship discussed in this chapter all in some way feature girls who undergo somewhat painful rites of passage through friendships that are often just as ambivalent.

This chapter's analysis of girl friendship in contemporary British cinema is situated within a postfeminist context of production and reception. In her work on the British Female Ensemble Drama (FED) of the 1990s, Vicky Ball argues that this form 'has the potential to be socially challenging' in its 'privileging [of] the friendship bonds between women' through undermining the ideology of love and romance (2007: 304), but these FEDs are nevertheless informed by the 'double entanglement' (McRobbie, 2004) of postfeminism (Ball, 2007: 16). Ball's work on British television's FEDs centres upon the friendships between groups of adult women. A number of recent British films, however, are characterised by friendships between pairs of girls and young women, such as the aforementioned *Morvern Callar* and *Bend It Like Beckham*, *Ginger and Rosa* (Potter, 2012), and the four case study films in this chapter: *Me Without You*, *Kicks* (Heymann, 2008), *Albatross* (MacCormick, 2011) and *My Summer of Love* (Pawlikowski, 2004) These four films all centre upon intense friendships between pairs of girls, and explore issues of identity and power within these relationships.

As this chapter is focused on representations of teenage girls' friendships, it is useful to explore some of the research relating to girls' friendships outside of Film Studies. Sociologists continually highlight the importance of female friendships, particularly during adolescence. Valerie Hey notes how these friendships play an important part in the way girls build their identity by reproducing 'themselves as mirroring their friends' in a way that boys do not (1997: 6). Ann Oakley, meanwhile, points to the intensity of these friendships and how they contribute the 'making of oneself as a girl' in a way that is 'fraught with ambivalences and contradictions' (1997: vii). The impact of friendship on girls' identities is further highlighted by Apter and Josselson, who assert: 'Through friendships, women of all ages develop individual and independent selves. Their route to individuality is through these connects' (1998: 17-18). This research therefore highlights the importance of establishing strong bonds of female friendship for teenage girls in order to help them form their own identities.

Alison Winch similarly agrees that 'female friendships are complex and formative in the production of feminine identities' (2013: 10). Winch's work is important to this chapter's exploration of depictions of girl friendship. In her book *Girlfriends and the Postfeminist Sisterhood* (2013) Winch explores a range of 'girlfriend media' to examine how female friendship is constructed within a postfeminist context. Highlighting work by figures such as Angela McRobbie and Diane Negra, Winch notes how postfeminist culture is theorised as 'anti-connectivity'. 'The ideal feminine subject is girly and flawless, and her desire for hypervisibility is exclusive. This means solidarity among women is foreclosed' (ibid: 2). Despite postfeminist culture's 'anti-connectivity', Winch notes how there 'is a proliferation of locations within the media that place primary emphasis on female sociality' (ibid). Winch therefore claims 'girlfriendship' within popular culture is 'strategic', as girlfriends 'support each other in striving for "representability" (Negra, 2009) and the perfect self' (ibid). Winch argues that girlfriends are 'essential for enabling normative femininity' but it is not enough to simply be normative, a girl must also 'stand out from her peers… she must be normatively distinctive' (ibid: 2-3). This idea that girlfriends are essentially competing against each other to be 'normatively distinctive' means that girls are subjected to a form of 'homosocial surveillance' (ibid: 5), which Winch terms 'the girlfriend gaze'. Through the 'girlfriend gaze', women are 'regulating each other's bodies through affective networks of control' (ibid: 10), but this surveillance is 'marketed as solidarity through the rhetoric of girlfriendship' (ibid: 5).

Winch explores a range of texts that highlight girlfriendship, such as *Sex and the City* and 'womance' films such as *Bridesmaids* (Feig, 2011) and *In Her Shoes* (Hanson, 2005). She also examines British reality TV programmes like *What Not to Wear* (BBC, 2001- 2007) and *Wife Swap* (2005-2009). While Winch does analyse texts centred upon young women, such as *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004) and *Girls* (HBO, 2012), she focuses mostly on adult women's girlfriendship. Winch discusses the characters in *Girls* in relation to their adult counterparts in *Sex and the City*. Winch notes how the girlfriendships in *Girl*s are 'highly ambivalent and emotionally messy' (2013: 140). Unlike the women in *Sex and the City*, they have 'not yet developed strategic means of relating in order to maintain their representability'

(ibid.). This chapter draws on this to ask: what happens to the postfeminist sisterhood when it is 'girled'? In addition, as Winch primarily focuses on US films, this chapter is also concerned with how young girlfriendship is constructed within the context of British cinema. Moreover, the case studies in this chapter are all in some way concerned with how the intense teenage friendships depicted impact upon and contribute to the formation and development of the characters' identities, but to what extent do these friendships help to produce the ideal postfeminist identity and the 'perfect self' (ibid: 2)? This chapter begins to explore this question with an analysis of Sandra Goldbacher's *Me Without You* and its depiction of a highly ambivalent and suffocating girl friendship.

Me Without You (2001)

Me Without You (2001) is the second feature film directed by Sandra Goldbacher, who had previously received a BAFTA nomination for her film *The Governess* (1999), starring Minnie Driver. The film was co-written by Goldbacher and Laurence Coriat.[67] It was produced by Momentum Pictures, with the participation of British Screen and BskyB. *Me Without You* tells the story of the intense friendship between two girls – bookish and thoughtful Holly (Michelle Williams) and extroverted Marina (Anna Friel). The film follows the girls' friendship from their childhood in the 1970s, where they are next-door-neighbours on the Isle of Man, through university and into adulthood as their relationship becomes increasingly claustrophobic, ending in 2001 with both Marina and Holly married with children.[68] The film is split into chapters for each decade, with the year appearing as a 'handwritten' font, evoking the iconography of a diary. According to Goldbacher, the film is semi-autobiographical. Goldbacher wanted to create an 'unsentimental film about the complications of women's friendships', after experiencing a 'furiously intense best friendship' with another girl during her teenage years that continued to

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[67] Coritat went on to write the original story of *Kicks* (2008) – the next case study in this chapter – which was then adapted by into a screenplay by Leigh Campbell.

[68] Although the film begins and ends with the characters aged outside of the parameters of this thesis, for the majority of the film the characters are aged between fifteen and twenty five in accordance with the categorisation established in the introduction. Friel and Williams play Marina and Holly from their teenage years onwards, and at the time of filming were twenty-five and twenty-one respectively.

'haunt' her 'like a spectre' (Goldbacher, 2001). Goldbacher's comments reinforce the ideas presented in the introduction to this chapter that highlight the centrality of female friendships to the formation of girls' identities and how these friendships have a lasting effect well into adulthood. As mentioned, Alison Winch describes depiction of twenty-something friendships in *Girls* as 'highly ambivalent and emotionally messy' (2013: 140), and, as this section will go on to demonstrate, the same can be said of *Me Without You's* representation of young female friendship, which remains true to Goldbacher's wish to produce an 'unsentimental' film about women's friendships (Goldbacher, 2001). This ambivalence is encapsulated in the film's tagline: 'Who needs enemies when you've got a best friend?'

As mentioned, the film's events take place from the 1970s to the present, and each decade is evoked though attention to detail to the music and fashions of the period. The film's stylistic elements play an important role in *Me Without You's* critical reception, particularly in relation to its status as a British film. Jason Solomons refers to *Me Without You* as 'Bold and British', 'ooz[ing] a refreshingly confident style', with a 'warmth and energy without recourse to gangsters or any desire to be American. He says what he 'liked most' was that 'it looks for poetry, laughter and beauty in life while still being British (2001: 72). Similarly, Tom Charity claims the film 'exudes an intelligence and emotional maturity all too rare in British cinema' (2001: 88). These comments are particularly revealing in regards to common perceptions of British cinema. The description of the film as 'bold' and 'refreshingly confident' (Solomons, 2001: 72) point to the perception of British cinema as synonymous with social realism, which is viewed as dour and unambitious, as explored in Chapter One. A similar tone of surprise was found in the critical reception of *StreetDance* (Giwa and Pasquini, 2010) in Chapter One, where the film's glossy and glamorous aesthetic was deemed very 'unBritish'. However, *Me Without You* is also identified as having particularly 'British' traits. A review in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* notes how 'Goldbacher sensibly keeps the film grounded in British reality' (Unattributed, 2001: 36), thus once again highlighting British cinema's perceived preoccupation with realism, which here is evoked positively. While the film may be stylistically more adventurous than is commonly associated with British cinema, it is sensibly so and is not seen to be 'over the top', which, as Solomons implies, is characteristic of American cinema (2001: 72). The film is also

linked to *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Maguire, 2001), which was released the same year. *Me Without You* is described as the 'grittier 'diary' of the two, (Franklin, 2002: 6) and is positioned as targeting the same 'chick flick' audience.

The praise for *Me Without You's* verisimilitude is firmly linked to its authenticity in its portrayal of the complexities of female friendship. This authenticity 'seeps from the pore of each set, costume and piece of dialogue' (Wyithe, 2001) with 'wincingly funny precision' (Charity, 2001: 88). This is often attributed to Goldbacher's authorship and the semi-autobiographical nature of the film as 'Goldbacher is writing and directing from fertile memory' (Solomons, 2001: 72) in her depiction of a 'bitter-sweet friendship' (Franklin, 2002: 6) in an 'original' film that 'avoids soppy female solidarity and easy anti-male sentiment' (Landesman, 2001). This highly gendered remark reinforces the idea of feminine emotional excess within the female friendship film. Derogatory comments such as this can be found in many reviews of the film, and are often used to highlight how *Me Without You* is in some way superiror. For example, a review in one regional newspaper draws on the perceived low-brow status of the 'chick flick' as a woman's genre to praise the film as giving "chick flick[s] a good name' (Unattributed, 2002).[69]

Me Without You opens in 1975 when Marina and Holly are children. Shots of the two girls playing in the summer sunshine dissolve into each other, conveying the idea of idyllic, never-ending childhood summers. However, the film immediately establishes Holly and Marina in terms of the dichotomies that characterise them. Marina commands a blindfolded Holly to step over a glass tumbler without smashing it, and when Holly hesitates asks, 'What's the matter? Don't you trust me?' This immediately establishes the power dynamic between the pair, with Marina portrayed as the confident leader, who expects Holly to blindly follow her. Their differences are further established in scenes in their respective family homes. While both girls are presented as middle class, their lives are very different. Holly's house is drab and

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[69] It is interesting to note that critical discussions of the film's authorship fail to mention Laurence Coriat as co-writer, and in providing Goldbacher with sole attribution, uphold traditional ideas of the single author who puts themselves in the text through drawing on autobiography.

stilted, with dull brown tones. She spends her time reading while her middle-aged parents listen to classical music. By contrast, Marina's house is brightly lit, and more low-brow, suggested by the way in which Marina, Nat and their mother casually gather around the television. This idea of Holly and Marina as opposites also forms a significant part of the film's critical reception. Anna Friel, as Marina, is described as the 'sexier best mate' (Bradshaw, 2001), 'flighty' (Franklin, 2002: 6; Solomons, 2001: 72), 'flirty' (ibid.), 'adventurous' and 'selfish' (Hunter, 2001: 9). Friel's 'sexy' persona is also alluded to through references to Friel's early role in the Channel Four soap opera, *Brookside* (1982-2003), as she is referred to as 'ex-Brookside star' (Wyithe, 2001). During her time on *Brookside*, Friel caused controversy in 1993 when her character was involved in the first pre-watershed lesbian kiss on British television (BBC, 2007), which is teasingly referred to in Jason Solomons' review when he says, 'Oh, that Anna Friel, she is one for same-sex kisses' (Solomons, 2001: 72). Meanwhile, Michelle Williams' Holly is referred to as 'thoughtful, bookish and romantic' (Franklin, 2002: 6), 'dowd[y]' (Solomons, 2001: 72), 'mousy and submissive' (Hunter, 2001: 9). Like Friel, Williams is also referred to in terms of a well-known role, which is then used to reinforce the persona of her character in the film. In 2001, Williams was best known for her role in US teen drama *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003), which was known for its serious, brooding tone (Charity, 2001: 88; Franklin, 2002: 6; Hunter, 2001: 9; Unattributed, 2001: 36). Moreover, what is most notable about the critical reception of the film is the attention paid to the fact that Williams adopts a British accent to play Holly. This is mostly reported in positive terms, which critics using words such as 'impressive' (Solomons, 2001: 72), 'simply extraordinary' (Charity, 2001: 88) and 'Williams shak[es] off her American accent with ease' (Unattributed, 2002). The favourable reception of Williams' British accent adds to the overall sense of the film's credibility and authenticity.

As Holly and Marina live out their teenage years in 1978, their friendship revolves around trying their best to alleviate the suffocating boredom of suburbia and negotiating their emergent sexualities. The girls give each other love bites in order to look 'more experienced', and lack of sexual experience is used as an insult, such as when Marina tells Holly, 'You should dye your hair, Holly, you look like a virgin'. This line is an example of what Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose refer to as 'normative cruelties' (2010: 585). In using the term 'normative cruelties', Renold

and Ringrose are referring to the 'ways performing normative gender subject positions invoke exclusionary and injurious practices… that are taken for granted' (ibid: 575). They argue that 'Meanness… is part of the normative cruelties of "doing" girl', and a 'primary way in which girls are socially sanctioned to express this meanness is through subtle and direct regulation of other girls' sexuality' (ibid.).[70] These 'regulatory discourses around sexuality' (ibid) function as a mode of constructing idealised femininity' (ibid: 586). In performing this 'normative cruelty', Marina is asserting both her power and attempting to position herself as 'hypervisible' in the inference that, by contrast, she does not look like a virgin, even though she is. Being referred to as a 'slut' is also part of these regulatory normative cruelties, reinforcing the contradictions within this mode of idealised femininity, in which appearing obviously sexually inexperienced is seen as 'abnormal', while appearing overly sexual is not 'feminine'. Furthermore, while Marina employs normative cruelties in an attempt to become hypervisible, Holly strives to have "representability" through emulating Marina, such as when they wear identical 'goth' outfits made out of bin liners to a party. This also reinforces the way in which girls are said to reproduce themselves in 'mirroring their friends' (Hay, 1997: 6).

As part of her attempts to become hypervisible, Marina's identity is constantly changing, signified by her changing appearance (Figure 11).[71] In 1982, during their years together at university, Marina is dressed in prom dresses and a large leopard print coat, with long, bleached-blonde hair with dark roots. Leopard print and bleached hair are often signifiers of working-class femininity (Mendick, 2013). Middle-class Marina's adoption of these visual signifiers could therefore be thought of transgressive, particularly when considered alongside the implication that she is promiscuous. As well as an attempt to transcend her class identity, Marina's appearance at this point is evocative of the pop star Madonna during the 1980s. This is referred to in the critical reception as Marina's 'Material Girl outfits' (Wyithe, 2001). The linking of Marina to Madonna also draws comparisons with the film *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Seidelman, 1985), which, like *Me Without You*, presents

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[70] This was also discussed in relation to *Wild Child* and the school's 'honour court' in the previous chapter.

[71] The fact that Marina's identity is very much tied to her image is also reinforced in the film's critical reception that emphasises Anna Friel's physical appearance and the idea of her as 'sexy'.

a friendship between two women within a good girl/bad girl pairing. As Lucy Fischer notes, within the film Madonna's Susan is presented as a 'slut' because she wears 'black lingerie' and 'junk jewellery' (1990: 202), much like Friel's Marina. Marina's changing identity highlights Antony Giddens' concept of the self as 'reflexively made' (1991: 3), in which 'appearance… becomes the central element of the reflexive project of the self' (ibid: 100).[72] According to Giddens, 'the moral thread of [this] self-actualisation is one of authenticity… based on "being true to oneself" (ibid: 78) (original emphasis). However, the film posits Marina's reflexive identity making as *inauthentic* through such devices as emulating Madonna's image and positioning her as Holly's opposite, as the fact that Holly's identity does not change is presented as an indicator of her authenticity.

Figure 11: Marina's (Anna Friel) makeovers.

While Holly's identity remains stable, that is not to say that she does not attempt to change at various points within the film. This is particularly evident during the pair's university years, when both Marina and Holly have affairs with the same lecturer, Daniel (Kyle MacLachlan). Holly and Marina compete to become hypervisible, specifically to attract Daniel's attention. Holly does so by trying to impress him with high-brow literary and cultural references, while Mariana uses her reputation for

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[72] As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, the idea of the self as a reflexive project is central to conceptualisations of postfeminism.

partying to get him the drugs he wants. According to Alison Winch, within postfeminist girlfriend media, 'women do not overtly compete for male attention' (2013: 26). Holly and Marina also do not overtly compete for male attention; rather they rely on slightly more subtle forms of regulation and control. While they amuse themselves by listing Daniel's flaws and ridiculing him behind his back, they also try to undermine each other, such as when Marina convinces Holly not to go to a party that she knows Daniel will also attend, and they lie to each other about seeing him. One of main ways in which they attempt to become hypervisible is by assimilating parts of the other's identity. For example, Marina attempts to impress Daniel by naming Ingmar Bergman films she knows Holly likes but the limits of her knowledge are exposed, making her look stupid, while Holly tries on one of Marina's dresses in order to look like her, but quickly decides not to wear it. Holly's decision not to wear Marina's dress to meet Daniel further highlights the idea that, unlike Marina, her identity is stable and authentic.

The final section of the film is set in the 1990s, where Holly and Marina have established their careers with varying degrees of success. Marina, now styled as a femme fatale of Film Noir with blunt dark hair and red lips (Figure 9), works 'with music videos' and is shown talking to Holly on the telephone in her stereotypically feminine frilly and pink bedroom. Marina's career success arguably stems from her ability to constantly change her outward appearance as she is able to present herself as the ideal neoliberal subject who is calculating and self-regulating (Gill, 2007: 164). Holly, meanwhile, is a journalist who is writing a book, trapped in a tiny apartment.[73] Holly is, as she says, 'waiting to transmute into a successful adult'. Here Holly is articulating a typically postfeminist anxiety. As Tasker and Negra note, within postfeminism 'female adulthood is defined as a chronic state of temporal neurosis' (2007: 10) and Holly adheres to this through the idea that she should be reaching certain goals by a certain age in order to be considered a successful adult. This involves making the 'right' choices out of the supposedly wealth of options available for women today, which Holly feels she has failed to do.

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[73] Holly's status as a writer is particularly interesting in terms of authorship as it further develops the autobiographical link with Goldbacher as the writer-director, and establishes Holly as the 'me' of the film's title. Furthermore, the idea of the film prioritising Holly's subjectivity renders her significantly more powerful.

Her mother reiterates this when she tells her she's 'messed up all the chances' she had. Sociologists such as Jessica Ringrose (2013) and Valerie Walkerdine (2011) have demonstrated a need to examine the affects of feelings such as shame, competition and jealousy in relations between women. This case study has highlighted how these feelings are very much evident in the depiction of the relationship between Holly and Marina throughout the film, but they increase significantly during adulthood. Holly and Marina's friendship is now unbearably intense and claustrophobic, and no longer beneficial. Holly confronts Marina in an attempt to separate herself from her, saying: 'I don't want to be us anymore. I feel ugly, and suffocated, and not good enough'. Marina also admits to feelings of shame, saying 'I'm disgusting', but unlike Holly she is unwilling to let go of their relationship and drunkenly threatens to kill herself. She tells Holly, 'I don't know who I am when I'm not us'. Marina's confession shows her reliance on Holly for her sense of identity, and her need for Holly to remain the quiet, thoughtful one of the pair in order for Marina to be hypervisible. Holly then replies that she doesn't know who she is 'ever'. While Holly claims to not know who she is, the film makes it clear that Holly does have a strong sense of her own identity as she rarely attempts to be anything else: she is 'true to herself' and this makes her powerful. For this Holly is rewarded with the ideal feminine lifestyle, as by the film's denouement she is happily married to Nat and they have a family. By contrast, Marina is shown to be stressed and hung-over, the implication being that she is still not secure and happy within herself. This is in keeping with the film's use of the girl/bad girl' dichotomy, as within these relationships the conflict between the two is resolved in a 'morally "agreeable" manner' and the good girl 'triumphs' (Fischer, 1990: 202).[74] The film's final image is of Holly and Marina's daughters playing together, while Marina's daughter wears one of her old prom dresses. The image of the smiling girls is held in freeze-frame, echoing earlier images of Holly and Marina as children. From this cyclical image, it seems that while the intense, ambivalent female friendship depicted within the film can be difficult to negotiate, it is nevertheless a rite of passage for girls and young women that cannot be avoided.

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[74] Holly's 'triumph' can also be linked to the notion of authorship and subjectivity within the film and the aforementioned idea that she is the 'you' of the film's title.

Somebodies, wannabes and nobodies: *Kicks* (2008) and *Albatross* (2011)

Me Without You's depiction of teenage girlhood was set in the 1970s at the height of the second wave of feminism. The following case study – Lindy Heymann's *Kicks* (2008) – is set very much within a postfeminist cultural landscape, and contemporary celebrity culture in particular plays an important role in the film's exploration of teenage girl friendship. *Kicks* is set in Liverpool and tells the story of the friendship between two fifteen-year-old girls: shy Nicole (Kerrie Hayes) and fame-hungry Jasmine (Nichola Burley), who wants to marry a footballer. The girls meet at Anfield football ground and bond over their obsession with fictional Liverpool footballer Lee Cassidy (Jamie Doyle). When it is announced that Cassidy is to transfer to Real Madrid Jasmine and Nicole decide to kidnap him in order to convince their hero to stay. According to Heymann, the filmmakers wanted to 'capture a moment in time and [say] something about the current climate we are living in' through exploring a specific aspect of celebrity culture and girls' relationship to this (Heymann, 2008). Heymann also claimed she wanted to draw on the experience of 'being fifteen retrospectively' through the casting of Burley and Hayes, who were both in their twenties at the time of filming, to play teenage girls (ibid.). This notion of a 'retrospective' depiction of teenage girl friendship also evokes comparisons with discussions of *Me Without You's* authorship, which centred around director Sandra Goldbacher's retrospective look at her own teenage friendship. *Kicks* is Heymann's debut feature film, having previously made music videos for a number of British bands. The screenplay was written by Leigh Campbell, based on an original story by Laurence Coriat (Campbell, n.d.). *Kicks* was created as part of the Digital Departures initiative; a micro-budget filmmaking scheme established to celebrate Liverpool's status as European Capital of Culture 2008 (Andrews, 2014: 121). [75] The scheme was run by the regional film agency Northwest Vision and Media, and its partners were the UKFC and Liverpool Culture Company (Andrews, 2014: 126). The other films produced through Digital Departures were Terence Davies' Of *Time and City* (2008) and Lawrence Gough's horror film *Salvage* (2008). Hannah Andrews claims that of all the Digital Departures films, *Kicks* is 'the most representative [of

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[75] A micro-budget is under £1 million. *Kicks* had an estimated budget of £250,000 (Andrews, 2014: 121). Although the film was produced to celebrate Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture in 2008, it did not go on general release until 2010.

Liverpool], not only in its aesthetic, but also in its narrative' (ibid: 130). Certainly, the city of Liverpool is at the heart of the film. Depictions of Liverpool on screen have mostly appeared on television, in dramas such as *Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC, 1982) and *Brookside* (Channel 4, 1982-2003) in particular. In fact, Liverpool's connection to television is so strong it is enough to render it an 'aesthetically "televisual" space' (Andrews, 2014: 132). Furthermore, television's most significant presentations of Liverpool, such as those mentioned, have typically been within the social realist mode of production. This is something Heymann was acutely aware of when making *Kicks*, and she was keen to avoid what she refers to as 'gritty, squalid, grim-up-North Britain' (Heymann, 2008). Instead, Heymann chose to create a more heightened and stylised aesthetic. This was achieved through focusing on seemingly insignificant details – extreme close-ups of eyes and hands – rather than wide shots of the surroundings. When the camera angle does widen, the city of Liverpool is rendered almost abstract, which, when combined with the film's hazy electro-pop soundtrack by Liverpudlian group Ladytron, creates an intense and unsettling effect. Heymann's desire to move away from Liverpool's televisual aesthetic was cemented with the hiring of Spanish Director of Photography Eudard Grau, whose 'outsider's view' was key to creating a vision of Liverpool that was both recognisable and fresh (Heymann, n.d.). Grau's focus on minute details is evident within the film's opening scene, which includes close-ups of Nicole's lips and her fingers touching the fabric on her bed. She also draws a heart with Lee Cassidy's name in the middle onto her chest, an inky outline of the tattoo she will carve into herself later on in the film. Nicole's continuous need to touch things or create sound conveys the idea she is trying to assert her existence and make herself visible. Her loneliness is indicated by the fact that her mother is absent - referred to solely through the sight of a nurse's uniform hanging in the doorway and notes on the kitchen counter – and her father is more concerned with his new family.

Although the film may offer a vision of Liverpool that has rarely been seen before, its Liverpudlian identity is very much apparent, particularly through Nicole. Much of Nicole's sense of her own identity comes from her connection to Liverpool, both the football team and the city itself. This is evident through aural codes, such as her accent and her reverent chanting of the football mantra 'We love you Liverpool, we do'; narrative codes, particularly through her obsession with Lee Cassidy; but also

through the film's visual codes. At the beginning of the film, Nicole is shown looking through various circular shapes within the landscape, such as the Liverpool docks. Nicole's fascination with these circular, eye-shaped features evokes the idea of voyeurism and establishes Nicole as someone who is watchful, thoughtful and introverted – someone who is used to witnessing life rather than experiencing it (Figure 12). Hannah Andrews notes how Nicole 'embodies Liverpool as a space' and 'Nicole and the city are juxtaposed in such a way as to suggest they are intertwined' (2014: 132). For Heymann, Nicole's connection to Liverpool goes even further: Nicole does not just embody Liverpool, she is a 'metaphor for Liverpool' (Heymann, n.d.).

Figure 12: Minute details and Nicole (Kerrie Hayes) within Liverpool's circular landscape.

If Nicole is a metaphor for Liverpool, then Jasmine serves to explore contemporary celebrity culture, and, more specifically, the UK's WAG culture. The term 'WAG' refers to 'wives and girlfriends' and is particularly associated with footballers. The notion of the 'WAG' became prominent during the 2006 World Cup in Baden-Baden, where the wives and girlfriends of the England players were followed extensively by the media, who highlighted their glamorous lifestyles that consisted largely of partying and shopping (Cochrane, 2010). The figure of the WAG arguably has particular cultural prominence within the film's Liverpool setting, which, as Hannah Andrews observes, 'has a reputation as a glamorous evening playground for the rich and famous' (2014: 131). Actress Nichola Burley also believes Jasmine's function is to explore the cultural phenomenon of the WAG by 'hold[ing] a mirror

up to society' (Burley, 2008) through Jasmine. However, as will become evident, the idea that Kicks is merely 'holding a mirror up to society' and depicting what is reflected in it is highly problematic. Liverpudlian Coleen Rooney is one of the most well known British WAGs. Coleen highlights the 'fairytale' nature of this culture, and the idea that it is relatively easy to achieve, as through her relationship and then marriage to Premiership footballer Wayne Rooney, she made the seemingly effortless transition from A-Level student to magazine columnist and fashion designer. Alison Winch highlights Colleen as an example of those 'working class women who have succeeded in celebrity culture. Consequently they signify aspiration and fame in an apparently meritocratic society' (2013: 20).

In depicting Jasmine's ambitions as part of a seemingly democratised celebrity culture, the film engages with contemporary debates about young people's (particularly girls) ambitions. As Kim Allen notes, 'Over the past decade, the UK has witnessed mounting public debates about young people's desire to become celebrities' (2011: 301). These debates, which take place not only in the media but also educational and political settings, are usually centred around the 'inappropriateness' of these ambitions (ibid.). Girls in particular are the main focus of these concerns, as contemporary celebrity culture appears to present girls with 'increasing opportunities to use their bodily and erotic capital for money' (Ringrose, 2013: 42). In 2008 Culture Minister Barbra Follett was critical of girls' aspirations, saying: "Kids nowadays just want to be famous. If you ask little girls, they either want to be footballers' wives or win *The X Factor*. Our society is in danger of being Barbie-dolled" (Adams, 2008). Follett's remarks are highly gendered, placing this desire to become famous squarely upon young girls, even going as far as to suggest that these aspirations are a 'dangerous' threat to society. The idea that the seemingly ubiquitous 'celebrification' of girls' ambitions that revolves largely around image is a mounting concern also underpins the filmmakers' discussions of the film. Screenwriter Leigh Campbell explains how she was especially interested in 'looking at girls today and how they increasingly get their validation from what they look like and who they're with, rather than their own sense of self-worth' (Campbell, n.d.). Similarly, Lindy Heymann believes it is crucial - and inevitable - for films centred around teenage girls to question this. "If you're an intelligent woman and you're a

film-maker you are going to be questioning the prevailing attitude among teenage girls that what you think is secondary to how you look" (quoted in Hoby, 2009).

While Campbell and Heymann's comments articulate the common concern that young girls are increasingly getting their validation from aspiring to be part of this over-sexualised WAG culture, the reality is very different. In 2008, it was reported that a survey by mybliss.co.uk found that teenage girls would 'rather be WAGs than politicians' (Beckford, 2008). While this is true, the article gives the impression that being a WAG was the most popular career choice for the girls surveyed, when in actual fact the majority (21.8%) said they aspired to be like author JK Rowling, compared to 2.4% who wanted to be a WAG (ibid.). More recently, research by the CelebYouth project has found that celebrity now serves an important social function through which young people learn the values of hard work, talent and modesty, and the teenagers who took part in the research were critical of "famous for nothing" celebrities, such as WAGs and those who become famous by appearing on reality television (Bingham, 2014).

However, the discourses circulating around WAGs are more complex than this suggests. This is evident both within *Kicks* and the film's extra-textual materials. For example, when discussing her character, Nichola Burley makes a distinction between different 'types' of WAGs. Although she is generally critical of that particular lifestyle, she identifies Colleen Rooney as a 'positive' example of a WAG (Burley, 2008). In doing so, Burley is alluding to the presentation of Colleen as a WAG who has been particularly successful used her acquired status to forge her own career as an entrepreneur and fashion designer, and reinforcing Winch's comment that Colleen signifies aspiration within a seemingly meritocratic society (2013: 20). Within the film Jasmine also makes this distinction between 'positive', successful WAGs and the ones who are less so. In many ways, Jasmine positions herself as a 'can-do girl', who is committed to 'exceptional careers and career planning, their belief in their capacity to succeed, and their display of a consumer lifestyle' (Harris, 2004: 14). For Harris, the celebrity lifestyle is 'exemplar of the can-do experience', as ordinary' girl is able to work on herself as a celebrity project and gain some kind of public profile in the process' (ibid: 127), an idea that Jasmine encapsulates. Jasmine is presented as being highly aware of the 'fame-by-proxy' (Allen, 2011: 131) criticism

levelled at WAGs and attempts to distance herself from this through regimented career planning and an overwhelming 'belief in [her] capacity to succeed' (Harris, 2004: 14). Jasmine's commitment to planning is partly conveyed by the revelation that she keeps an autobiography book in which to record details of her life. In his work on self-identity, Anthony Giddens argues autobiography is 'at the core of self-identity in modern life' (1991: 76). As discussed earlier in this chapter, self-identity in modern times 'becomes a reflexively organised endeavour', and this involves maintaining a 'coherent, yet consistently revised biographical narrative', where a 'narrative of the self is made explicit' through keeping a journal and making an autobiography (ibid.). In keeping an autobiography book, Jasmine is creating her own biographical narrative in the self-reflexive process of identity making because, as Harris asserts, girls today are expected to 'make themselves', placing the onus to succeed squarely on the individual (ibid: 5). This reflexively-organised biographical narrative is then a product that can be marketed and sold in the form of a celebrity memoir if – or, as the character believes – when Jasmine achieves her dream of fame. Jasmine is also reliant on her body to make her hypervisible, as she explains to Nicole through the following dialogue: "I'll get my boobs done, get my portfolio, little go of modelling – glamour and that – and maybe a part in a soap or something'. Jasmine's plan to modify her body in a way that would be beneficial to her career goals conveys the importance of the body in achieving hypervisbility and fame. As Winch argues, 'In the hypervisible landscape of popular culture the body is recognised as the object of a woman's labour: it is her asset, her product, her brand and her gateway to freedom and empowerment in a neoliberal market economy' (2013: 21), an idea that is arguably most applicable to the figure of the WAG. Jasmine's strategic approach to achieving her goals, and her awareness of the criticisms levelled at the WAG lifestyle, is further articulated in her comment: 'It's better if you're famous yourself because then you go to the same parties and premieres and whatever… Plus, if you're a bit of a celebrity then they don't think you're a gold-digger'. This line alludes to the perception of WAGs as 'mere appendages' (Cochrane, 2010) and the importance of avoiding being labelled a 'gold-digger' with its negative connotations. However, while Jasmine seems to view herself as having the attributes of a 'can-do' girl, she appears to be oblivious to the fact that the ambitions she outlines, particularly glamour modelling, are viewed as 'illegitimate' routes to success for young women. The film's implicit criticism of

ambitions such as the ones articulated by Jasmine is conveyed not only by the slightly humorous tone of this dialogue but also by Nicole's incredulous reaction when she tells Jasmine, 'You're scary'.

Although *Kicks* is presented as a 'parable about Britain's love-hate relationship with fame' (Sandhu, 2010), the film's critical reception highlights how the film is really more about the relationship between Nicole and Jasmine and their 'power relationship' (Solomons, 2010). For many critics, the portrayal of the girls' friendship is the strongest aspect of the film, which is let down by the melodramatic kidnap plot at the end. For Dave Calhoun, this plot development prevented the film from being a 'more credible exploration of teenage sexual infatuation and celebrity obsession' (Calhoun, 2010), while Peter Bradshaw claims 'The initial stages of the film – just hanging out with Nicole and Jasmine – are considerably more interesting than the rather strained denouement' (Bradshaw, 2010). Director Lindy Heymann also views the relationship between Nicole and Jasmine as 'crucial' because it 'underpins the whole movie' (Heymann, 2008). The focus on the relationship between the two girls also extends beyond the film and its characters as both Burley and Hayes discuss how they worked to build a convincing relationship. In an interview that accompanies the film's DVD release, Nichola Burley talks about how they worked together from the very first audition, and Kerrie Hayes reveals she lived with Burley for the duration of the filming and spent a great deal of their time off-set together as well in order to create a strong bond. Critics also praised the way in which Hayes and Burley conveyed the relationship between their respective characters. Jason Solomons notes how 'Burley and Hayes play splendidly off each other' (Solomons, 2010), while a review of the film in *The Glaswegian* newspaper remarks how the film 'builds the sisterly solidarity' and 'Hayes and Burley gel nicely' (Unattributed, 2010: 3). The use of the phrase 'sisterly solidarity' evokes comparisons with the more politicised second wave feminism rather than the individualistic discourse of postfeminism. It also highlights the contrast between Jasmine and Nicole's relationship and that of Holly and Marina in *Me Without You*, in which Marina attempted to regulate and control Holly. The focus on Hayes and Burley's on-screen chemistry alongside the close relationship between their characters demonstrates how *Kicks*' portrayal of teenage girl friendship does not, for

the most part, emphasis the 'peer control' through the guise of friendship (Winch, 2013: 2) that characterises the postfeminist sisterhood.

Nicole and Jasmine's friendship provides a notable point of contrast within *Kicks'* depiction of contemporary Liverpool as a place where girls in particular are desperate for fame, which encourages a very individualistic, 'every-girl-for-herself' attitude. This sentiment is articulated by Jasmine's acquaintance, Jade (Laura Wallace) – also an aspiring WAG. With her blonde permed hair, leopard print dress and heavy make-up, Jade 'conforms to the stereotype of Liverpool women' (Andrews, 2014: 131). She is dismissive of Nicole and her child-like appearance, saying she 'looks about ten' and refuses to stay behind when Nicole is denied entry into a nightclub Jade's comment not only conveys an individualistic attitude, but also the idea of the 'girlfriend gaze', where in 'girlfriend culture', it is other women, not men, who are looking at, controlling and judging other women's bodies (Winch, 2013: 5). Jasmine, on the other hand, is caught between wanting to stay with Nicole and wanting to meet the footballers the girls know are inside. Although Jasmine does go into the club, she returns to Nicole shortly afterwards after seemingly falling out with Jade, who criticises Jasmine's unwillingness to perform sexual favours. Jasmine grabs Nicole's hand and the pair use Nicole's special knowledge of Liverpool to find Lee Cassidy's apartment. While Winch has argued that using friends to achieve hypervisibility means that girls are inevitably competing against each other, this competition is not necessarily evident within Jasmine and Nicole's relationship. Nicole and Jasmine's friendship develops quickly and intensely, echoing the type of 'sentimental' friendship developed by Karen Hollinger in her study of female friendship in Hollywood cinema. Hollinger defines 'sentimental' friendship as 'close, emotionally effusive, dyadic same-sex unions'. They are often portrayed as exhibiting 'a fervent passion that is reminiscent of heterosexual romantic love', and often stimulate personal and psychological growth' (1998: 7).

One of the main ways in which Nicole and Jasmine's friendship is developed and articulated is through makeover. As explored elsewhere in this thesis, makeover is central to postfeminist culture, and is a key feature of texts centred around and/or aimed at teenage girls in particular, as the makeover is a key ritual of female coming into being' (Negra, 2009: 123). Negra goes further to call the makeover the 'scene

par excellence of postfeminist identity making' that allows for the 'revelation of the self that has been there all along' (ibid: 124). Sarah Gilligan, meanwhile, states the makeover narrative 'implies that through the process of consumption and feminisation, the female protagonist will achieve social mobility, popularity and the 'prize' of (a new or rekindled) heterosexual romance' (2011: 167). Both Negra and Gilligan refer to the process of 'consumption' within the makeover narrative. For Negra, the makeover trope is useful for 'staging the kind of transformative consumption so valued by postfeminism' (2009: 123). However, Gilligan points out that while consumption is key to the makeover trope, texts centred around teens:

> eschew conspicuous consumption… Rather than montages of shopping sequences… teen films tend to fetishize vintage clothing, hand-me-downs, dressmaking, and stylistic experimentation as the means by which postfeminist subjectivities can be productively re-envisioned and performed' (2011: 168).

As discussed, this is particularly applicable to the British texts explored within this thesis, where British girls are constructed as eschewing branded consumption. This is certainly the case within *Kicks*, as Jasmine gives Nicole her old clothes and encourages her to try new things by telling her, 'That looks so cool on you'. Jasmine's silky, brightly patterned dresses are in stark contrast to Nicole's usual, more child-like hooded tops and pink trainers.[76] Hannah Andrews links Jasmine's appearance to the 'femme fatale of Film Noir' due to her 'long dark hair, smoky eye make-up and oriental silken dresses' (2014: 131). For Andrews, Jasmine represents both the 'generic conventions the film wants to emulate, and a wider culture of young women who exploit their sexuality for material gain' (ibid: 131).[77] In giving Nicole her old clothes, Jasmine is helping Nicole to gain 'representability' (Negra, 2009) by enabling Nicole to both fit into the glamorous, celebrity-focused world of the film, while Nicole's grateful acceptance reinforces the idea that 'girls look to

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[76] The contrast between their appearances also points to Jasmine and Nicole's different class backgrounds. Jasmine's expensive-looking dresses convey her parents' economic status, and she is referred to as 'nouveau riche' (Smith, 2010; Solomons, 2010) in the film's critical reception. Nicole, on the other hand, is coded as working class through her costume and the fact she lives on a council estate.
[77] The femme fatale of film noir is also one of the styles adopted by Marina in *Me Without You*, which is suggestive of her exploitative and potentially dangerous sexuality.

their peers to secure appropriate behaviour and looks' in order to construct a normative feminine identity' (Winch, 2013: 10). This act of sharing clothes is essential to the characters' quest for 'representability' (Negra, 2009) as wearing the 'right' clothes earns them access to the clubs attended by footballers, and to be seen, bringing them one step closer to their dream lifestyle. To borrow Lauren Berlant's phrase, this sharing helps to 'produce deep affinities, offering solutions to the desire to be *somebody* in a world where the default is being nobody, or worse, being presumptively *all wrong*' (2008: 3) (original emphasis).

Clothes are valued highly within the film, acting almost as a form of currency within Jasmine and Nicole's friendship. Not only does Jasmine give Nicole a dress at the beginning of their friendship, as discussed above, but she also gives Nicole a bag of clothes as a type of peace offering when Nicole is upset by Jasmine's overly sexual behaviour. The significance placed on clothing also conveys the aforementioned concern of the filmmakers that, in the contemporary postfeminist era, 'girls increasingly get their validation from what they look like' (Campbell, n.d.). However, while Nicole is proud of her new image, a close-up of one of her feet in Jasmine's shoes reveals that they are too big for her. This image evokes the idea of Cinderella and the glass slipper. In her work on the discursive formations around Audrey Hepburn, which was discussed in the previous chapter's analysis of *An Education*, Rachel Mosley notes how the Cinderella motif is central to makeover culture (2002: 39). Similarly, Jessica Ringrose highlights how the princess has 're-emerged as a powerful postfeminist motif in popular culture', citing Hollywood films such as The *Princess Diaries* and *Enchanted*, as well as the coverage of the marriage of Prince William to Kate Middleton as examples (2013: 110). Jasmine is also shown to be invested in the princess motif. She confidently asserts she was 'born to be a princess' and, to an extent, WAGs could also be viewed as the contemporary incarnation of the princess, promoting as they do a rags-to-riches narrative through marriage. In Nicole's case, however, unlike Cinderella, the 'glass slipper' does not fit, suggesting she will not get the fairytale lifestyle promoted by postfeminism.

Kicks also uses the friendship between Jasmine and Nicole to explore contemporary discourses relating to the concern about the sexualisation of young girls, which was

explored in detail in the previous chapter. Lindy Heymann taps into this sexualisation 'panic' with her belief that girls today face a "devastating" pressure to 'be sexual before they are ready' (quoted in Hoby, 2009: 4). *Kicks* explicitly links this 'sexualisation panic' to contemporary celebrity culture, as world in which the film is set is a place where sexual favours are traded 'to gain access to the promised land of celebrity' (Heymann, n.d.) Jessica Ringrose similarly notes how contemporary celebrity culture presents girls with 'what looks like increasing opportunities to use their bodily and erotic capital for money' (2013: 47). Within *Kicks*, it is Jade who is shown to most overtly engage with this. Jade is willing to perform sexual favours for the nightclub doormen in exchange for access to the VIP area. Although Jasmine briefly considers this, she cannot go through with it and her offer to pay money for VIP access instead is turned down. Jade criticises Jasmine for being a 'tease' and tells her to 'grow up', suggesting girls are expected to be willing to use their sexuality for their own advancement in a carefree way, and to do so is a sign of maturity. Jasmine is caught between wanting to be thought of as sexually mature but is not ready for it – it's 'too much too soon'.[78] Her innocence in comparison to Jade is exposed when she reveals her fantasy situation with Lee Cassidy would be 'you, me and a bottle of Lambrini' – a fantasy that does not directly express sexual desire and also reinforces her youthfulness and lack of sophistication through her choice of wine that is often associated with being 'girly' and inexpensive.

Moreover, the film's concern over the sexualisation of teenage girls is directly tied to its critique of 'raunch culture'. As discussed, 'raunch culture' evokes postfeminist rhetoric of 'choice' and 'empowerment', as raunch culture purports the idea that this is acceptable because women *choose* to make sex objects of themselves to show that they are liberated. Therefore, participation in raunch culture is the litmus test of female uptightness' (2006: 4). Rosalind Gill also describes how "porno chic" has become the 'dominant representational practice' in postfeminist culture (2007: 151) and girls are 'endowed with agency on the condition that it is used to construct oneself as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy found in

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[78] This was argued in the previous chapter with the idea that although the girls in *St Trinian's* and *Wild Child* may attempt to convey sexual availability, this does not equate to experience.

pornography' (ibid: 152). Jasmine and Nicole's ambivalence towards raunch culture is evident when they kidnap Lee Cassidy and take him to abandoned military accommodation in a bid to stop him leaving Liverpool. In an effort to keep his attention, Jasmine engages in an innuendo-laden conversation, at which point Lee orders to girls to kiss each other. The spectacle of Jasmine and Nicole kissing each other for Lee's enjoyment highlights a common feature of raunch culture whereby lesbianism is reconfigured as a performance for men (ibid.). However, rather than seeming 'empowered', Nicole is visibly uncomfortable with this and starts to play loud music to distract Jasmine's attention. The sight of girls dancing around in a carefree, child-like manner reinforces the idea that they, but particularly Jasmine, are caught between wanting to seem sexually mature but they are not comfortable with the realities of what this entails. It also suggests that Jasmine's friendship with Nicole is more important to her than she realises.

The playful mood changes suddenly when the girls discover Lee's phone and the fact that he lists women under names such as 'sexy arse' and 'fit tits'. Although Jasmine makes fun of this overt sexism, her mood changes entirely when she finds a video of Jade performing sexual acts on a footballer while the other men watch and laugh. Jade's face isn't visible in the video and Lee admits that he doesn't even know her name, reflecting his view of her as merely an object of sexual gratification with no individual identity. The film's critique of postfeminist raunch highlights the film's critical feminist voice, made explicit by Jasmine's horrified cry of 'You're all laughing at her like she's nothing'. Not only is this a critique of raunch culture, but also more specifically, football's relationship to this culture, and the idea that footballers use their money and status to attract young women and then dispose of them. Reports about footballers' affairs and the women they have affairs with have been a common staple of tabloid newspapers within the past decade. These stories shore up conservative female binaries of the 'loyal wife' vs. the 'gold-digging mistress' – although there is often an underlying critique of footballers' wives and the assumption that 'accepting or ignoring infidelity is the price they pay to maintain their lifestyle' (Secret Footballer, 2011), which implicitly places blame upon the women involved.

It is at this point that Jasmine becomes aware of the realities of her dream lifestyle. She angrily starts to undress because 'it's what [Lee] came for' but Nicole fires a gun to make her stop. Nicole's strength is emphasised here, as, unlike Jasmine, she is unwilling to degrade herself and she refuses to let her friend be drawn into this culture. Indeed, although Jasmine may seem to be the driving force within the friendship - particularly as she facilitates Nicole's makeover and drives them to the caravan where they hold Lee hostage - Nicole has more power than is immediately obvious. Not only is she able to stop Jasmine from doing things she might regret, but also her close connection to Liverpool means she knows the city well and she is the one who knows how to find Lee. Nicole also has a greater sense of her own identity. While Jasmine is always trying to become somebody, Nicole is fully aware of the fact that she is, and probably always will be, a 'nobody'. Pointing the gun at Lee's feet, she tells him: 'The only way I can have my dream is if you're a nobody like me'. Here Jasmine and Nicole realise the futility of their dream and Lee is let go.

Nicole and Jasmine's all-consuming friendship, the intensity of which is heightened by the dark and claustrophobic space of the caravan that is the location for the final third of the film, is presented as a rite-of-passage from which they emerge irrevocably transformed. This rite-of-passage is depicted symbolically in the final scene of the film when they burn all of their possessions related to Lee Cassidy. They then walk hand in hand and look out over Liverpool as the sun rises, while the soundtrack plays BlackCar's 'Start Again Tomorrow'. Now the hollowness of their dream has been exposed, they must start again together, as nobodies. Jasmine and Nicole's friendship only provided them with temporary 'representability' (Negra, 2009), with neither girl managing to become 'hypervisible' (Winch, 2013). They realise that trying to become 'somebody' is a futile endeavour, but the fact that they appear to remain friends suggests the bonds of friendship are strong enough to withstand such a formative experience. However, in locating this friendship within a critique of celebrity culture, *Kicks* merely shores up the moral panic discourses that circulate around girls and girlhood today.

Like *Kicks*, *Albatross* (2011) also explores a contemporary teenage friendship through questions of identity and the seeming importance of being 'somebody'. Seventeen-year-old Beth (Felicity Jones) lives in a hotel run by her parents in a small

town on the south coast of England, called The Clifftop. The Clifftop was purchased by her father, Jonathan Fischer (Sebastian Koch), who used it as the setting for his highly successful novel of the same name twenty years previously. Having failed to produce another book, he now spends his days in his office battling writer's block. Beth is shy and studious and destined for Oxford University, but her life is transformed when she meets Emelia (Jessica Brown Findlay). Emelia is bright but rebellious. Like Beth she is desperate to escape her surroundings, and dreams of becoming a writer in order to follow in the footsteps of her grandfather, whom she believes is *Sherlock Holmes* author Arthur Conan-Doyle. When Emelia takes a job as a cleaner at the hotel Jonathan offers to teach her creative writing and the two begin an affair that threatens to ruin Emelia's friendship with Beth. *Albatross*, like *Me Without You*, was produced by Isle of Man Films and shot on location in the Isle of Man in six weeks during 2009. The film was directed by Niall MacCormick, who was making his feature film debut having previously directed *Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley* (2008) for the BBC. The screenplay was written by Tamzin Rafn, who was a first-time writer. In the 'Making Of' feature included with the film's DVD release, Rafn claims the script was inspired by her teenage years growing up in the small costal town of Worthing, which was the setting for the film *Wish You Were Here* (Leland, 1987). *Albatross* shares a number of similarities with *Wish You Were Here*, which is also about a rebellious young girl, Lynda (Emily Lloyd), who is desperate to escape her small seaside town. The relationship between *Wish You Were Here* and *Albatross* will be explored in more detail later on in this section.

When discussing the making of the film, it is interesting that director Niall MacCormick draws on a similar discourse relating to British cinema (and television) as Lindy Heymann's vision for *Kick*s. As mentioned previously Lindy Heymann was very aware of Liverpool's perceived televisual history and as such deliberately rejected social realist conventions when making *Kicks*. MacCormick echoes this in the 'Making Of' documentary for *Albatross*. MacCormick explains how he wanted to create a sunny seaside setting because he 'didn't want it to feel like a kitchen sink drama, or Brit grit, where everyone was depressed because it's raining all the time and they're in England… We wanted to make it more universal' (MacCormick, 2011). Here MacCormick disparagingly conveys a very narrow – but common –

perception of British cinema as producing solely social realist films with seemingly limited appeal and as being somewhat unambitious. Producer Adrian Sturges similarly alludes to this when he says, 'We have this great tradition but we wanted to do something else' (Sturges, 2011). While the filmmakers claim they intended to do something different, the film's critical reception perceived the film as having very 'British' characteristics. However, these were not so much associated with social realism but rather the film's comedic elements. Critics referred to the comedy series *Fawlty Towers* (BBC, 1975-1979) in relation to the film's setting, and arguably the way in which the film attempts to draw comedy out of chaos and incompetence (Rowat, 2011: 17), although this is mostly deployed as a criticism, with the film being a 'gritty reboot' of *Fawlty Towers* (Ewart, 2011) and '*Fawlty Towers* without the jokes' (French, 2011: 24). The film's place within Britain's cinema and, to an extent, television, history is further highlighted by the way in which it is referred to as 'one of those sweet, slightly sad comic dramas that only Britain can produce' (Ewart, 2011), and a 'very British comedy, for good and ill' (Rowat, 2011), suggesting the film is not as 'universal' as the filmmakers intended. Furthermore, *Albatross* is also criticised for being 'not much more than a TV movie' (Synnot, 2011: 6) and lacking big screen ambition' (Unattributed, 2011: 18), which further highlights British cinema's perceived detrimental relationship with television and lack of ambition that MacCormick was keen to avoid. This echoes Hannah Andrews' observation 'That a film "looks like television" is often the ultimate insult in the arsenal of the high-brow film critic' (2014: 10).

Another recurring theme within the film's critical reception is the influence of *Wish You Were Here* and also *An Education* (Scherfig, 2009), but to a lesser extent.[79] In relation to *Wish You Were Here*, *Albatross* is at best described as '*Wish You Were Here* for the noughties' (Unattributed, 2011: 18), but mostly the film is viewed as 'overly enamoured' with *Wish You Were Here* (Hunter, 2011) and lacking originality. The 'screenplay… is predictable and too much like *Wish You Were Here*, *My Summer of Love* and *An Education*' (Tookey, 2011) and the film 'gets itself into a tangle by mixing elements familiar from both *Wish You Were Here* and *An*

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[79] The reviews do not specify which elements of *Albatross* are reminiscent of *An Education*, but both films feature an ambitious teenage girl who is too big for her small town and who has an affair with an older man.

Education (Johnston, 2011: 86). In each instance, *Albatross* is viewed as weaker than the films it is seen to borrow elements from. Screenwriter Tamzin Rafn openly acknowledges the debt she owes *Wish You Were Here*, saying she was 'obsessed' with the film, which was filmed in her hometown when she was growing up (Rafn, 2011). Rafn also claims she shared Emelia's rebellious streak. In talking about her desire to write the screenplay, she explains how she likes 'Sherlock Holmes, films about writers and naughty young girls', all of which are significant aspects of the film (Rafn, 2011). Rafn creates a highly personalised account of the writing process – her motivation was seemingly just to write about the things she liked the most. This invokes the notion of 'retrospective' girlhood that is inherent within the previous case studies on this chapter, such as Goldbacher's account of her intense friendship or Heymann and Campbell's idea of looking at being fifteen retrospectively in a way that highlights *Kicks'* critique contemporary girlhood from an adult's perspective. With *Albatross*, Rafn has also arguably created a version of girlhood that is filtered through her own teenage years and is in some ways anachronistic. In his review for *The Guardian* Peter Bradshaw (2011) writes that although the film is 'evidently autobiographical in origin, the fictional treatment has made it look sentimental and unreal', while others note the Sherlock Holmes inspired sub-plot is handled 'clumsily' (Lougher, 2012: 61) and 'doesn't even ring true' (Landesman, 2011). As Cosmo Landesman bluntly states, 'As if a girl of [Emelia's] generation, growing up in a seaside town, would give a toss about Conan Doyle' (ibid.). This sense of sentimentality is further enhanced by the lack of technology in the film, as Jonathan is the only character who writes using a laptop. While this is explained by the fact that Emelia comes from a 'no-parent family', which means she cannot afford a laptop, the frequent scenes featuring Emelia writing with a pen and paper serve to remove the film from its contemporary setting, making it seem oddly out of time.

Emelia's rebellious character is firmly established within the opening scene of the film. She stares defiantly into the camera, which pans around to reveal she is standing in front of a boy, who she kisses forcefully and then pushes away. Emelia's defiant stare is reminiscent of those found in British social realist films, such as *Kes* (Loach, 1969) and later *This is England* (Meadows, 2006), in which the young boy protagonist looks directly into the camera. This scene both invokes and subverts this

social realist trope as the fact that it is Emelia staring into the camera subverts the convention that social realist protagonists are usually male, although there are a few notable exceptions. Also, the rapid panning of the camera to reveal the teenagers kissing creates an energy and sense of fun that highlights MacCormick's desire to avoid creating a 'depress[ing]' 'kitchen sink drama' (MacCormick, 2011). As if to further reinforce this point, the scene ends with Emelia detonating an explosive as if to explode these conventions and establish without doubt that Emelia is a wild child.

Emelia's rebellious character is referred to throughout the film's critical reception through the repeated description of her (and, by extension, Jessica Brown Findlay) as 'sassy' (Aftab, 2011; Hunter, 2011; Johnston, 2011: 86). This sassiness is seen as a particular point of contrast to Brown Findlay's television role in the conservative costume drama *Downton Abbey* (ITV, 2010-2015), in which she played Lady Sybil from 2010-2012. Although her role in *Albatross* was her first acting role, she was most known for appearing in *Downton Abbey* at the time of the film's release in 2011. Comments such as 'Brown Findlay, known to millions as Lady Sybil from *Downton Abbey*, roughs up nicely as a wild child' (Quinn, 2011) and 'Downton's Jessica Brown-Findlay swaps posh frocks and enunciated vowels for tarty skirts and dropped aitches' (Lougher, 2011) create comparisons between the two roles highlight the class differences between Lady Sybil and Emelia, with an implicit class bias against the working-class character of Emelia through the use of derogatory phrases such as 'roughs up' and 'tarty skirts'. Furthermore, the greatest point of contrast arises from the fact that, as Emelia, Brown Findlay appears semi-nude. When asked to provide proof of age in order to buy a bottle of wine, Emelia lifts up her top and asks, 'Do these look like the breasts of an eighteen-year-old to you?' to which the mesmerised teenage boy merely hands over the bottle of wine As one reviewer comments, 'It comes as something of a shock when all you've seen her in previously are ankle-length Edwardian frocks' (Pearce, 2011: 30).

Unlike Emelia, Beth is not rebellious. When we are introduced to Beth she is studying alone in her room, while the camera zooms in on the numerous '1st' trophies and rosettes that adorn the walls. It is quickly established that Beth is studying for her A Levels in order to gain a place at Oxford University. Her

conscientious studying and numerous awards position Beth as a 'top girl'.[80] However, although they may seem to be opposites, Beth and Emelia both just want to escape. Beth views studying as her 'get-out-of-jail-free card' because she wants to 'get out of here like everyone else'.

As with *Kicks*, MacCormick emphasises how the film is 'about the two of them' and their friendship above all else (MacCormick, 2011). Alison Winch claims 'girlfriend culture takes pleasure in the presence of girlfriends', and as such men are 'cast as an accessory to prove a girl's worth' to her girlfriends (2013: 4). *Albatross* takes this 'pleasure in the presence of girlfriends' even further as men are not just 'accessories' to prove a girl's worth to her girlfriends, but rather just a means of having fun and they provide little value to the girls, to the extent that the men often just create trouble. Emelia and Beth are largely disinterested in men – Emelia rejects her acquaintance and Beth leaves her one-night-stand. Even older male figures such as Jonathan are at times presented as sad and immature. When Emelia arrives at the hotel for the first time and introduces herself as 'Serena Molina, the cleaner', Beth stares at her in amazement and she instantly wants to be her friend. Joa is less impressed by Emelia and criticises Beth for 'stooping to the hired help for friendship', in a very snobbish manner that emphasises the class differences between the two girls. At the beginning of the film Beth appears to lack friends as she spends most of her time in her room. This conveys her lack of visibility and 'representability' (Negra, 2009), as 'girlfriends are essential in enabling feminine normativity' (Winch, 2013: 2).

Much of Beth and Emelia's bonding takes place by the sea, such as when they discover containers full of clothes washed up on the beach. It is here that Emelia tells Beth more about her background and how her mother died. The sea provides Beth and Emelia with the freedom and space to temporarily escape their confinements as they jump around and scream into the open space. Furthermore, Beth and Emelia's friendship could be viewed as what Karen Hollinger defines as a 'sentimental' friendship. In her work on female friendship films, Hollinger claims sentimental friendships are often portrayed as psychologically enriching partnerships that also

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[80] Felicity Jones' own status as a 'top girl' was explored in Chapter One's discussion of *Chalet Girl*.

exhibit a fervent passion that is reminiscent of heterosexual romantic love', and often stimulate personal and psychological growth' (1998: 7). Beth and Emelia's friendship is 'psychologically enriching' and stimulates 'personal and psychological growth' (ibid) for both characters, as they help each other to discover their 'true' identity. The main impact Emelia has on Beth is to give her more 'representability'. Beth's costumes are full of neutral tones. Her father describes them as 'colourless', to which Beth sarcastically responds that they 'match my personality'. Her mother also instructs her to wear her hair down when she is working as a receptionist at the hotel in order to 'look more presentable'; the implication being that she should look more typically feminine. When Beth and Emelia go to a party, Emelia gives Beth a revealing dress and leather jacket to wear. As in *Kicks*, these teenage girls 'eschew postfeminist consumption' and fashion their makeover with 'hand-me-downs' (Gilligan, 2011: 168). When Emelia sees her in her outfit Beth covers herself up, embarrassed because she thinks she looks 'ridiculous' but Emelia encourages her, saying: 'look at you, hot patootie… You should wear what you want, you look amazing'. Beth then turns back to face the mirror, shyly pleased. Emelia's confirmation that she looks 'hot' reflects how within girlfriend culture, the worth of the female body is 'circulated among a homosocial world of women through a tacit and strategic understanding of its leveraging power' (Winch, 2013: 26). Emelia's encouragement and approval are most important to Beth, and the male attention Beth receives as a result of her makeover is the by-product of her new 'sexy' image and her ability to perform postfeminism's ideal femininity. Beth submits herself to the 'girlfriend gaze', but unlike Winch's conceptualisation of the gaze, and the kind exhibited by Marina in *Me Without You*, Emelia's 'girlfriend 'gaze' is not a means of controlling Beth or being critical through the veil of friendship, but merely encouraging her to be less confined.

While Emelia helps Beth become more visible, Beth helps Emelia gain a better understanding of her identity. Both Beth and Emelia are confined by the identities bestowed upon them. Beth lives in the Clifftop, which reflects the world created by her father in his novel, to the extent that tourists complain when something 'wasn't like that in the book'. However, Beth does not care that she is the daughter of Jonathan Fischer and tries to make Emelia see that her name is a 'pointless hindrance' but Emelia believes 'being a Conan-Doyle makes you special'. When

Emelia finds out that she is not actually the great-granddaughter of Arthur Conan Doyle she is upset that 'the foundation of my life is based on a lie'. Her whole identity was built around her belief that she was related to the famous author and her desire to write arose out the belief that talent was 'in [her] blood'. But as her grandfather explains: 'The name was just an albatross around your neck… you're still special'. Emelia's belief that it is only the Conan Doyle name that makes her special is reminiscent of Jasmine's desire to be 'somebody' through being famous, and the idea that if you're not 'somebody' then you are a 'nobody'. Emelia has to be convinced that she is 'still special', even without her name. She decides to 're-write' herself now that she has the 'self-understanding' to build 'a coherent and rewarding sense of identity' (Giddens, 1991: 75). This includes writing her novel using Jonathan's laptop, which he gives to her because she will put it to better use than him. This is followed by a scene in which Emelia is writing overlooking the sea as the sun sets, where the sea as a site of freedom provides her with the space to 're-write' her sense of identity.

As with *Kicks*, there is a sense by the end of the film that the characters have undergone a rite-of-passage through their friendship, which is reinforced by the reception of *Albatross* as a 'coming-of-age' film (Aftab, 2011; Bradshaw, 2011; Carter, 2011; Gilbert, 2011; Hunter, 2011; Johnston, 2011: 86; Landesman, 2011; Muir, 2011; Rowat, 2011: 17). There is a sense that, although they are apart now, they helped each other to discover their 'true selves'. In the film's final sequence, in which the soundtrack repeats the refrain 'We've all been changed from what we were', Emelia prints out her novel, and in close-up we see that it is titled 'Albatross by Emelia Doyle'. Emelia has asserted her new-found identity through her authorship, as the events of the film, and her friendship with Beth, have enabled her to become an author.[81] She also sees Beth, who is wearing Emelia's t-shirt bearing the phrase 'I put out'.[82] The image of Beth wearing Emelia's suggestive t-shirt alongside her own clothes indicates Emelia's influence and the idea that she helped Beth to become more visible by allowing her to find a more balanced identity –

[81] Emelia's authorship is also emphasised in the film's trailer through her voiceover and her assertion: 'I've got a story to tell', which affirms her subjectivity and the idea that she is the author of this – her own – story.
[82] By contrast, Emelia's clothes have become more muted, as she ends the film wearing a large neutral, knitted cardigan.

signified through her appearance - that is no longer so 'colourless' and confined. Beth then looks at the t-shirt and smiles, acknowledging the impact Emelia had upon her. The final image is of Emelia cycling away with her novel in the basket, which is reminiscent of Lynda defiantly pushing her pram at the end of *Wish You Were Here*. However, Lynda's escape from the confines of her father figure is muted somewhat by her move into motherhood (Ashby, 2010: 157), whereas Emelia's escape from the Conan-Doyle name has provided her with a more 'authentic' identity and new possibilities. Moreover, in enabling Emelia to escape in this way, *Albatross* is more in keeping with the feminist films Ashby highlights from the 1980s than the more recent 'desperate girl' films during the 1990s and early 2000s (Brunsdon, 2000, 2009), who, despite their efforts, remain stuck. In her work on tween popular culture, Melanie Kennedy notes the importance of 'revealing and maintaining an "authentic" self' (2012: 2) and that 'the girl's role as a friend is central' to the development of this authentic self (ibid: 25).[83] Although *Albatross* is a teenage rather than tween text, this idea is still applicable. For it is through their friendship that Beth and Emelia gain 'representability' (Negra, 2009), freedom, and begin the process of becoming their 'true' selves.

Class and identity in *My Summer of Love* (2004)

The very British notion of class has subtly underscored much of this chapter's exploration of teenage girl friendship. In both *Kicks* and *Albatross*, a working-class character is paired with a middle-class character, and they offer each other glimpses into an unseen world. In the previous case studies, although it is evident that the characters occupy different class positions, this is not explored in detail, certainly not politically. In Pawel Pawlikowski's *My Summer of Love*, this issue of class is much more overt, and has a greater impact upon the characters' identities and opportunities. *My Summer of Love* is Pawlikowski's second feature film following Last *Resort* (2000), which centres around a young Russian mother and her son, who seek political asylum in the UK and end up confined in the seaside town of Stonehaven (a fictional town supposedly based on Margate). *My Summer of Love* had a budget of £1.5 million and was produced by BBC Films and The Film

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[83] Although in tween culture the 'authentic self' is usually a postfeminist feminine identity, which is not as apparent in *Albatross*.

Consortium, with support from the UK Film Council. The film was freely adapted from Helen Cross' 2001 novel of the same name. Set in the Yorkshire Dales, *My Summer of Love* explores the friendship between two bored and lonely fifteen-year-old girls – working-class Mona (Natalie Press) and middle-class Tamsin (Emily Blunt), who form an intense relationship over the course of one summer.

The film's critical reception paid great attention to Pawlikowski's evocation of Britain – or England, as it is most often referred to. As Peter Bradshaw claims, 'If there is such a thing as English cinema, as opposed to British cinema, then this… fits the bill. It has taken a Polish-born director to respond to the exoticism of the English countryside and English mannerisms of region and class (Bradshaw, 2004). Jonathan Romney, meanwhile, writes how it is a 'film about class' that presents a 'rarely seen' depiction of 'the English summer' (2004: 16), while Jeff Sawtell (2004) claims the film is 'revealing' about the 'angry realities of class'. While critics may highlight the significance of class within the film, Pawlikowski does not. He claims:

> British cinema is drowning in sociology… In this story it is clear: One is working class and one isn't… It's no big deal. Now lets concentrate on the story and the psychology, lets make it universal and slightly abstract (quoted in Foley, 2004).

Much of the praised for Pawlikowski's depiction of an 'English summer' draws on the film's aesthetics. Peter Bradshaw refers to the film as a 'swooning love story' within the 'Yorkshire Dales' sunlit expanses' (2004), while Jonathan Romney describes how 'Heat haze ripples of roofs [and] golden light shimmers through leafy canopies…' (Romney, 2004). Romney also draws attention to the film's opening scene. The opening scene of *My Summer of Love* features Mona sketching a picture of Tamsin on her bedroom wall to the soundtrack of Goldfrapp's 'Lovely Head'. Initially filmed in close-up, the focus is on the scratching of Mona's pen as she sketches the at-first-unclear image. For Romney, 'The harsh scrape of biro on wood-chip wallpaper is the kind of throwaway touch that reminds you that this truly is a Pawlikowski film' (Romney, 2004). The tactility of this image recalls the opening scene of *Kicks* where Nicole scratches a tattoo of Lee Cassidy's name onto her skin. Once again, the intense close-up combined with a similarly hazy electro pop soundtrack creates an almost abstract sensory experience that hints at the intensity

that is to come. Moreover, just as DoP Eudard Grau's 'outsider's perspective' was credited with creating a vision of Liverpool that had rarely been seen before, Pawlikowski's own 'outsider's perspective' is attributed to his creation of a vision of England that 'resembles no-one else's' (Kellaway, 2006). Although he has an 'outsider's perspective', Pawlikowski's work is viewed very much as part of 'British' cinema. Writing in the *Sunday Times*, Garth Pearce muses: 'Once in a while, a little film comes along to reassure us British that we can still come up with a winner in these times of computer-generated everything' (2004: 6).[84] Similarly, Derek Malcolm claims Pawlikowski's skill as a filmmaker is 'rare' in British cinema (2004: 30).

Pawlikowski's 'abstract' style led to *My Summer of Love* being positioned alongside the films of Lynne Ramsay, particularly *Morvern Callar* (2002) (Bradshaw, 2004; Romney, 2004). James Leggott notes a 'trend' within contemporary British cinema for films that 'foreground the minutiae of human interaction' (2008: 45). This focus on the 'minutiae of human interaction' is reinforced by the way Pawlikowski removes the 'precise historical and political references of its source novel', which was set during the miners' strikes of the 1980s, 'to place its intense adolescent relationship within a "timeless, self-contained world"' (ibid). Dave Calhoun (2004) similarly notes how 'the film exists entirely in the now'. In her article examining Pawlikowski's resistance to poetic realism, Claire Monk questions whether poetic realist strategies, such as the film's timelessness, represent 'merely an evasion of political engagement?' (Monk, 2012: 483). This 'evasion of political engagement' is characteristic of the neoliberal postfeminist culture in which the film was produced and received, which as McRobbie (2009) and others have noted is largely depoliticised, placing the focus upon the individual in a way that denies structural inequalities. Monk goes on to state, Pawlikowski is clearly 'attuned to the specifics' of human circumstance in a way that is reminiscent of social realism (Monk, 2012: 483). Pawlikowski has also bemoaned this depoliticisation, claiming Britain does not

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[84] Alongside *My Summer of Love*, Pearce also lists *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002) as examples of British 'winners'. However, these films were notable for their mainstream international success, which *My Summer of Love* failed to achieve.

have a 'collective belief system to measure the individual against… What do you make films about now that people are so pointless?' (Thompson, 2004: 38).

This sense of a 'timeless' world was also highlighted in *Albatross*' critical reception. Although *Albatross* does not use the poetic realist strategies identified by Leggott (2008) and Monk (2012) in relation to *My Summer of Love*, *Albatross*' was described as 'sentimental and unreal' (Bradshaw, 2011), despite being informed by Tamzin Rafn's own teenage years. This is likely due to the fact that Rafn's teenage years preceded the present-day setting of the film, and as such created a retrospective version of girlhood. Moreover, like all of the films discussed here, Pawlikowski cast professional actors who were much older than their characters in twenty one-year-old Emily Blunt and twenty three-year-old Natalie Press, despite auditioning younger, non-professional actors (Pearce, 2004). This draws comparisons with Lindy Heymann's decision to cast older actors Kerrie Hayes and Nichola Burley in *Kicks* in order to explore 'being fifteen retrospectively' (Heymann, 2008). Pawlikowski's choices seem just as deliberate as he describes how he wanted to create teenagers that were "slightly more timeless and removed from now" (quoted in Foley, 2004). He claims a film about British teenagers 'wouldn't interest me… They'd be listening to music I hate, watching TV all the time and talking about *Big Brother'* (ibid). In aligning contemporary teenagers with the reality TV programme *Big Brother*, Pawlikowski is conveying a similar 'moral panic' view of teenagers evident within *Kicks*, in which teenagers are viewed as obsessed with low-brow, celebrity-driven culture. In creating Mona and Tamsin, Pawlikowski has created a version of girlhood that is in some ways removed from contemporary girlhood. This 'timeless' construction of girlhood, which is compounded by the lack of historical context, therefore means it is difficult to read the film within the wider postfeminist context it was produced in relation to discourses of girlhood in the same way as the other films discussed in this chapter.

Despite this, *My Summer of Love's* critical reception draws on similar discourses of teenage friendship as the previous films. *My Summer of Love*, like *Albatross* in particular, is referred to as a 'coming-of-age' story, which points to the rite of passage experienced by the characters (Tookey, 2004: 53). Mona and Tamsin's friendship is also described as 'intense' (French, 2004: 10), and 'unique[ly]' so, in a

way that only female friendship can be (Bradshaw, 2004). Natalie Press also reinforces the idea of the unique intensity of female friendship, as she recalled "the intimacy you have with girlfriends at a certain point in your life – when your bed becomes like an island, with clothes and mess all over the floor – and you talk about everything" (Press, quoted in Pearce, 2004: 6). This idea of the bed being "like an island" is particularly pertinent, as it is suggestive of the combination of intimacy and exclusion within the depictions of girl friendship in this chapter where pairs of girls exist within very isolated, vacuum-esque worlds.

Moreover, like the characters in *Kicks* and *Albatross* in particular, both Mona and Tamsin are presented as somewhat lost and looking for an escape. Pawlikowski describes Mona as 'at odds with herself and the world' (quoted in Foley, 2004) in a way that recalls Nicole's ghost-like wandering around Liverpool, aware that she does not fit it, as well as Emelia's rebellious character and her tendency to lose herself in her belief that she is related to Arthur Conan Doyle. Mona – like Emelia – is orphaned, living with her devoutly Christian brother, while Tamsin's parents seem to pay her little attention (her father is having an affair). Jasmine and Nicole's parents similarly paid little attention to their daughters. The introduction to this chapter highlighted Justine Ashby's claim that Charlotte Brunsdon's (2000, 2009) work on 'desperate girls' in 1990s British cinema, and claims this trend has been extended into the millennium through films like *Morvern Callar* (Ramsay, 2002) and *My Summer of Love*, 'all of which centre upon psychologically brittle girls who undergo painful, emotionally ambivalent rites of passage (Ashby, 2010: 164). These girls are 'typically motherless, cast adrift in a confusing and alienating world' (ibid.).[85] The notion that the characters in *My Summer of Love* belong alongside these 'desperate', 'brittle' girls is further highlighted in the frequent labelling of Natalie Press as the 'new' Samantha Morton (Bradshaw, 2004; French, 2004: 10). Morton is known for playing 'saucer-eyed' (Bradshaw, 2004), brittle, working-class young women, like Morvern Callar and also Iris in *Under the Skin* (Adler, 1997), who, like Mona, are adrift and looking for an escape from their situation, and

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[85] The idea of the girls in these films as 'brittle' is also evident within *My Summer of Love's* critical discourse, with the word 'brittle' used to describe both Mona and Tamsin. Mona is described as having a 'brittle, prosaic hardness' (French, 2004: 10), while Tamsin is described as having 'brittle accomplishments' (Bradshaw, 2004).

themselves. Morton's characters often search for this through hedonistic, 'numbing' behaviour, such as excessive drinking and casual sex.

The critical reception of *Albatross* and *Kicks* frequently discussed the characters in relation to their class status. This is evident to an even greater extent within the reception of *My Summer of Love*, which frequently refers to the characters within class binaries, such as 'working-class Mona and middle-class Tamsin' (Bradshaw, 2004; Romney, 2004; Sawtell, 2004: 9). These class hierarchies are evident from the very first moment Mona and Tamsin meet. Mona is lying on the ground next to her engineless scooter when Tamsin enters her vision on horseback and upside down. Tamsin is metaphorically and literally 'above' Mona. The fact that she is on horseback indicates her wealthy background and casts her as Mona's potential 'knight in shining amour' who can rescue her and provide her with the mobility to escape the confines of her class – a notion that is reinforced later on in the film when Tamsin buys Mona an engine for her scooter. Furthermore, the idea that Mona first views Tamsin as a vision that is upside down suggests that there is something unusual about Tamsin and she is not all she seems. Other early indications that Tamsin and Mona's relationship will be based on falsities come when Tamsin tells Mona: 'I'm here all summer'. This comment hints of the finite nature of their friendship, which must begin and end within the summer holiday. It also has vague connotations of lines spoken by holiday entertainers, implying that Tamsin is giving some sort of performance.

Moreover, both Mona and Tamsin are acutely aware of their class positions. Tamsin frequently demonstrates her class by using her superior education to impress Mona. She recommends the work of Nietzsche, linking it to that of Freud and thus exposing the limits of her knowledge (Monk, 2012: 498). She does this, though, knowing full well that Mona will be impressed regardless because her working class status denies her access to those kinds of academic and cultural references. Mona's awareness of her own class(ed) identity is conveyed through the following line of dialogue:

> Mona: I'm gonna be a lawyer. [Pause]. I'm gonna work in an abattoir… get a boyfriend who's like, a bastard, and churn out all these kids with mental problems. And then I'm going to wait for menopause. Or cancer.

For Jonathan Romney, 'such exchanges show that this is a film about class as much as female rebellion' (Romney, 2004). The line 'I'm gonna be a lawyer' conjures up images of the ambitious 'can-do girl' who shows 'commitment to exceptional careers and… their belief in their capacity to succeed' (Harris, 2004: 14). As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, within the meritocratic rhetoric of the period the 'can-do' girl is presented as the normative mode of contemporary girlhood. Within this, structural inequalities are deemed non-existent. However the pause in the dialogue suggests Mona is aware that she is unlikely to achieve this as – unlike Tamsin – she lacks the necessary resources. Instead the character articulates a tragi-comic vision of the future that is stereotypically working class. 'Living in poverty, with few opportunities' (ibid: 14), Mona is depicted as a typically working-class 'at-risk' girl, a 'failure in the making' (ibid: 25), who is unlikely to achieve the level of success of her 'can-do' counterparts. Like Nicole, Mona conveys an awareness that she will always be a 'nobody'.

This acute awareness of their respective class identities enables Tamsin and Mona to temporarily occupy different class positions in various ways throughout the film. As with the previous films in this chapter, makeover is a key way in which characters attempt to gain 'representability' (Negra, 2009). During the film's 'makeover scene', Mona tries on Tamsin's brightly coloured dresses and stares at her reflection with wonder. The girls dance around to the soundtrack of Brazilian Gilberto Gil's 'Três Caravelas', creating a carnival atmosphere that seems to celebrate Mona's new 'girly' image. Mona's stunned reaction to her appearance in the mirror suggests she is 'visible' to herself for the first time. However, just as Nicole's makeover did not seem to fit her, Mona's ability to transcend her working class status through makeover is also undercut by the fact that Tamsin is also able to perform a different class identity through changing her clothes. Monk highlights how Tamsin and Mona's identities contain elements of 'mimicry, exchange and masquerade' (2012: 497) and this is apparent when Tamsin mimics Mona's working class identity by wearing a hooded top and gold hoop earrings, which are typically associated with 'chav' culture, when the girls visit the home of Mona's older ex-boyfriend in order to get revenge for the way he treated her (ibid). The fluidity with which both Mona and Tamsin can seem to occupy different class positions through changing their clothes implies that a makeover may not be the key to Mona becoming the

'hypervisible' postfeminist ideal after all because it is not permanent and not necessarily the authentic 'self that has been there all along' (Negra, 2009: 124).

The characters' knowledge of their respective class positions also impacts upon the negotiation of power within their relationship. Joanna Rydzewska claims that Tamsin's access to superior knowledge, acquired through her family's economic means, allows her to exert greater power over Mona. She describes this in Foucauldian terms as the relationship between truth and knowledge, where knowledge is a 'privileged discourse of truth' (Foucault, 1990: 67, cited in Rydzewska, 2009: 130). Therefore, Tamsin's wealth gives her false stories credibility and puts her in a superior position. However, Mona and Tamsin's relationship is not as one-sided as it initially seems because Mona can also provide Tamsin with something she currently lacks. This is evident when Tamsin asks Mona to show her what it is like to be 'shagged by Ricky'. After a comically quick and unfulfilling demonstration, Tamsin asks 'Is that it?' On the one hand, this scene provides a critique of heterosexual norms whereby sexual pleasure is presumed to be the privilege of the male, while also conveying Tamsin's naivety in regards to sex. It seems here that Mona provided Tamsin with knowledge about sex that she lacks because she has not experienced it herself. This scene also contradicts Rydzewska's assertion that the film fails to suggest that Tamsin is motivated by anything other than 'boredom… as well as, or perhaps predominantly, the sheer elation at the feeling of power she exerts over Mona' (2009: 129). The fact that Tamsin looks to Mona to educate her about something she has little experience of suggests that both girls share a mutual fascination with each other, knowing that their (class) differences enable them to provide each other with something they currently lack.

Mona's power is also evident when she tries to drown Tamsin after discovering she has been lying to her. When Mona arrives at Tamsin's house, greeted by Tamsin's supposedly deceased sister Sadie, she finds Tamsin getting ready to return to boarding school with her mother. Tamsin then tells Mona that she 'always knew' she would be going back to school. In the film's final sequence, Tamsin catches up with Mona and tells her: 'I couldn't be myself in front of my mother, I was just playing a part. You *know* me'. Tamsin's assertion that Mona 'knows' her is particularly interesting considering Tamsin has lied to Mona on numerous occasions. However,

her relationship with Mona enabled Tamsin to create an identity for herself that made her more 'visible'. For a short time she was able to use her education and status to create an almost ideal version of herself because Mona lacked the knowledge that would have allowed her to question Tamsin's statements. Like Mona, Tamsin also wanted to be more, to have 'representability' (Negra, 2009). Mona coaxes Tamsin into the lake, where she starts to drown her but lets her go at the last minute. The film's final image is of Mona walking away with a determined stare into the camera. This ambiguous image has unsurprisingly produced opposing critical readings. Rydzewska suggests that Mona will just return to her life as it was before she met Tamsin, and probably fulfil the passive version of her future self she so vividly described. She claims that 'far from portraying the experiences of one idle summer which changes the girls' lives forever by giving it a new and better direction', *My Summer of Love* is actually a 'perceptive portrait of people who cannot change their spots trapped in a class system they will always endure' (ibid: 123). Rydzewska completely denies any suggestion that the relationship between Mona and Tamsin has been in any way positive and had an impact on their identities, which she views as being fixed by their respective classes. Monk, on the other hand, claims that her relationship with Tamsin has enabled Mona to access mobility and move between classes, albeit temporarily, which directly connects with 'Mona's ability to leave the valley – upwards and out – at the end of the film' (2012: 499). It is likely that Mona and Tamsin will simply continue to live their lives as they were before they met. However, the idea that their relationship enabled them to, in some small way, become more visible, even temporarily, suggests they may still have a chance to change their future.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored depictions of teenage girl friendship in contemporary British cinema. All of the films analysed here were received as 'coming-of-age' films, due to their focus on girls who undergo rites of passage narratives through friendship. They were also perceived as being 'British' to varying degrees and in a variety of ways. *Me Without You*, although viewed as more 'confident' and refreshing than most British films (Solomons, 2001: 72), was praised for its authentic portrayal of female friendship that was 'grounded in British reality'

(Unattributed, 2001: 36). *Kicks'* Britishness arose out of its very particular setting of contemporary Liverpool and its exploration of the city – and by extension, the UK's – distinctive WAG culture, and its role in the film's portrayal of teenage friendship. At the same time, the film's authorship discourse highlighted a deliberate attempt to move away from 'typical' – the implication being social realist and small-scale televisual – British cinema aesthetics. This sentiment was also present in the making of *Albatross*. The filmmakers created a sunny seaside-set comedy drama as a reaction against what director Niall MacCormick referred to as 'Brit grit', but critics still viewed the film as typically British due to its tragi-comic story, seeming lack of ambition and its heavy debt to David Leland's *Wish You Were Here*. Pawel Pawlikowski, meanwhile, was credited for brining an 'outsider's view' to British cinema with *My Summer of Love*, but still very much part of contemporary British cinema's poetic realism, with the film being positioned alongside the work of Andrea Arnold and Lynne Ramsay.

What is particularly striking about British cinema's depictions of teenage friendship is the way in which all of the case studies construct a retrospective version of girlhood. This is achieved through drawing on screenwriters' autobiographies in *Albatross* and *Me Without You,* which is also largely set in the past, and through the removal of historical context to create a timeless version of girlhood such as in *My Summer of Love*. Even *Kicks*, with its contemporary setting, is informed by the filmmakers' desire to explore contemporary celebrity culture and girls' place within it by drawing on 'being fifteen retrospectively' (Heymann, 2008). This in turn meant that while the film offered an implicit critical feminist voice against postfeminist culture, it also created a version of contemporary girlhood that merely shored up existing panics and anxieties. These retrospective, 'timeless' constructions of teenage girl friendship mean that their relationship to the 'postfeminist sisterhood' is complex and at times unclear. The introduction highlighted Alison Winch's observation that the friendships in *Girl*s are 'highly ambivalent and emotionally messy' as they have 'not yet developed strategic means of relating in order to maintain their representability' (2013: 140). This is evident within the films discussed in this chapter, as the friendships depicted are often messy, and sometimes controlling, as is the case in *Me Without You*.

Makeover plays an important role in the characters' attempts to gain representability, but this is not always successful. Both Nicole in *Kicks* and Mona in *My Summer of Love* attempt image makeovers through clothes provided by their friend but there is a sense that these new images do not fit or cannot be maintained. This is also tied to the fact that both Mona and Nicole are coded as working-class, and they are unable to overcome their working-class status and become the postfeminist (middle class) ideal. Class plays an important role within this chapter. With the exception of *Me Without You*, all of the friendships are presented in terms of working-class/ middle-class binaries, but it is not simply a case of the middle-class girl providing the working-class girl with representability, as each character is able to provide something that contributes to the development of their friend's identity.

The notion of authenticity and the 'true self' is also apparent within this chapter. While the idea that girl friendship provides a way of discovering the 'true self' is not unique to these films, it is significant that the character's 'true self' is not always equated with the postfeminism's ideal femininity, as is the case in postfeminist culture more broadly. In *Me Without You* Holly is deemed 'authentic' because she does not seriously attempt to change herself or attain a postfeminist lifestyle – unlike Marina – and is 'rewarded' for this through ending the film in the traditional feminine role of wife and mother. Moreover, both Mona and Nicole are aware of their 'lack' of ideal, postfeminist femininity and the fact that they are likely to remain 'nobodies'. *Albatross* arguably offers the most overtly feminist take on authenticity. Through her friendship with Beth, Emelia escapes the confines of her 'great-grandfather's' name and discover her true identity, and in turn use this discovery to 'rewrite' herself and author her own story. All of the films in this chapter are underpinned by a rite of passage, and this idea of being and becoming is central to the next chapter's discussion of young femininity in historical films.

Chapter Four

'When did ambition stop being thought of as a sin and become a virtue?':
Girlhood and the British Historical Film

Introduction

The previous chapters of this thesis have explored young femininity in contemporary British cinema through films set either in the present (i.e. twenty first century) or recent past. This chapter will explore the construction of young femininity in historical films made since the millennium but set before 1900, looking specifically at *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Chadwick, 2008), *The Young Victoria* (Vallée, 2009), *The Duchess* (Dibb, 2008) and *Belle* (Asante, 2013). The chosen case studies all centre around young royal or aristocratic women, and, as Belén Vidal notes the 'woman-centred monarchy film [has] become part of a profitable generic cycle' (2012: 109) since the millennium, which, I would argue, began with Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth* (1998). The significance of *Elizabeth* to this chapter's exploration of girl-centred historical films will be discussed later on in this introduction.[86] The idea that there has been a proportionate increase in films about young royal or aristocratic women is highlighted in a feature from *The Guardian* to coincide with the release of *The Duchess* in 2008, where, according to Sukhdev Sandhu (2008): 'Every time you look there's another movie about a nervy, underprepared young girl taking tentative steps towards a life of pomp, ceremony and unsatisfying sex'. While Sandhu himself does not elaborate any further as to why this might be, I would argue they can be viewed as part of British cinema's response to the 'obsession' with girls within twenty-first century media and popular culture more broadly (Projansky, 2014: 94), which has been discussed fully elsewhere. Vidal similarly notes how, 'These returns to the past are filtered through the lens of a postfeminist movement, in which the emphasis on female subjectivity has been subsumed within the celebration of gendered forms of popular culture (2012: 105). As has been discussed previously, constructions of

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[86] This extends beyond British cinema, with films such as Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006) and the Danish *A Royal Affair* (Arcel, 2012), which tells the story of the British Queen Caroline Mathida (Alicia Vikander), who is trapped in a loveless marriage with Christian VII of Denmark.

postfeminist girlhood are individualised, with a focus on white, middle-class girls, and as Maggie Andrews argues, this cycle of historical films focus on the 'individual and privileged lives' of famous women from history and use them as 'prisms for the exploration of women's history' (2014: 244). One need only look at the titles of the films discussed here to see this, as they all signify individualised girlhood through use of words such as 'girl' or 'young' and/ or the names of the figures being depicted. The frequent use of 'The' – *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *The Duchess*, *The Young Victoria* – also signifies individualism.

Moreover, As James Chapman (2005), Kara McKechnie (2002), Belén Vidal (2012) and others have noted, films set in the past often tell us more about the time in which they were made rather than the time in which they were set. As such, these films explore many of the discourses circulating around girlhood today found within the contemporary-set films discussed in previous chapters. This includes highlighting the historical setting as a time when women were considerably more disempowered and disenfranchised than today to explore discourses of girls' ambition and the 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004). Meanwhile, the focus on a 'nervy and underprepared young girl' (Sandhu, 2008) evokes anxieties about girlhood and the potential pressures and dangers faced during the transition from girlhood to womanhood. Lastly, the focus on 'pomp and ceremony' (Sandhu, 2008) provides a means of exploring ideas about consumption, image and identity, particularly the idea that girls are expected to "make themselves" (Harris, 2004: 5), and the way in which girlhood is inextricably linked with celebrity culture (Projansky, 2014: 6). Most of the case study films in this chapter have already received some academic attention; Vidal (2012) provides a case study of *The Duchess*, while Maggie Andrews briefly discusses *The Duchess* alongside *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Young Victoria*. Both Andrews and Vidal highlight the importance of female identity, celebrity, consumption and ideas about women's freedoms and gendered power relations within these films. However, this chapter will go beyond this to examine how specific discourses such as girls' ambitions, anxieties around girlhood, and the relationship between girlhood and celebrity are mediated within the films themselves and their extra-textual materials in relation to the ideas discussed in previous chapters in order to position these historical films within contemporary British cinema's constructions of young femininity. Furthermore, the final case study of Amma Asante's *Belle* (2013) which

centres around Dido Elizabeth Belle, a mixed race young women who lived at Kenwood House during the 1700s, will explore how these issues of gender and class intersect with race and how, in this film, questions about female identity are inextricably linked to issues of representation.

The heritage film debate

Films set in the past 'have been central to the popularity, commercial success – and exportability – of British cinema since its earliest decades', and as such films set in the past are often synonymous with Britain's national cinema itself (Monk and Sargeant, 2002: 1). While an examination of contemporary British cinema would be lacking if it excluded films set in the past, this frequently leads to questions of 'appropriate' terminology. Labels such as 'historical film', 'costume film', 'period film' and 'heritage film' are all terms used to 'describe films whose narrative is set wholly or partly in the past' (Chapman, 2005: 2). The term 'heritage film' is most often associated with the academic Andrew Higson, who attributed the term to a cycle of English costume dramas that emerged during the 1980s and seemed to 'articulate a nostalgic and conservative celebration of the values and lifestyles of the privileged classes' (2003: 12). Heritage films were often 'period fictions' rather than historical films because they were adapted from '"classic" literary sources' (Monk, 2002: 178) with a particular focus on the Edwardian era. Notable examples are the Merchant Ivory films *A Room With a View* (Ivory, 1985) and *Howard's End* (Ivory, 1992). The heritage films of the 1980s were frequently considered to be ideologically linked to the Thatcherite conservatism of the time (ibid: 177). As Chapman (2005), Hall (2009) and Monk (2002) highlight, the term 'heritage film' is more of a critical construct that treats these films as a unified genre to which a 'monolithic', often derisive, critique could be applied (Monk, 2002: 177). Furthermore, Monk asserts that heritage film criticism needs to be understood as a 'historically specific discourse, rooted in and responsive to particular cultural conditions and events' of Britain in the 1980s (2002: 178).

During the 1990s a number of British heritage films sought to distance themselves from the conservatism of their 1980s predecessors, which Monk (1995) termed 'post-heritage'. These literary/ period films, Monk claims, 'display a deep self-

consciousness about how the past is represented' (1995: 33). For Monk, films such as *Carrington* (Hampton, 1995) and *Orlando* (Potter, 1992) are characterised by 'archly explicit dialogue' and mobile camerawork, and more specifically a concern with 'non-dominant gender and sexual identities' (ibid).[87] According to Vidal, post-heritage films not only eschewed 'quaintness and "tastefulness" in favour of spectacle' but they also show 'renewed interest in imagining moments when the present consciousness was formed (2012: 101).[88] Although a case could made for the films discussed in this chapter to be termed 'post-heritage',[89] I am reluctant to do so as they are not all adaptations of novels, with the exception of *The Other Boleyn Girl*. Furthermore, as will become clear through the analysis of *The Young Victoria*, not all of my case studies can be thought of as explicit or daring in the manner associated with post-heritage.

This chapter will use the less critically loaded and more neutral term 'historical films' to refer to films set in the past. According to Chapman, a historical film is 'one based, however loosely, on actual historical events or real historical persons' (2005: 2). This definition is appropriate for, and applicable to, the films in this chapter as they all centre around real historical young women who were either members of the aristocracy or royalty. These historical films are pertinent to this thesis' exploration of the construction of young femininity in contemporary British cinema as 'the theme of identity is central to the [British historical film]' with class and gender 'among its principal concerns' (ibid 2005: 6). In addition, the heritage genre is noted for its privileging of women's stories with an 'intense appeal to female viewers' (Higson, 2004: 39). Before going on to consider this chapter's case study films, it is necessary to briefly discuss Shekhar Kapur's 1998 film *Elizabeth* because it is an important text in relation to this chapter's examination of young femininity in the contemporary historical film.

Elizabeth (1998) and the changing British historical film

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[87] *Wings of the Dove* (Softley, 1997) and *Jude* (Winterbottom, 1996) are also notable post-heritage films.

[88] This is evident in the following discussion of *Elizabeth* (1998) as a post-heritage film.

[89] Vidal (2012) refers to *The Duchess* as post-heritage.

As highlighted previously, *Elizabeth* is an important film as it introduced many of the elements found in the historical films discussed in this chapter in its construction of a royal biopic. Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* around the time of the release of *The Other Boleyn Girl*, Jasper Rees notes how 'the success of Cate Blanchett's two stints as Elizabeth I has persuaded producers that queens and duchesses are box office [gold]' (Rees, 2008: 27).[90] Although the film's 1998 release means it falls outside of the boundaries of this research it deals with a number of similar issues found in the films discussed in this chapter, namely women's freedom and power; the search for a stable identity in the face of conflict between the personal and public; and the exploration of female sexuality. *Elizabeth* is a 'historical thriller' that explores the early years of Elizabeth I's (Cate Blanchett) reign, focusing in particular on the young Elizabeth's (sexual) relationship with Robert Dudley (Joseph Fiennes). *Elizabeth* has been the subject of much academic attention and is often referred to as a 'post-heritage' film. According to Pamela Church Gibson, Elizabeth 'constituted a paradigm shift within the English heritage film… in terms of the role of spectacle within the genre' (2002: 136). This involved a 'move away from the fetishisation of "authenticity"… which had characterised the heritage cinema of the previous decade' (ibid: 135), and an emphasis on spectacle, both in terms of an 'exciting and excessive' narrative and mise-en- scène and 'the particular spectacle of royalty to be found in public ceremonies and pageantry' (ibid). *Elizabeth*, therefore, provided 'ostentatious display of a new kind' (ibid: 137). Higson claims the film's difference in 'tone' represented 'a new stage in the quality "British" costume drama of the 1980s and 1990s' that positioned the film as a 'product of Tony Blair's "Cool Britannia"' (2003: 194).

Kara McKechnie, meanwhile, sees *Elizabeth* as part of a 'recent revival of the monarch film' (2002: 219) that responds to the public mood at the time, particularly an 'appetite for gossip and insight' into the royal family in the 1990s following the breakdown of Prince Charles' marriage to Diana, Princess of Wales and her subsequent death in 1997 (2002: 221). Church Gibson similarly notes how the royal

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[90] Britain's current monarch is not exempt from this trend, as evidenced by *A Royal Night Out* (Jarrold, 2015). The film is centred around the teenaged Princess Elizabeth (Sarah Gadon) and Princess Margaret (Bel Powley) as they escape the confines of the palace for one night only on V.E Day in 1945.

biopic provided an 'ideal way of reconfiguring the current tensions within the private lives of the Windsors' in relation to the troubles within the royal marriage (2002: 135). In particular, this involved engaging with the 'conflict between private desire and public duty' that was being played out in wider media within a cinematic context (ibid: 134). Church Gibson claims this is part of the 'Diana hysteria' circulated around the royal family in the 1990s (ibid: 133), and the majority of the films studied in this chapter all engage with the discursive formations around Princess Diana, although, as will be demonstrated, *The Duchess* does this most emphatically.

Also important is the film's mediation of the postfeminist 'girl power' discourse, which, according to Higson, 'played an interesting role in the take-up for the film' and its marketing (2003: 196). Higson notes how sexiness is a prominent aspect of 'girl power' and the film engages with this through its depiction of Elizabeth as a highly sexual young woman in contrast to the popular image of her as the Virgin Queen (2003: 220). In addition, the film also highlights the postfeminist notion of 'having it all' through the narrative conflict between Elizabeth's personal feelings for Robert Dudley and duty as Queen of England and the pressure she faces from her advisors who want her to marry someone who is more politically appropriate for the good of the nation. The contemporary royal biopic's depiction of the 'public-private conflict' is, for Church Gibson, one of the main ways in which these films began to deviate from the heritage films of the 1980s. In the literary adaptations of the 1980s, the protagonists chose 'personal freedom over stifling social convention' (2002: 135). However, in the royal films, based on real people, duty ultimately cannot be 'evaded or escaped', with 'potential solutions to personal problems often entailing a constitutional crisis' (ibid).[91] This incorporation of postfeminist discourses, Higson explains, signals the filmmakers intention to attract a 'street-wise youthful audience and a more politically aware feminist audience', neither of which were traditionally thought of as the target audiences for romantic historical films (2003: 195) and as such the 'appeal and modernity' of Blanchett's Elizabeth was widely commented on in the film's critical reception (ibid: 218).

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[91] This is particularly evident in *The Young Victoria*.

Julianne Pidduck also highlights *Elizabeth's* incorporation of postfeminist discourses, specifically 'women's pleasure, power and right to control their own bodies' (2004: 172). The issue of women's right to control their own bodies is most evident at the end of the film when Elizabeth demonstrates that she has chosen her duty as queen over love by cutting her hair, painting her face white and announcing 'I have become a virgin', thus becoming the image of Elizabeth I that is most recognisable. Chapman highlights how Elizabeth's adoption of 'the persona of the Virgin Queen' here suggests the film is abut 'the "making of" a queen' as she 'represents herself as a symbol of nation' (2005: 315). McKechnie asserts the 'reconstruction of the Ditchley portrait at the end of the film… firmly establishes the invention of the Virgin Queen as a deliberate, carefully staged campaign', which McKechnie equates with the idea of media 'spin', a concept that was particularly prominent during the New Labour government (ibid: 230). The purpose of this discussion of *Elizabeth* has been to highlight how the film was perceived as a distinct 'move away' from the historical films that preceded it, especially its distancing from the concept of 'heritage cinema', while paving the way for the current female-centred historical films that form the basis of this chapter. As will be shown throughout this chapter, prominent themes within *Elizabeth*, such as the incorporation of postfeminist discourses, femininity as a constructed [media] image, the 'Princess Diana "myth"' (Vidal, 2012: 109) and the conflict between private desire and public expectations, as well as the idea of creating a 'modern' and 'exciting' style of filmmaking are all evident in the case studies that follow.

The Other Boleyn Girl (2008)

The Other Boleyn Girl was released 2008. Although this UK-US co-production appeared ten years after the release of *Elizabeth*, the fact that the film was dubbed '*Elizabeth* the prequel' (Sandhu, 2008: 29) in reference to the film's focus on Elizabeth I's mother, Anne Boleyn, reinforces the significance of *Elizabeth* within discussions on the contemporary British historical film. *The Other Boleyn Girl* was directed by Justin Chadwick with a screenplay written by Peter Morgan, both of whom had experienced recent success with historical and literary adaptions as Chadwick directed the BBC series *Bleak House* (2005) and Morgan wrote the screenplay for *The Queen* (Frears, 2006), which focused on Queen Elizabeth II in the

days following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Based on the novel by Philippa Gregory (2001), *The Other Boleyn Girl* was released during a period of 'Tudor revival' in film and television that included the sequel to *Elizabeth*, *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (Kapur, 2007) and the HBO series *The Tudors*, created by Michael Hirst (2007-2010). *The Other Boleyn Girl* covers Thomas Boleyn's attempts to gain status by having his daughters, Anne (Natalie Portman) and Mary (Scarlett Johansson), earn prominent places within the court of Henry VIII (Eric Bana). Mary becomes the king's mistress but is soon replaced by Anne, who is believed to be more intelligent and fashionable. In order to be Queen of England, Anne must convince Henry to break with the church and get his marriage to Catherine of Aragon annulled, and provide him with a male heir. The film follows her attempts to do so, which culminate with her beheading.

In his biography of Anne Boleyn, historian Eric Ives argues that Anne Boleyn

> deserves to be a feminist icon, a woman in a society which was, above all else, male-dominated, who broke through the glass ceiling by sheer character and initiative (2004: xv).

However, this chapter will explore how *The Other Boleyn Girl* takes this idea of Anne Boleyn's 'sheer character and initiative'[92] (ibid) to construct Natalie Portman's Anne Boleyn as a *post*feminist ambitious young woman in a manner recognisable to contemporary audiences. One of the main ways in which the film constructs Anne as a postfeminist icon is through its adaptation of Gregory's original novel. In the novel, Mary's subjectivity is prioritised, with the story mainly revolving around her affair with the king and its repercussions. The second half of the novel explores her relationship with William Stafford, who she then marries. The narrative of Mary's relationship with Stafford is removed from the film; it is only hinted at within the main action of the film and the viewer is informed by the intertitles at the end of the film that she went on to marry him. Therefore, unlike the novel, the ambitious and modern Anne is very much the focus of the film. The privileging of Anne is also

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[92] While the film does portray Anne as a person of 'sheer character' and ambition, it also suggests she is a victim of patriarchy and circumstance as she is at the mercy of her father and uncle.

reinforced by the fact that Natalie Portman as Anne has top billing over Scarlett Johansson as Mary.

The film positions Anne and Mary as binary opposites. Mary is fair, 'simple and uncomplicated', while Anne is 'different', clever and ambitious. Anne is frequently referred to as 'ambitious' and 'feisty' (Landesman, 2008: 12) within the film's critical reception, but this ambition has negative connotations as she is referred to as 'bewitching' (Bradshaw, 2008) and a 'scheming, cruel trollop' (Landesman, 2008: 12), all of which positions Anne as threatening and dangerous. It is initially Anne who is referred to as 'the other Boleyn girl' while the sweet and innocent Mary attracts the attention of the king. Mary's traditional femininity is emphasised when she uses her maternal qualities to take care of Henry following a riding accident. Furthermore, when Henry and Mary have sex for the first time the scene bears all the typical signifiers of romance: it is filmed in soft focus and the score consists of gentle string instruments. It is also suggested that it is a pleasurable experience for Mary, particularly as the camera lingers on a glowing sunrise the following morning. This scene was mocked in the film's critical reception (Sandhu, 2008), with critics lamenting the film's lack of 'sexiness' by comparing it unfavorably to the TV series *The Tudors*. Cosmo Landesman, writing in *The Sunday Times*, says the film 'could do with a bit of the other' and it misses the chance to make history sexy by 'going all gauzy and coy' (2008: 12).

However, Henry soon rejects Mary in favour of Anne and the girls' father and uncle work on how best to utilise this to secure the family's position. As the men sit around a large table in a darkened room and discuss the next phase in their plan to ensure Anne marries the king, the darkened mise-scène creates a sinister atmosphere while the fact that they sit around a large table gives the impression they are in a boardroom, which serves to highlight the idea that Anne is being used to further a business transaction without any regard for her own wants and feelings. This idea that Anne and Mary are powerless like pieces being moved around a board game in order to secure the family's social advancement is evident from the opening of the film as the Boleyn children play together in an image of childhood freedom while their parents discuss their futures, which it seems will involve very little freedom and choice. Here also Anne is singled out as capable of being a high achiever, with her

father claiming 'Anne can do a lot better than a merchant's son'. Scenes such as these serve to highlight the lack of choice for women during the period in comparison with today, as the film suggests marriage was a woman's only means of securing her future. This is reinforced through the character of Anne's mother (Kristin Scott-Thomas), who angrily points out that her daughters' education has been in vain as they continue to be 'traded like cattle for the advancement and amusement of men'. In expressing her anger, Anne and Mary's mother provides a critical feminist voice. The feminist mother figure is common throughout these films, providing what Maggie Andrews refers to as 'fragments of feminism that although culturally familiar by the millennium had become marginalized' (2014: 249).

The positioning of Anne as a potential high achiever highlights the film's mediation of the postfeminist discourse of the ambitious young woman. When Anne is sent to the French court as a punishment for her reckless behaviour that led to Henry's accident, her mother encourages her to make the most of the chance she never had. While Anne may not be able to access a career in a way that is recognisable to modern audiences it is clear that her time at the French court has helped her in her aim to 'catch the king and keep him' in order to secure her family's advancement and she returns to England transformed. In his review of the film, Dave Calhoun highlights how Anne is 'emboldened by a spell at the French court (it's a small mercy she doesn't return with a copy of *The Second Sex* under her arm)' (2008b). Calhoun's reference to Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 feminist text would suggest Anne is constructed as proto-feminist. It is worth noting, however, the tone of this comment and the review as a whole mocks the film's attempts to inscribe contemporary gender discourses onto a pre-feminist setting. Other critics, and the film text itself, I would argue, present Anne as a *post*feminist young woman by deeming the film a 'historical girl power drama' (Unattributed, 2008a). On her return from France, Anne is confident and independent and able to hold the attention of the male court, including Henry, in a manner which could be described as 'ballsy' (Ashby, 2005: 129) when Anne jokes that women 'now accept [men] as equal'.

Interestingly, it is in this scene that Anne is first seen wearing her distinctive 'B' (for Boleyn) necklace, thus reinforcing her desire to cement her own identity within the

court, raising her family's status in the process. By taking visual ownership of the Boleyn name through her necklace, Anne has ensured she is no longer 'the other Boleyn girl', but *the* Boleyn girl. In addition, the emergence of the distinctive necklace, which is familiar to the audience through well-known portraits of Anne Boleyn, at this point gives the impression that she is developing a public persona and representing herself as an image in a way that evokes comparisons with Elizabeth I's construction of the 'Virgin Queen' persona in *Elizabeth*.

Moreover, Anne also displays a postfeminist sexuality.[93] Rosalind Gill argues that postfeminist media culture is overwhelmingly preoccupied with the female body, to the extent that femininity is now defined as a 'bodily property rather than a social, structural or psychological one' (Gill, 2007: 149). To this end, the 'procession of a "sexy body" is presented as a woman's key (if not sole) source of identity', the 'source' of her power (ibid.). This modern emphasis on a woman's sexuality as the main source of her power and identity means that the sexualisation of women now works differently. According to Gill:

> Women are not straightforwardly objectified but are portrayed as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so (ibid.).

Women are therefore required to possess a certain level of sexual knowledge and experience, and Anne clearly displays a certain degree of sexual knowingness. A key scene in this respect is when Anne joins Henry and his men on a hunt. When Henry offers to ride with Anne, she declines his offer, explaining she will use a new kind of saddle that allows her to ride on her own. The following exchange then takes place:

> Henry: With no man to hold on to, how do you propose to stay on the horse?
> Anne: As you do, my lord, with my thighs.

In choosing to ride alone, Anne is demonstrating her independence, and also the sense that in doing this she is thoroughly modern because a woman riding a horse without a man was unheard of. However, her flirtatious comment that she will use

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[93] Louise Wilks similarly argues that Anne is initially portrayed as a postfeminist heroine because her 'empowerment' is 'rooted in displaying her body' (2012a: 216).

her thighs to stay on the horse, with its sexual connotations, reveals her sexual knowledge that she chooses to convey her power and identity and, in doing so, improve her position in the eyes of the king.

While Anne's father wants her to get the king's attention, Anne refuses to settle for being his mistress and requests Henry divorce Catherine of Aragon in order to marry her. Like a 'can-do' girl, Anne exhibits the "desire, determination and confidence" (Harris, 2004: 1) to take opportunities and achieve her goal of becoming Queen of England. However, she becomes powerless as she becomes increasingly unable to produce an heir. She confesses she has to resort to 'evermore degrading means' and is raped by Henry. The close-up of Anne's anguished face during this violent scene is in stark contrast to the love scene between Henry and Mary earlier in the film, where Henry is portrayed as caring and emotionally literate, creating the impression that he believes Anne's failure to provide an heir has provoked his violent behaviour. The intensity of this scene is further heightened as it is followed by Anne's coronation. The use of a blue and grey colour palette is cold and harsh and Anne stares blankly ahead, ostensibly looking regal but also passive and empty. Now she is queen she appears to possess power but in reality has none.

The question of blame becomes intertwined with the issue of power as Anne begins to lose control. Mary blames Anne for being too ambitious, telling Anne 'You reached too high', evoking the myth of Icarus who flew too close to the sun. Anne too blames herself for her situation when she frantically claims 'It's all slipping away from me and it's all my fault'. This idea of the individual being solely responsible for their own problems is central to postfeminist 'self-help' discourses as postfeminism is centred around the neoliberal ideals of 'freedom' and 'choice'. Rosalind Gill has highlighted the fit between the neoliberal choice biography, as defined by Ulrich Beck, and postfeminism. According to Gill, postfeminist discourses revolve around the idea that women are no longer inhibited by any inequalities whatsoever, and therefore they are autonomous beings whose practices are entirely freely chosen (2007: 153). This discourse of 'free choice' corresponds with Beck's idea of the 'choice biography'. Writing about a move to a 'new modernity', Ulrich Beck reflects upon a growing sense of 'individualization' within society, at the centre of which is the '*do-it-yourself biography*' (1992: 135) (original

emphasis). According to Beck, this individualization means that a person's life biography is 'removed from given determinations and placed in his or her own hands, open and dependent on decisions' (ibid). This idea that a person is free to make their own decisions means one's life narrative appears to be self-constructed, even though it is actually influenced by external factors such as institutions, government polices and consumer markets (ibid: 130). Angela McRobbie similarly argues that postfeminism works upon the basis of individual responsibility. As McRobbie asserts, postfeminism assumes that feminist politics is no longer needed because of the equal opportunities available to women, they are now 'pushed firmly in the direction of independence and self-reliance'. This involves 'self-monitoring', constructing a life plan and finding their own solutions to problems (2007: 723). However, while Anne continuously strives to solve the problem of producing a male heir (including considering committing incest) and blames herself for her situation, the film questions whether she is truly responsible as her ambition was initially cultivated by her father and uncle who plotted to secure their own position.[94] For all it seems that Anne has been managing her own ambitions, her decisions – and their consequences – have been influenced and underpinned by patriarchal figures. Furthermore, Anne's mother is critical of the emphasis on young female ambition, asking 'when was it that people stopped thinking of ambition as a sin and started thinking of it as a virtue?' This question is significant both within the film world and to the contemporary audience as it recalls the widespread emergence of the 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004) and the idea that young women especially are expected to be ambitious and successful. It also reinforces the idea of Anne's mother as a critical feminist voice within the film, highlighting both the issues facing women at the time and the problems with contemporary postfeminism.

In a promotional interview, Eric Bana also highlights *The Other Boleyn Girl's* engagement with postfeminism, saying: "It shows two very strong sides of the female psyche:[95] in modern terms, Anne is the professional, ambitious woman, while

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[94] Beck refers to this idea of blaming oneself as "guilt ascription", which is a particular burden associated with the choice biography and the risk of the 'chosen' personal identity (1992: 136).
[95] This idea that Anne and Mary are two sides of the same person is evident within the film when Mary shows her support for Anne by stating, 'She is my sister and therefore half of me'.

Mary wants love and family" (Bana, quoted in *The Westmorland Gazette*, 2008).[96]
Bana's comment draws on the postfeminist notion of 'having it all', which is
recognised as a 'postfeminist fantasy of femininities' (Brunsdon, 2000: 167). . In
many popular media texts 'having it all' is proven to be a myth as the woman often
gives up her career in order to find personal happiness. Similarly, in *The Other
Boleyn Girl* 'simple and uncomplicated' Mary ends up happily married to William
Stafford (Eddie Redmayne) while Anne's struggle to maintain the highest position –
Queen of England – leads to her death. Louise Wilks claims that the ending of *The
Other Boleyn Girl* - and also *The Duchess* – subverts notions of postfeminist
empowerment as things 'end darkly' for both Anne and Georgiana (2012a: 218).

Ultimately, *The Other Boleyn Girl* is a highly ambiguous text. To an extent, the film
questions whether women have as much power as they think, both during the Tudor
period and today as Anne pays the price for wanting 'too much'. However, the film
demonstrates that Anne was not entirely to blame – she was not acting freely as she
was being controlled by patriarchal forces. Indeed, Anne is celebrated in the final
scene of the film when a image of a young girl playing with other children is
accompanied by intertitles informing the audience that Anne gave Henry a 'strong
red-headed girl' called Elizabeth who would 'rule over England for forty-five
years'.[97] By producing Elizabeth Anne is presented as ultimately successful. The
close-up freeze-frame image of Elizabeth that closes the film evokes comparisons
with the moment at the beginning of the film where the Boleyn children are playing
together while their parents discuss their futures. The repetition of this image
suggests that things are cyclical and the issues of female power and autonomy Anne
faced will similarly be faced by Elizabeth, as explored in Kapur's film, but also that
these issues still exist for women today.

From 'ordinary' Princess to extraordinary Queen: *The Young Victoria* (2009)

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[96] This idea of 'doubling' and girls positioned as opposites is evident in Chapter
Three's exploration of teenage friendship between pairs of girls.
[97] For Vidal, this image links the film to Kapur's *Elizabeth* films, and in doing so,
highlights the 'highly reflexive' '"knowing" mode of address' adopted by recent
heritage films (2012: 109).

Issues of female power and freedom are also raised in *The Young Victoria* (Vallée, 2009). Unlike *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *The Young Victoria* is aimed at a younger, teenage audience –it has a 'PG' certificate rather than a '15' like *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *The Duchess*. The film is therefore 'mindful of appealing to a younger audience' and according to Maggie Andrews, this influenced the decision to abandon 'the trope of victimhood' present in the other films and replace it with 'the trope of girl power' (2014: 246), with Victoria being portrayed as 'sassy, both an ordinary and extraordinary teenager' (ibid: 245). The film focuses on the life of the teenage Queen Victoria (Emily Blunt), who lives at Kensington Palace under the guard of her mother and uncle. Following the death of her father, and as his only child, Victoria will one day be Queen of England when her uncle (Jim Broadbent) dies. As the heir to the throne, Victoria must live by a strict set of rules, known as the 'Kensington System', devised by her mother and uncle ostensibly for her own protection but more importantly as means of control. They believe Victoria is too young to rule and try to force her to sign a regency order to pass control to her uncle. When Victoria meets and falls in love with Prince Albert (Rupert Friend) he encourages her to maintain control and marry someone who is her equal who can work with her. Victoria starts to doubt her abilities when she becomes too reliant on Prime Minister Lord Melbourne (Paul Bettany) but Albert convinces her to let him share her work and the pair remain happily married until Albert's death.

The Young Victoria was directed by French-Canadian director Jean-Marc Vallée, director of C.R.A.Z.Y (2005), a French family drama. The screenplay was written by Julian Fellowes, who had previously won an Oscar for the period drama *Gosford Park* (Altman, 2001) but has since become known as the creator of *Downton Abbey* (ITV, 2010-2015). The film was produced by Martin Scorsese and Graham King, as well as Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York. In the film's production notes, Graham King discusses how Sarah Ferguson wanted to portray Victoria "in a different way" to how she is commonly represented (GK Films, 2009: 5). Representations of Queen Victoria in British cinema have previously focused on her as an older queen mourning Prince Albert in films such as *Victoria the Great* (Wlicox, 1937) and *Sixty Years Glorious* (Wilcox, 1938) starring Anna Neagle and more recently in *Mrs Brown* (Madden, 1997) starring Judi Dench. As Peter Bradshaw notes in his review of the film, unlike previous portrayals, Emily Blunt's Victoria is 'very much

amused' (Bradshaw, 2009). In wanting to portray the monarch differently, the producers are echoing the production discourse surrounding *Elizabeth* that emphasised her youth and sexuality as opposed to the image of her as the 'Virgin Queen' (Higson, 2003: 220).[98] Actress Emily Blunt claims the ability to produce a 'different' portrayal of Victoria lies in Vallée's 'outsider' status.[99]. Blunt believes "It's good not to have an English… director, because he doesn't hold this period in too much reverence", which enables him to take a more 'modern' approach (GK Films, 2009: 9). Vallée agrees that, while he 'didn't consciously bring something different' to the project, he had a helpful distance from British history, as he "didn't want to make a classic British period film" (GK Films, 2009: 10), a sentiment also echoed by Shekhar Kapur when making *Elizabeth*. Graham King also highlights this desire for *The Young Victoria* to have a more contemporary visual style that is 'less restrained than… "your typical BBC-type movie"' (Lawrenson, 2007).

Also, like *Elizabeth*, production discourses surrounding *The Young Victoria* promise a less conservative, 'sexier' portrayal of Victoria. Pre-publicity notes how the film 'promises a new, more sexed-up portrayal of Britain's longest-reigning monarch' (Hastings, 2008). Despite this pledge to create a sexier monarch, King explains how "there will be a bedroom scene [but] there will not be a sex scene" because "we're going to be tasteful in what we show" (King, quoted in Bamigboye, 2007: 55). King's comment presents a point of tension because it not only reinforces the idea that *The Young Victoria* is aimed at a younger audience (for whom explicit sex scenes would be inappropriate) but it also undercuts previous claims about the film not being a 'classic British period film'. In vowing to be "tasteful", King is acknowledging a need to adhere to certain conventions and audience expectations about the genre.

As with Anne in *The Other Boleyn Girl*, *The Young Victoria* aims to reconstruct the image of Victoria and present her as a modern young woman in a pre-feminist world. In the production notes that accompany the film, actress Emily Blunt talks about

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[98] Although British cinema has tended to depict Victoria as a widow, John Erman's 2001 television drama *Victoria and Albert* explored Victoria and Albert's marriage.
[99] This idea of the 'outsider's view' on British history was also evident within discussions of Kapur's *Elizabeth*.

how her perception of Queen Victoria changed after researching the role. Blunt notes that Victoria "seemed like a very modern character, a very 21st century sort of woman" (GK Films, 2009: 9). Director Jean-Marc Vallée, meanwhile, evokes the discourse of girl power by conveying the image of a confident, 'go-getting' young woman who overcame gender barriers to succeed in her role, saying 'She was a woman in a man's world and despite being tiny, she had balls' (2009: 8). Screenwriter Julian Fellowes further positions Victoria in the twenty-first century world by linking Victoria's situation to the idea of 'instant celebrity'. According to Fellowes, "One minute Victoria was living under virtual house arrest, the next she is the most famous woman in the world" (ibid: 6). In highlighting how Victoria went from living a rather secluded life to Queen of England with a public image at the age of eighteen, Fellowes is drawing on the idea of contemporary reality television in which an 'ordinary' person is quickly catapulted to fame through participation on a television show (which was explored in elsewhere). Fellowes' comments emphasise the producers' keenness to construct Victoria as a modern woman because his interest in the idea of 'instant celebrity' creates the impression that Victoria went from being an 'unknown' girl to famous monarch, when, although Victoria was secluded, as a member of the royal family she would have been known to the public beforehand and was far from an ordinary girl.[100]

The Young Victoria both evokes and questions the idea of the fairytale. In the film's opening voiceover Victoria states:

Some people are born more fortunate than others; such was the case with me. But as I child I was convinced of quite the opposite. What little girl does not dream of growing up a princess?... [But] even a palace can be a prison

The use of the voiceover firmly establishes Victoria's subjectivity as well as the 'fairytale motif of the princess in a golden cage' (Vidal, 2012: 109). It also

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[100] While *The Young Victoria's* production team aimed to present Victoria as a twenty-first century kind of young woman in the manner of *Elizabeth* and *The Other Boleyn Girl*, the film's critical reception suggests that this attempt to create an innovative and modern image of Victoria was not particularly successful. The film is described as 'a film of polished niceness' (Synnot, 2009: 8) and 'about as sexy as a cold fish and as imaginative as a kipper' (Malcolm, 2009).

reinforces the representation of Victoria as both ordinary and extraordinary by suggesting that her position is merely a result of circumstance, she just happened to be born a princess because 'some people are born more fortunate than others'. Her 'ordinariness' is articulated by the fact that she never felt privileged and did not realise she was next in line to the throne until the age of eleven.[101] While Victoria's life may seem like a real-life fairytale, the film is quick to establish that being a princess isn't all it seems as 'even a palace can be a prison' and Victoria will face the same issues of freedom and power as other young women. Victoria's confinement is conveyed repeatedly during the opening scenes of the film. She is shown obeying a set of rules known as the 'Kensington system', in which she must walk down stairs holding an adult's hand at all times for her own safety. This is widely commented upon within the film's critical reception (Bradshaw, 2009b; Swarbrick, 2009: 6) as a way of conveying just how trapped Victoria is. Victoria is also shown looking out of windows while the voiceover explains how she dreams 'of the day I might be free and pray for the strength to meet my destiny'. This is then followed by a cut to Victoria's coronation, an image that recurs at various points in the film, before returning to the previous year. The mise-en-scène is regal, highlighting the vastness of Westminster Abbey as the soundtrack plays the coronation anthem. As the crown is placed on Victoria's head the music stops and camera zooms in as she stares directly into the lens (Figure 13). Victoria breathes in deeply and the scene moves from the public celebration of the coronation to the private and personal as the intimate focus on Victoria's face reflects the sense of responsibility she feels and the burden of reigning alone at the age of eighteen.

Moreover, Julia Kinzler asserts that 'the iconography of the film's most significant moments is derived from… portraits of Victoria and the royal family'. 'The coronation scene marks the beginning of the film's 'quoting of royal portraiture' as the scene seems to be inspired by John Martin's *The Coronation of Queen Victoria* (1839) (2011: 52). As Vidal notes, this technique is common in historical films and characters often become 'walking illustrations of famous portraits' (2012: 112). Not

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[101] This idea of a teenage girl being both ordinary and (unknowingly) a princess is also evident in the Hollywood film *The Princess Diaries* (Marshall, 2001), in which sixteen-year-old Mia (Anne Hathaway) learns she is heir to the throne of Genovia. In aligning itself with *The Princess Dairies*, *The Young Victoria* is reinforcing its attempts to appeal to a younger target audience.

only does this serve to reinforce the 'authenticity' of the film but also draws attention to the monarch as 'a visual representation, a symbolic construct' (Scharff, 2004: 128). Here *The Young Victoria* evokes comparisons with *Elizabeth* and the way in which Blanchett's Elizabeth 'becomes' the image Virgin Queen in the famous portrait, although arguably to a lesser extent. In drawing on royal portraiture during the coronation scene, the film is capturing Victoria's transition from a young girl who happened to be a princess to becoming the 'image' of Victoria, Queen of England and all that this image symbolises.

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Figure 13: Victoria (Emily Blunt) during her coronation.

However, it is not Victoria's reign that is *The Young Victoria's* main focus but her relationship with Albert (Rupert Friend). According to producer Graham King, the film "is pure love story… It is a human story" (GK Films, 2009: 7). Initially, Victoria and Albert's relationship is presented as a political venture prior to meeting, with scenes of Albert's family planning the match in a similar manner to *The Other Boleyn Girl*, with Albert coached on Victoria's likes and interests. But it soon becomes clear that their relationship is a love match above all. When Victoria and Albert first meet they play a game of chess, during which Victoria asks him: 'Do you ever feel like a chess piece in a game being played against your will?' Here Victoria is articulating her feeling of powerlessness as she is caught between her own desires and the control of her mother and uncle but this scene also draws attention to

women's status during the period in suggesting that a woman (and the extent of her power) was defined by her relationship with a man, an issue which is also raised in *The Other Boleyn Girl*. This is particularly apparent when Victoria then tests Albert by asking if he suggests she find a man to play the game for her, to which he replies, 'You find a husband to play it with you, not for you'. Albert's reply creates the impression that their future marriage would be based on equality, and as such presents Victoria and Albert as 'a 'modern' couple who are ahead of their time but recognisable to today's audiences. However, as Vidal points out, 'By depicting their arranged marriage as a love union between two equals, this strangely quaint film isolates Victoria from her turbulent socio-political era' (2012: 109). In doing so, the film reinforces the idea that recent historical films are 'filtered through the lens of a postfeminist movement' (ibid: 105) by largely depoliticising the issues they address. In the case of *The Young Victoria*, the question of female power is raised but then subsumed into the broader narrative of the love story between a young couple.

The question of Victoria's power and capability is raised throughout *The Young Victoria*. Victoria is woken in the middle of the night to be told of the king's death. The scene begins with a close-up of Victoria's sleeping face, which portrays her as child-like and vulnerable. This is enhanced further as she is guided down stairs into a darkened room, where her male relatives kneel before her and announce 'Long live the Queen'. Victoria's white nightgown stands in stark contrast to the men's black mourning clothes, and is suggestive of her innocence, despite the fact she is now Queen of England. The fact that inherits her power at a time when she looks 'at her most vulnerable' (Kinzler, 2011: 52) highlights the constant contradiction and anxiety that surrounds her in that she is both young and naïve but in procession of great power. Victoria herself also feels this anxiety. A dream sequence the night before her coronation shows her dreaming of chess pieces being moved along aboard and voices whispering 'she's too young'. Although only a very brief sequence within the film, Victoria's 'anxiety dream' is pertinent when looking at these films' relationship with twenty-first century young femininity. The 'successful girls' (Ringrose, 2013) discourse of the 'top girls' (McRobbie, 2007) and the 'can-do' girls (Harris, 2004) highlight the increasing capacity of young women, who, in the twenty-first century, are seemingly more economically and socially powerful than

previous generations. At the same time, however, the 'Reviving Ophelia' discourse circulates around this to construct the idea of teenage girls as vulnerable and in 'psychological crisis' (Marshall, 2007: 717). This discourse constructs the 'never-good-enough girl who must perpetually observe and remake herself' (Harris, 2004: 33).[102] As Victoria becomes more powerful and 'visible', so her anxiety becomes more apparent as she and others question whether she is strong enough to fulfill her role.[103]

It is not just Victoria who questions her own ability to rule and she soon becomes an object of public concern when she creates a constitutional crisis. When Victoria's close friend Lord Melbourne resigns as Prime Minister, incoming Prime Minister Robert Peel refuses to form a government unless some of Victoria's ladies-in-waiting, who are mostly related to Lord Melbourne, are dismissed. Victoria refuses, leaving the country in a state of political instability. As in *Elizabeth*, Victoria jeopardises her position when she (initially) prioritises her personal feelings over her duty. She is also involved in a 'media scandal' as cartoons appear that ridicule her and mock her over-reliance on Lord Melbourne by referring to her as 'Mrs Melbourne'. The notion of public image and media representation is present in many of these historical films, as will become more apparent in the discussion of *The Duchess*, with cartoons being equated with modern tabloids as providers of gossip and scandal. According to Maggie Andrews, 'a desire to be loved at public and private levels – to become "Queen of Hearts"… seeps through all of these texts' (2014: 246).

It is at this point that Victoria marries Albert, which, in the film, is attributed with bringing a renewed stability to her reign. The marriage proposal is particularly interesting. It is well known that the real Queen Victoria asked Albert, who is of lower status, to marry her. However, in this scene Victoria struggles to articulate her wishes and in the end Albert asks *her* to marry *him*, highlighting a 'consequential

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[102] The Ophelia narrative was explored in Chapter Two's discussion of girlhood hysteria in *The Falling* (Morley, 2014).

[103] Anne Boleyn also suffers from increasing anxiety as she becomes more powerful in *The Other Boleyn Girl*. She is shown frantically pacing and worrying that it's 'all slipping away' as the pressure to provide a male heir increases once she becomes queen.

difference between historical records (the Queen's journal) and the filmic representation' (Kinzler, 2011: 61). As such, Victoria's status and power here is integrated into traditional patriarchal structures in which it is conventionally the man's responsibility to propose. While this proposal scene presents Victoria as somewhat conventionally passive, the film is keen to allude to her sexuality, suggesting she is confident and desiring as well as desired. Although *The Young Victoria* is less sexually explicit than *Elizabeth* or *The Other Boleyn Girl* due to the films' differing intended audiences, Victoria's passion is implied, as she seems to initiate the consummation of their marriage, after which she happily proclaims to be 'quite married'. Furthermore, Albert addresses Victoria as 'wife' at this point, reinforcing her 'ordinariness', as well as arguably reducing her status to that of simply a wife and not his wife, the Queen. This 'normalising' of Victoria and Albert positions them as the direct ancestors of, and draws parallels with, the current royal family who have in recent years, 'actively engaged… in the representation of themselves… as a "normal", modern… ideal middle-class family' (Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 132).[104]

As with other recent historical films, the female protagonist often experiences conflict between love and duty, and in *The Young Victoria* this manifests itself through Victoria's dual role as 'normal wife' and that of Queen. This is emphasised within the film's trailer, which informs us that 'her destiny belonged to an empire but her heart belonged to one man', and also through the fact it is the main cause of tension in what is otherwise presented as an idyllic relationship. Matters of the private and the public clash when Albert and a pregnant Victoria argue over government issues in the domestic space of their bedchamber. Victoria attempts to reassert her power and remind Albert of his position by reminding him that she is the Queen of England and he is her husband, broadening the issue of female power to examine the position of women more generally by angrily claiming, 'You thought I was a woman who is to be ignored'. Albert then accuses her of over-exciting herself, which is harmful for the baby, and disobeys her orders by leaving the room. Kinzler

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[104] This representation of the Royal as a 'normal' middle-class family has become even more prominent since the marriage of Prince William to Kate Middleton in 2011, as the media were keen to highlight the fact that Kate was not a member of the aristocracy.

demonstrates how in this scene 'Victoria is not presented as a monarch, but as a pregnant woman who is reduced to her body', where the needs of the foetus are prioritised over her rights as monarch, and links the scene to the earlier 'domestica[tion'] of Victoria on her wedding night (2011: 61). Kinzler argues that this is all part of the film's attempts to refrain from 'constructing a Queen as too feminist' (ibid: 62). This is also reminiscent of postfeminist discourses in which young women are allowed to 'come forward' on the condition that feminist politics fades away (McRobbie, 2007: 722). In initially voicing reluctance to give up her newly acquired power by becoming trapped in a marriage, Victoria is presented as being aware of the need for feminism but the film suggests that the best way for her to manage her power is to give some of it to Albert. The film takes this further by implying Victoria *needs* Albert when he risks his life to save her from a bullet. The synopsis in the production notes details how at this point 'Victoria realizes what a selfish woman she has become' (GK Films, 2009: 3), employing language of postfeminist backlash against feminism to portray Victoria as a selfish woman who puts her work before her husband's desires. It is this dramatic event as well as Melbourne's suggestion that Victoria let Albert 'share [her] work' that leads to Victoria placing Albert's desk next to hers where the film's closing caption tells us they 'reigned together for twenty years' until Albert's death. The caption also states that Victoria is Britain's longest-reining monarch… to date', a record that as of September 2015 is held by the current Queen Elizabeth II. Once again, the film is drawing on links to today's royal family in order to present Victoria as 'modern'. This idea of Victoria and Albert as modern is also reinforced by the image of their working together side by side as it implies their marriage is modern because it is based on equality. However, it is possible to question the film's commitment to equality when one considers that Victoria has to lose some of her power in order for the film's love story to have a 'happy ending', which arguably undermines the (filmmakers') idea of the film as modern.

Constructing an image: *The Duchess* (2008)

The case studies so far have focused on women who have occupied the position of Queen. The final case studies will centre around young women who, while not royalty, are members of the aristocracy, beginning with *The Duchess* (Dibb, 2008).

The Young Victoria went to great lengths to demonstrate that, despite initial familial interference, the marriage between Albert and Victoria was based on love above all else. This is not the case in *The Duchess*, where the much older Duke of Devonshire (Ralph Fiennes) marries seventeen-year-old Georgiana (Keira Knightley). For the Duke, this is a marriage of convenience with the sole aim of producing a male heir. He has numerous affairs, including with Georgiana's best friend Bess (Hayley Atwell). However, it soon becomes clear that 'the Duke is the only man in England not in love with his wife' as Georgiana's popularity soars and she becomes an eighteenth-century celebrity and fashion icon. The film explores the idea of sexual 'double standards' when Georgiana falls in love with Lord Grey (Dominic Cooper) and is forced to give up their child. *The Duchess* is directed by Saul Dibb, whose previous feature film *Bullet Boy* (2004) explored contemporary gang culture in East London. This meant Dibb was viewed as an 'unexpected' choice to direct this female-centred historical drama with a £15.3 million budget (Saker, 2008: 29). The casting of Keira Knightley as the Duchess of Devonshire, on the other hand, did not surprise the critics. Knightley has frequently featured in period dramas, with roles in Joe Wright's film adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), *Atonement* (2007) and *Anna Karenina* (2012), as well as *The Edge of Love* (Maybury, 2008) and *Never Let Me Go* (Romanek, 2010). *The Daily Telegraph's* Benjamin Secher points to Knightley's filmography to claim '[Knightley] may be the British actress who best represents her generation but when film directors look at Keira Knightley they see a face that belongs to the past' (2008: 5) and Knightley is referred to as 'an experienced wearer of corsets' (Phelen, 2008: 22). As with the previous case studies, Dibb is keen to highlight the relevance of the film to today's audiences and distance it from earlier heritage films. He explains how

> It's a story with a modern sensibility… dealing with messy relationships. That, to me, is not the stuff of Merchant Ivory… I tried to look at it with immediacy rather than nostalgia (Dibb, quoted in Saker, 2008: 29)

As I have argued, the previous case studies have utilised the discursive formations around Princess Diana to some extent, such as 'victimization, life story as empowerment and domestic life into the public sphere' (Andrews: 2014: 246). However, it is *The Duchess* that uses 'the Diana narrative' most overtly (Andrews, 2014: 246). Similarly, Vidal argues that *The Duchess* is a 'significant example of a

strand of costume melodrama that maps anxieties about the postfeminist present onto a prefeminist past' (2012: 105), perhaps even more so than the other films. The use of the discursive formations around Princess Diana within *The Duchess* – particularly its marketing campaign - has been frequently remarked upon in the film's critical reception, with specific reference to the film's trailer, which explicitly links Georgiana and Diana (Driscoll, 2008: 2; Hastings, 2008; Hellicar, 2008; Pettie, 2008; Roberts, 2008; Rowat, 2008).[105] In the theatrical trailer images of Keira Knightley as Georgiana are intercut with an image of Diana, while the text informs us the two women are 'related by ancestry, united by destiny' as 'this summer, history repeats itself'. The trailer then goes on to highlight clips from the film that highlight Georgiana's popularity with the public as well as emphasise the idea that Georgiana is trapped in her marriage to the unfeeling Duke, all of which strongly alludes to discourses regarding Diana.[106] However, both Keira Knightley and Saul Dibb were keen to distance themselves from the film's marketing campaign. Dibb claims that 'In the making of the film we didn't want to make any parallels whatsoever', although he does acknowledge the link between Diana and Georgiana, and the fact that Amanda Foreman's book was released a year after Diana's death, so the marketing has made the link "much more explicit to try to reach out to a wider audience" (Dibb, quoted in Calhoun, 2008: 76).[107]

As with the other films discussed in this chapter, *The Duchess* is largely concerned with questions about women's freedom. The opening scene of the film shows a teenage Georgiana playing games in the garden with her friends, including Charles Grey, while the Duke watches from a window and makes arrangements with her

[105] According to Biressi and Nunn, 'Diana's emergence as a world-wide figure of fascination and scrutiny was a significant landmark in the restaging of the aristocracy as glamorous, celebrity-orientated and above all, perhaps, caring' (2013: 133). Georgiana is represented as having all of these characteristics and more.
[106] The marketing for Amanda Foreman's book, on which the film was based, highlighted the link between Georgiana and Diana most emphatically, however, as the book was released a year after Diana's death.
[107] The implication here is that the distributors are attempting to reach a US audience in particular. Diana and the myth surrounding her continue to be a source of fascination and the biopic of her life - *Diana* - was released in 2013. The film was directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel and starred Naomi Watts, but was far from a critical success.

mother to marry her. Georgiana seems unaware of what is going on inside her home and the green expanse of the garden serves to heighten the contrast between the freedom she currently has and the confined domesticity she is about to enter. This scene is reminiscent of the opening of *The Other Boleyn Girl* when the Boleyn children are playing together while their parents plan their future marriages, which, once again, undercuts the image of childhood freedom. It appears that Georgiana, like Anne and Mary Boleyn before her, will be 'traded like cattle' in order to secure a man's future as it is made clear that Georgiana will be handsomely rewarded when she provides a male heir. This lack of choice is emphasised later when Georgian's mother reveals that the Duke has asked to marry her and Georgiana excitedly replies, 'He loves me? I've only met him twice!' Georgina's assumption that the Duke must love her because he asked to marry her, despite only meeting him twice previously, demonstrates her belief in the 'fairytale' ideal, in which a girl meets her prince who undoubtedly loves her, an ideal that is promoted in *The Young Victoria*. Georgiana's naïve belief that the Duke loves her works to reinforce the common convention within these films which is to highlight how women today 'have it better' because they have the freedom to marry for love. The audience can, theoretically, both relate to Georgiana and her wish for love in modern terms while also feeling grateful that they have more freedom than these young women from the past.

Interestingly, the film's title does not appear on screen until Georgiana and the Duke's wedding. The fact that the words 'The Duchess' appear as the pair are officially married signals the start of Georgiana's new persona, as she has entered a new life and become 'The Duchess'. The idea of persona and image is central to the film and its presentation of Georgiana's femininity. When the Duke attempts to consummate the marriage he struggles with Georgiana's many layers of clothing and questions why women's clothes are so complicated. Georgiana explains that clothes are women's way of 'expressing ourselves… we must make do with hats and dresses'. Georgiana's comments draw attention to women's lack of means of publically expressing themselves during the eighteenth century, and clothes act as a means of creating and displaying an individual identity. This narrative is still prominent today. As Diane Negra states, 'Postfeminism attaches considerable importance to the formulation of an expressive personal identity and the ability to select the right commodities to attain it' (2009: 4), and clothes in particular are

viewed as 'the right commodities' to achieve this personal identity. The difference
here, the film suggests, is that women like Georgiana had to 'make do' with clothes
as this was the *only* way of constructing an identity, whereas women today - in line
with the postfeminist 'choice' narrative - *choose* to do so. The Duke then cuts open
Georgiana's dress, which makes a very audible tearing sound, and undresses her in a
clinical manner. The ripping of Georgiana's clothes turns this 'love scene' into a
seeming act of aggression against not only her body but also her personal identity
and to an extent foreshadows the violent rape that occurs later on in the film that
results in the birth of the Duke and Georgiana's only son. Furthermore, the Duke's
lack of sensitivity is apparent Georgiana lies on the bed passively, visibly shaking
and in pain. This is in stark contrast to the equivalent scene in *The Young Victoria*, in
which sex was a source of pleasure for Victoria and one she was actively engaged in,
again reinforcing the idea of Georgiana's marriage as loveless and stifling in
comparison with Victoria and Albert.

As demonstrated above, *The Duchess* places great significance upon women's
clothing and Georgiana's style changes over time. In suggesting that Georgiana's
identity is constructed through her clothes the film is arguably drawing on the
postfeminist makeover narrative, which is closely linked to female identity. As
Brenda Weber notes how and the makeover 'doesn't create but brings out one's
inner woman (2009: 128), while Diane Negra similarly argues that 'In postfeminist
consumer culture, the makeover is a key ritual of female coming into being' (2009:
123) and it allows for a 'revelation of the self that has been there all along' (ibid:
124). What is interesting about the use of clothing in *The Duchess* is that changes in
Georgiana's appearance are used to cement her public image at times when she feels
most insecure. Georgiana's clothes are so extravagant they are clearly part of a
constructed image. This undermines notions of authenticity as although Georgiana's
appearance allows her to become more visible, to come 'into being' (ibid: 123), the
suggestion within the postfeminist makeover is that it is merely highlighting what
already exists, whereas Georgiana's appearance is deliberately artificial.[108]

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[108] This idea that clothes do not necessarily reveal the 'true self' is also evident in the
previous chapter's discussion of makeover within depictions of girls' friendship in
British cinema, as films such as *Kicks* (Heymann, 2009) and *My Summer of Love*

This emphasis on Georgiana's clothes presents her as a woman with 'modern' sensibilities, and the film presents her as the main fashion icon and celebrity of her day. When arriving at a public event, Georgiana is referred to as the 'Empress of fashion' and the announcer proclaims, 'What she wears today I expect to see the rest of you wearing tomorrow', establishing Georgiana as a trendsetter and icon for the masses. Georgiana then emerges wearing a giant ostrich feather on her head to gasps from the audience. According to Belen Vidal, the film's focus on Georgiana's image and the 'emphasis on feminine construction of self through consumption confutes the possibility of women's revolt to the realm of the private' (2012: 106). The consequence of this, Vidal states, is that the socio-political context of Georgiana's era and her part within it is reduced a discourse on contemporary femininity and celebrity' (ibid: 106). This is evident within the film as although Georgiana is shown to be politically conscious, such as when she questions why the vote cannot be extended to include all men, her involvement is depoliticised as it mostly seems to involve appearing at events wearing fashionable outfits and generating publicity from her presence.

Moreover, this focus on clothes and consumption is also evident within the film's critical reception. Charlotte O'Sullivan links *The Duchess* to Sophia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006) as both are films about 'poor little "It girls"' that foreground their protagonists' identity as young women through fashion and consumption (O'Sullivan, 2008: 39). Sofia Coppola's film depicts the teenage Marie Antoinette (Kirsten Dunst) as an excessive consumer. The costumes are elaborate and the mise-en- scène is anachronistically candy-coloured. The film is distinctly 'post-heritage' as Coppola's cinematic style is 'ironic and self-aware' (Ferriss and Young, 2010: 111) through its use of a twenty-first century soundtrack and designer brands. Also, the way in which Marie Antoinette constructs her image as Queen of France 'points to the constructed nature of representation' (Lane and Richter, 2011: 190), just as Georgiana constructs identity as the Duchess of Devonshire. Georgiana's consumption is also reinforced through references to the fact that Keira Knightley wore twenty seven individual costumes throughout the film, and the largely

(Pawlikowski, 2004) suggest that the image provided by the makeover provides a temporary and false identity.

ambivalent reviews of her performance focus on her image. Knightley is referred to as a 'stunning centre piece' who is 'coiffed and primped to within an inch of her life' (Rowat, 2008) and 'she gives great profile' (Maher, 2008: 15). On the other hand, the more negative reviews pay particular attention to her 'pouting', which is deemed excessive (O'Sullivan, 2008). Peter Bradshaw, for example, notes how her 'lips are once again perennially shaped to express something between a pout and a moue' (Bradshaw, 2008b: 16). A reviewer for the *Nottingham Evening Post* questions whether being 'posh, pretty and pouting' is enough to enable Knightley to carry a £13m budget film (Unattributed, 2008c) while other reviewers claim she is too thin (Sandhu, 2008). Knightley's performance, therefore, in a number of cases, is reduced to her appearance. Not only does the film text itself remove Georgiana from her social-political context by focusing on her fashion consumption, so Knightley's performance is judged on a superficial level that rarely looks beyond her image.

The Duchess, like the other films in this chapter, references paintings of the real Georgiana. The film does not just recreate paintings but also exhibits painterly photography. Barbara Scharff notes how historical films reliance on the arrangement of shots as works of art makes the historical film 'a highly self-reflexive genre that foregrounds problems of reality and identity' (2004: 132). This is particularly apparent within *The Duchess,* as the film is self-reflexive not only in terms of its aesthetics but also in its construction of feminine identity. This 'artificial' femininity is explored both within and outside of the film. In promotional interviews Keira Knightley discusses the problems she encountered when wearing the lavish costumes. Talking about a particularly tall wig, Knightley says, "I couldn't lift my head it was so heavy… [they couldn't] see [my] eyes anymore… my neck couldn't hold the weight of my own head", which resulted in crew members making a board for her to lean against to protect her neck (Knightley, quoted in Gritten, 2008: 21). This arguably lent a stillness to Knightley's performance as the constrictive nature of her costumes rendered almost mannequin-like at times, giving the impression of an artificial performance of femininity in which Knightley's own performance of femininity – where the weight of her wig forced her eyes to become demurely downcast - was dictated by what she was wearing. It is interesting that Georgiana's performance of femininity becomes more exaggerated as her personal difficulties increase. Her dresses and wigs become more extravagant and she enacts the persona

of 'the Duchess' to an even greater extent as her popularity with the public increases. Maggie Andrews notes how these historical films fetishize costume and hair, which leads to a 'slippage towards exaggerated, disruptive, tongue-in-check representations of gender' that highlight the 'performance and construction of gender' (2014: 248) and this is particularly applicable to *The Duchess*. Furthermore, Belen Vidal argues that, as well as drawing attention to the performance of gender, *The Duchess*

> constructs a double-edged discourse on clothes that highlights the function of costume as an outlet for sensuous pleasure, as a means of empowerment and self-expression as well as a tool for the control of women. While costume allows them to "express themselves", it also hides their disenfranchisement (2012: 106).

Vidal's use of the term 'empowerment' reinforces the film's incorporation of postfeminist discourses on clothes and makeover as clothes are Georgiana's main way of controlling her image but at the same time the clothes physically confine her. In a similar way, postfeminism seemingly offers women freedom and empowerment through clothes and make-up but this is highly regulated. The use of inverted commas around the phrase "express themselves" is useful as it casts doubt over the authenticity of this self-expression because, as I have argued, Georgiana's appearance is deliberately artificial. Vidal also notes how Georgiana 'suffers from "modern" addictions (bulimia, drugs gambling) that stem from a precarious sense of self under pressure' (ibid: 107). These addictions are largely played down within the film and are only alluded to during once scene of drunken behaviour. References to her eating disorder also strengthen the link between Georgiana and Princess Diana, who openly discussed her struggle with eating disorders and the pressure that she experienced due to her status.

As discussed above, this idea of the fragile and anxious young woman under pressure is a common contemporary discourse and is incorporated into three of the case study films in this chapter, with Georgiana presented as perhaps the most fragile of them all. Speaking in an interview to coincide with the release of the film, Amanda Foreman, author of the biography on which the film was based, reinforces the presentation of Georgiana as a 'modern' woman in a historical world:

> She's a modern woman because she's struggling to have it all, like the rest of us. It doesn't mean your life is a failure, it just means you can't have it all. That's what her life shows us (Foreman, quoted in Fitzherbert, 2008: 57).

Here Foreman explicitly links the representation of Georgiana to postfeminist notions of 'having it all'. Foreman likens Georgiana's experiences to those of young women today by suggesting Georgiana suffered because she was constantly striving for success in her personal and professional life. Georgiana's addictions become public knowledge when she staggers around drunkenly at a ball. She is the subject of much whispering as she stumbles into a chandelier, causing her wig to catch fire. She rips her wig off and falls to the floor with her hair net exposed to a stunned crowd. She seems vulnerable as she falls literally and metaphorically in the eyes of the public and the revelation of her hairnet exposes the artificiality of her image and the effort she must put in to maintain it.

However, when Georgiana is with Charles Grey there is a sense that she can be her 'real' self. Her clothes are markedly simpler and the lighting is brighter away from the dark confinement of Devonshire House, creating a more natural-looking mise-en-scène. In addition, there is a significant contrast between the representation of sex between Georgiana and Grey in comparison with the Duke. With Grey sex is presented as a pleasurable experience for Georgiana, and something she actively participates in because, like Victoria, she is in love. Furthermore, it is Grey who is presented as the object of Georgiana's desire, and the focus on Dominic Cooper's bare torso positions him as a site of 'erotic spectacle.' On the one hand, this, as Keira Knightley's references to the scene state, is due to practical reasons, as it is much easier for Cooper to remove his more straightforward costume rather than hers (Hellicar, 2008). However, this also points to the fact that 'heritage' films often play a 'seemingly progressive role' compared to the 'heterosexist norms of mainstream cinema' by foregrounding female characters and their desires in acknowledgement that the primary audiences for these films are "women (and gay men)" (Monk, 2011: 19).

When Georgiana and Grey are in bed together, they are shown reading and making fun of the various cartoonists' depictions of Georgiana, who is caricatured as an overly flirtatious woman in ridiculous clothes. As in *The Young Victoria*, the

cartoonists are represented as the equivalent of modern day paparazzi, keen to spread gossip and cause embarrassment. Also, as with Victoria, Georgiana's behaviour is shown to dent her public image and have wider repercussions. As with the other films in this chapter, Georgiana's – and women more generally – transgressions are highlighted in order to prompt debate about women's freedom and autonomy (Andrews, 2014: 251). Nowhere is this more apparent in *The Duchess* than when Georgiana is forced to give up the baby girl she had with Charles Grey because she is forbidden to leave the Duke to be with Grey, who is of lower status. This raises the issue of the 'double standards' of the period in which the film was set, (which arguably still exist today) as the Duke is free to have affairs without consequence. According to Belen Vidal, the 'emotional violence' of this scene renders the 'conciliatory happy ending of the film unsatisfactory and problematic' (2012: 108). Vidal raises an interesting point here but I would question the extent to which the film's ending could be described as 'happy'. The fact that Saul Dibb refers to the film as a "feminist tragedy" also supports this point (Dibb, quoted in Calhoun, 2008c: 76). In the final scene of the film the Duke shows a rare glimpse of affection for Georgiana as he tells her that he does not want her to 'suffer' but they should return to a 'calm normality', the implication being that they should resume their life together and behave as the public expects, regardless of their own feelings. The Duke watches their children playing in the garden and remarks how it must be 'wonderful to be that free', making it apparent that patriarchal structures and societal conventions and expectations can be restricting for both genders, although as the camera lingers on Georgiana's face it is clear that she has paid the highest price and sacrificed the most. The final image is an aerial shot of the children running around. The repetition of the image of freedom and recreation from the beginning of the film and the circular nature of the shot itself connotes, as Vidal states, 'cyclical repetition' (ibid: 109). It is for this reason that I believe the ending cannot be viewed as a 'happy' one because the film suggests that history will repeat itself and women like Georgiana will remain trapped in a system that denies them true freedom and happiness.

'I don't know that I find myself anywhere': Race, representation and identity in *Belle* (2013)

According to Stephen Bourne, there is 'ample ammunition for regarding "whiteness" as a specific generic trait of British period films' (2002: 49), a statement it is impossible to refute, particularly when considering the films mentioned so far in this chapter. Bourne also notes how British films that do acknowledge the black presence in Britain's past have typically been set in the 'pre-twentieth century era' (2002: 49) and often do not focus on female characters. An exception to this was *The Sailor's Return* (Gould, 1978), which was a literary adaptation that featured a black female protagonist about a sailor who returns home with his new black wife. However, the film was denied theatrical release and eventually shown on ITV in December 1981, suggesting that British television has historically been more committed to diversity than cinema (Bourne, 2002: 61). The release of Amma Asante's *Belle* in 2014 provided a notable exception to British historical films' overwhelming preoccupation with "whiteness". The film is based on the true story of Dido Elizabeth Belle (Gugu Mibatha Raw), the mixed race illegitimate daughter of a Royal Navy Admiral. Dido is sent to live with her great-uncle Lord Mansfield (Tom Wilkinson) and his niece Elizabeth Murray (Sarah Gadon). Dido has some privileges as an aristocrat but is denied others because of the colour of her skin. She falls in love with John Davinier (Sam Reid), a vicar's son, who opens her eyes to the case of the Zong ship trial and the issue of slavery that Lord Mansfield is presiding over as Lord Chief Justice. Lord Mansfield's decision is seemingly influenced by his relationship with Dido and his ruling helps to bring an end to slavery in Britain in the eighteenth century. A £7 million co-production between Fox Searchlight Pictures[109] and the BFI, *Belle* is Asante's second feature film following the BAFTA award-winning *A Way of Life* (2004). *A Way of Life* also dealt with issues of racism, but from opposite ends of the class system, centring around a teenage mother Leigh-Anne (Stephanie James), who carries out a racist attack on her neighbour.

The fact that the film focuses on issues of race through the eyes of its mixed race protagonist makes *Belle* an atypical historical film, and this was highlighted by the critics. *Belle* is praised for being a 'fresh and thought-provoking spin on… traditional costume drama' (Fitzherbert, 2014). What makes *Belle* so unusual in comparison to the other films within this chapter is that while it also focuses on

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[109] The film was shown to various film festivals in the US before being released in the UK after being championed by Oprah Winfrey.

issues of identity and image but it goes beyond this to examine issues of representation in connection with race. The film also highlights the overwhelming 'whiteness' of the genre itself (Bourne, 2002: 49). This is most striking when a young Dido is introduced to her new life. Dido stands in the middle of a large room filled with paintings depicting the Murray lineage, typically white men and the use of wide shots shows how she is dwarfed by her surroundings and is noticeably the only person of colour. Dido's presence within the frame, which adheres to the conventions of 'period aesthetics', confronts the idea that aristocratic women in British historical films are more often than not white. The film's use of 'typical period' conventions is referred to frequently within the critical reception, usually placed within the realm of Jane Austen due to the film's marriage plot, examination of social etiquette and 'lush' period aesthetics (Collin, 2014; Harkness, 2014,: 22; Kermode, 2014; McCartney; 2014; Phelan; 2014; Viner, 2014). The combination of period detail with an examination of issues of race and gender was important to Asante, who wanted to make the film 'as much Amma-esque as Austenesque' (Asante, 2014). These references to the world of Jane Austen highlight the cultural prominence of Jane Austen in contemporary British film and television. According to Andrew Higson, audiences experienced 'Austenmania' during the mid-1990s, with Andrew Davies' adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) for television, along with film adaptions of *Emma* (McGrath, 1996), *Sense and Sensibility* (Thompson, 1995) and *Mansfield Park* (Rozema, 1999). This continued into the millennium with notable texts such as Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), starring Keira Knightley, and *Bridget Jones' Diary* (Maguire, 2001), based on Helen Fielding's (1996) novel, which is a contemporary re-working of the themes within *Pride and Prejudice*. *Bridget Jones* also makes intertextual references to Davies' adaptation through the casting of Colin Firth as Mark Darcy.

Asante's aesthetic decisions were very much influenced by the fact that Dido's story is quite unusual. According to Asante, 'It was important to us to place this unexpected character in a very expected world'. This meant that filmmakers did not want to create an 'edgy' look as the real Dido existed in 'that classic Jane Austen world', and it was 'important not to change the audience's perception of that world. So we went for classic all the way' (Fox Searchlight, 2013: 14). Asante's comments are in stark contrast to the production discourses within the other films in this

chapter, as they all went out of their way to demonstrate that the films were placed in opposition with the 'typical' heritage conventions and were not 'stuffy Merchant Ivory' (Dibb, 2008), regardless of whether they actually achieved this.

As mentioned, the film uses the conventions of the Austen 'marriage plot' to explore issues and attitudes towards race and gender in the Georgian period. Although Dido and Elizabeth have been raised together and Lord Mansfield views his daughters equally, Dido's race, or rather eighteenth century society's attitudes towards it, poses a number of difficulties and highlights the differences between the two girls. Elizabeth is about to 'come out' into society and is required to find a suitable husband. However, her biological father would not acknowledge her as his daughter and as such she has no inheritance, rendering her 'too poor' for many men. Dido, meanwhile, cannot marry above her current status due to her race but it would also be unacceptable for her to marry for less. However, this issue is neatly side-stepped when she inherits £2,000 per annum from Captain Lindsay, leaving her financially secure and free of the pressure to marry for security like Elizabeth.

Belle makes it very clear, like the other films in this chapter, that marriage has historically been a woman's only route to security and marrying for love rather than money will leave them 'poor and broken-hearted'. Elizabeth articulates their situation when she says, 'We have no choice. We are but their property, forbidden from any activity that allows us to support ourselves'. This dialogue highlights the film's explicit criticism of the lack of freedom and choice afforded to women in the eighteenth century and serves to make the audience grateful they live in an era that offers young women 'choice' and the opportunity to be economically independent. However, the film's dialogue - particularly Dido's speeches that explain her position – has been criticised in the film's critical reception for sounding too much like 'the words of a 21st century screenwriter' (Fitzherbert, 2014). Comments such as this highlight the film's construction of Dido as a 'modern' woman, 'a woman out of time' (Kermode, 2014) in a way that is characteristic of these historical films.

The contradictions that Dido experiences contribute to an 'identity crisis', where she struggles to make sense of who she is. As a relation of Lord Mansfield, Dido has a significant degree of privilege and yet she is not equal to those who also share this

privilege. Issues of authorship come into focus here as Asante has drawn parallels between *Belle* and her experience as a black woman filmmaker, as she is part of a very small minority of directors working in the British film industry. Asante talks about how she feels 'privileged' to have had some success in the film industry but 'that doesn't negate the set-backs that gender and race can bring' and she doesn't feel 'fully equal' (Asante, 2014). Dido's unequal position is most apparent when Lord Mansfield invites guests to Kenwood House and informs Dido she will not be joining them for dinner, even though she usually dines with the family rather than the servants. Lord Mansfield explains that 'we cannot impose on others our disregard for rules', reinforcing the sense of the strict social codes of the era that were particularly limiting for women and people of colour. This is then followed by a short scene showing Dido angrily striding down a narrow, dark corridor. This creates a claustrophobic atmosphere as Dido, like Victoria and Georgiana before her, discovers that women can be confined even within the private realm of the home.

Dido's confusion over her own identity stems from the fact that she does not 'see' herself anywhere. She stares at her hands and beats her chest and pulls at her face in frustration while staring into a mirror – the only place where she can see herself. The tactility of these actions reflect Dido's struggle to find her 'true self'; it is as if she has to feel her own skin to confirm that she exists while also feeling angry that her skin is different to everyone around her. In addition, film also explores the idea of female identity being tied to appearance in a similar way to *The Duchess*, but to a much lesser extent. During one particular scene, Dido is angry because she cannot brush her Afro-Caribbean hair properly without it getting tangled. Seeing her upset, Mabel, a black woman who works as a servant for the family, takes the brush and brushes it for her, explaining, 'My mam taught me'. This alludes to the aspect of Dido's identity that is missing, as not having a mother meant that she missed being taught how to manage the hair that she inherited from her, and Dido's grateful smile reflects conveys the significance of this gesture. It also reinforces the idea that codes of feminine behaviour are learnt and recreated, rather than naturally occurring.

Dido becomes more politically aware when she meets John Davinier, who teaches her about the Zong slavery case and leads her to question the position of people of colour in society and her relationship to this. She also challenges Lord Mansfield's

position, reminding him that she is evidence that he breaks the rules when it matters. Becoming more politically conscious enables Dido to become 'empowered'. As Amma Asante explains, 'Dido transforms from a girl who says, "As you wish, sir", to a woman who says, "As I wish"' (Fox Searchlight, 2013: 3).[110] However, the race and gender politics are subsumed into the love story between Dido and Davinier. In the production notes that accompany the film, Asante describes how Dido 'grows into a woman by falling in love' because, through love, she gains access to the information that 'allows her to become a woman' (ibid: 6). This arguably neutralises the film's politics by reducing it down to a more 'universal' commentary on love and marriage, evoking the idea of the 'fairytale' also explored in *The Young Victoria*. This link to *The Young Victoria* is evident when Davinier explains how Dido will not be confined in marriage if she marries 'her true equal, someone who respects her'. In echoing Albert's line to Victoria, the film is once again reinforcing the idea that equality is something to be achieved on an individual level in a marriage between a man and woman, rather than in society more broadly. This issue of depoliticisation is also raised within the film's critical reception, where it is claimed the film's 'breezy' approach is due to 'not wanting to offend the "Downton Abbey" brigade' (Calhoun, 2014). Also, *Belle's* 'light' approach to its subject matter is further highlighted through comparisons to *12 Years a Slave* (McQueen, 2013), which was released the same year and known for being particularly confrontational (Calhoun, 2014; Macnab, 2014).

While the film does undermine its initial critique of class and gender somewhat, it is committed to issues of race and representation throughout. The production notes claim the inspiration for *Belle* came when screenwriter Misan Sagay saw a painting, thought to be by Zoffany (1779), of two girls – Dido and Elizabeth - sitting next to one another and of equal status at a time when it was unusual for black people to feature paintings as anything other than servants (Fox Searchlight, 2013: 4). Dido comments on this lack of representation within the film when she sees a painting of a young black slave with a white master and says, 'Just as in life, we are no better in paintings'. Therefore, when Lord Mansfield asks Dido to sit next to Elizabeth and be

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[110] To an extent, this echoes contemporary neoliberal discourses that prioritise individualism but Asante is keen to convey that Dido does this not because she wants more but because she wants equality for everyone (Fox Searchlight, 2013: 3).

painted, Dido is reluctant and unsure of whether it would even be acceptable for the artist to paint her. This unusualness of this situation is hinted at within Zoffany's original painting (Figure 14). Dido appears to be pointing at herself, as if to draw attention to the fact that she is occupying a space that convention suggests she shouldn't (Asante, 2014). The film recreates this painting and Dido is stunned to see an image of herself looking back at her from the canvas. Seeing a visual representation of herself (as well as falling in love) enables Dido to 'find herself' and cement her sense of her own identity. Furthermore, just as Dido occupies an unconventional space within eighteenth century portraiture, in creating *Belle*, so Asante has begun to address issues of representation within the British historical film genre, highlighting the need for women of colour's place in British history to be represented on screen.

Figure 14: The film's re-creation of Zoffany's (1779) painting next to the original.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the representation of young femininity in recent British historical films focusing on the royal and aristocratic figures. These films are part of contemporary British cinema's increased interest in girls and young women, and as Belen Vidal notes, these representations of women from British history are 'filtered through the lens of a postfeminist movement' (2012: 105). The influence of Kapur's *Elizabeth* (1998) – a film that was notable for its incorporation of postfeminist discourses and a significant change in tone and style from previous 'heritage' films – is evident through the majority of the case studies discussed here.

The production discourses surrounding these films heavily promote the idea that the films are a move away from the typical Merchant Ivory' idea of heritage cinema, in that they are faster paced and explore ideas about sexuality, for example, even if the critical reception suggests the films are not as innovative as the filmmakers would like us to believe. *Belle* is an interesting exception here as the film deliberately conforms to conventional 'period film' aesthetics in order to examine issues of race, an area that is largely under-explored within British historical films.

All of the films have a common is an interest in the issue of women's freedom. All four films highlight marriage as historically being a young woman's only means of security, and the protagonists are often very reluctant to relinquish their freedom become trapped within the confines of a marriage. Marriages based on status alone are stifling and traumatic – as in *The Duchess* and *The Other Boleyn Girl* – while marriages that stem from love are based on equality and freedom, even if, when one looks more closely, the young woman has had to give up some of her own power in order to make the marriage and career successful, as is the case in *The Young Victoria*. In addition, the young women presented here are all constructed as having contemporary sensibilities within a prefeminist world, a world that was not ready for them. This, as Maggie Andrews has stated, 'bridg[es] the gap between past and present' and renders them relatable to modern audiences, who can be grateful that they have 'choices' that were previously unavailable (2014: 255). As part of this, the films all engage with certain postfeminist discourses related to ambition and the idea of 'having it all'. Films such as *The Duchess* and *The Other Boleyn Girl* in particular are ambivalent in this regard. For while both Anne and Georgiana are ambitious, the question is raised as to whether this is achievable and to what extent did their ambition and desire to be loved by all contribute to their downfall? Perhaps these films set in the past are best placed to interrogate contemporary postfeminist discourses as the female characters exist in a world that is both recognisable and yet far removed from the audiences' experiences in comparison with the other contemporary films discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

These films set in the past also suggest that trying to attain postfeminist ideals causes anxiety and a fragmented sense of identity. This is often linked to the idea of constructing a public persona. This is most evident within *The Duchess* as Georgiana

uses fashion to create the image of the glamorous society girl in an attempt to hide her private insecurities from the public. Similarly, Victoria must transition from being a young woman and 'become' the image of a queen in order to overcome public criticism. Dido also experiences an identity crisis - not because she must construct a public image - but because she is burdened by a lack of representation that renders her unable to find herself. Overall, these films raise pertinent questions about women's freedom and how young women must negotiate 'being and becoming' women in the face of public and private pressures. However, the fact that these films and their representations of young femininity are mediated through postfeminist discourses means they become depoliticised, as the 'problems' they identify get subsumed into a love story narrative or merely accepted, meaning the issues they raise are never fully confronted, which, as Justine Ashby (2010) has highlighted, is characteristic of the contemporary British woman's film more broadly.

Conclusion

As this thesis draws to a close, one of the most striking observations that has arisen from its exploration of young femininity in contemporary British cinema is the variety of films within the corpus, which is indicative of British cinema's dynamism and diversity of film production since the millennium. This thesis has examined a range of contemporary British films, from the work of independent filmmakers amenable to auteurism such as Andrea Arnold and Carol Morley, to more commercially orientated films such as *St Trinian's* (Parker and Thompson, 2007) and *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Chadwick, 2008). In addition, *StreetDance* (Giwa and Pasquini, 2010) showcased the British film industry's ability to produce a commercially successful 3D feature film, the first of its kind in British cinema. The British film industry has also made very noticeable concentrated attempts to target youth audiences, particularly young girls. This is evident in the aforementioned *St Trinian's* revival, and *StreetDance*, as well as films such as *Chalet Girl* (Traill, 2011) and *Fast Girls* (2012). Working Title, a prominent brand within British cinema, also made its first attempt at targeting teenage girls with *Wild Child* (Moore, 2008), which incorporated Working Title's key themes of an Anglo-American culture clash within a quaint and idealised version of England into a boarding school-set tween film. Meanwhile, *The Young Victoria* (Vallee, 2009) provided an opportunity for the British 'heritage' genre, which has been a significant strand of film production throughout British cinema's history, to target teenage girls. Alongside this increase in female-centred films is an increased presence of female filmmakers, with Andrea Arnold, Lynne Ramsay, Carol Morley, Lone Scherfig and Amma Asante all emerging within this period, as well as continued success for Gurinder Chadha with films such as *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) and *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008). However, the number of women filmmakers working within British cinema is still significantly fewer than male filmmakers, a trend that is echoed within the film industry more broadly. The films in this thesis were also symptomatic of British cinema's current organisational structures, funded and produced by organisations such as the UKFC – and later the BFI – and BBC Films and FilmFour.

The variety of female-centred films produced since the millennium is all the more remarkable when one considers that Justine Ashby's work on the contemporary British women's film that explores how the key themes of liminality and escape are articulated in films since the 1980s (2010: 161). While Ashby rightly points to the signs of the British women's film being in good health during this period through her analysis of films such as *The Land Girls* (Leland, 1998), *Morvern Callar* (Ramsay, 2002) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002), it was impossible to make a claim for a generic cycle of films as they were too diverse (ibid: 168). In investigating contemporary girl-centred films in British cinema, this thesis has demonstrated the ability to make a claim for not only the increased visibility of female-centred films, but also that these films share a number of commonalities within their constructions of young femininity in terms of aesthetics, themes and narrative structure, which means they can be comfortably be grouped together into numerous thematic chapters. In addition, a number of common themes or tropes emerge continuously across the corpus, regardless of thematic characterisation or genre orientation.

The aim of this thesis was to examine how young femininity is constructed in British cinema in an era broadly defined as postfeminist. There is a small amount of existing work in this area, but dealt with only a small number of films. Angela McRobbie (2004) examined postfeminism in relation to the British film *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Maguire, 2001), while the need for a specifically British understanding of postfeminism was highlighted by Justine Ashby in her article 'Postfeminism in the British Frame' (2005), which examined the relationship between postfeminism and Britain's New Labour government through an analysis of *Bend It Like Beckham*. Louise Wilks (2012) has explored female sexuality in British cinema between 2000 and 2009 within a postfeminist framework, which includes some work on depictions of girls' sexuality in the British tween film. This thesis goes beyond this through exploring a greater range of films and looks beyond sexuality to broader aspects of young feminine identity to gain a more thorough understanding of how postfeminism is modified and articulated within contemporary British cinema.

Each of the case study chapters examined how discourses of girlhood are mediated within contemporary British cinema, through textual analysis of the films themselves, and how thesis discourses circulate extra-textually through analysis of

the films' critical reception and other paratextual materials. The figure of the 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004) has emerged as the dominant construction of girlhood in the twenty-first century. Within this, success is 'constructed as a mainstream experience for young women, and failure is deemed to be the consequence of an individual's limitation' (Harris, 2004: 16). However, the 'can-do' girl is also a 'narrow version of acceptable girlhood' (Projansky, 2014: 1), a 'fantasy promise that if girls work hard,… they can achieve anything… this narrative promises unbelievable happiness and achievement' (Projansky, 2014: 5). The figure of the 'can-do' girl emerged throughout this thesis, but was a particular point of focus in Chapter One's examination of the ambitious young woman the contemporary British sports film. Films such as *Fast Girls, Chalet Girl* and *StretDance* articulated 'can-do' girlhood through the use of sport to uphold neoliberal ideals, suggesting that if their female sporting protagonists work hard, and make the right choices, they can achieve their goals. This was facilitated by the use of glossy aesthetics, which formed a significant part of the films' production and reception discourses. This was focused around the idea that these films were atypically British in their deviation from the social realist mode of filmmaking, which is seemingly synonymous with British cinema. Producers often highlighted their desire to create aspirational aesthetics – despite working with relatively low budgets – in opposition to 'gritty' British films. Critics, meanwhile, praised this deviation. This was most evident in the reception *of StreetDance*, where the film's ability to create a rarely seen version of London that was glamorous and aspirational was considered one of the film's main strengths. However, while the films ultimately celebrated neoliberal, can-do girlhood, the issue of class was prominent within both *Fast Girls* and *Chalet Girl*, in which the context of the economic recession functioned to highlight the difficulties faced by their working-class protagonists and their lack of resources to help them achieve their goals, even if this is eventually overcome.

Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank* was also discussed in terms of this chapter's focus on ambitious young women. The construction of working-class Mia (Katie Jarvis) as an 'at-risk' girl (Harris, 2004) served as a useful counterpoint to the chapter's earlier exploration of the 'can-do' girl and demonstrated how discourses of girls' ambition are mediated within British social realism. What was particularly interesting in this regard was the way in which this discourse also circulated around Katie Jarvis.

Jarvis' status as an 'at-risk' girl was highlighted, and then the idea of her being 'discovered' by Arnold and her subsequent success was co-opted into a 'can-do' discourse to present her as a girl who was determined to make the most of the opportunities afforded her. The inclusion of *Fish Tank* alongside films such as *StreetDance* and *Chalet Girl* showcases how discourses of girls' ambitions are mediated within very specific ways in contemporary British cinema as part of a dialogue about what it means to be a British ambitious girl.

Chapter Two examined discourses of girls' education within films set in single-sex girls' schools, typically public or boarding schools. It was noted how the girls' school film had emerged in a variety of ways in recent British cinema. Contemporary-set films such as *St Trinain's* and *Wild Child* were positioned alongside films set in the 1960s, such as *An Education* (Scherfig, 2009) and *The Falling* (Morley, 2014) in order to examine how these enclosed and highly regulated environments functioned to explore twenty-first century anxieties about girls' sexuality, particularly concern over the premature 'sexualisation' (Ringrose, 2013) of young girls. Drawing on Wilks (2012b), the chapter demonstrated how the characters in *Wild Child* and *St Tinian's* show some awareness of, and make attempts to conform to, postfeminist 'raunch culture' (Levy, 2006). However, the texts also suggested that the characters were not as sexually knowing as they thought they were, and how an awareness of sex did not necessarily equate to sexual activity. Similarly, the films' reception discourses more often than not deemed the films' depictions of girls' sexuality as tame and not colluding with moral panics.

Despite being set in the 1960s, *The Falling* also engaged with contemporary discourses about girls' sexuality through the idea of the Ophelia narrative, whereby the figure of the hysterical adolescent girl as a symbol of girl-in-crisis. However, in its depiction of girlhood hysteria, *The Falling* refutes the idea of girls as vulnerable examples of failed femininity. Instead, it is the intense regulatory nature of the institution that is seen as the problem, in that it stifles female creativity and rebellion. There is an implicit criticism of the education system within many of these films, such as the idea that St Trinian's provides a space for girls to be free from the constraints of the National Curriculum, or suggestion that Abbey Mount provides the characters in *Wild Child* with more traditional values, such as fellowship and loyalty,

which the film suggests have been lost in contemporary mainstream education. This criticism is all the more interesting given how girls were viewed as the beneficiaries and figureheads of New Labour's education policies during this period.

While the girls' school films explored the dynamics between groups of girls, Chapter Three's exploration of girl friendship in recent British films focused on the friendships between pairs of girls. The chapter drew on Alison Winch's work on the postfeminist sisterhood, and the idea that in postfeminist culture friendship between women is strategic in order to attain "representability" (Negra, 2009) and the 'perfect self' of postfeminist femininity (Winch, 2013: 2). Winch also notes how friendships between girls, as opposed to adult women, are 'highly ambivalent and emotionally messy' (ibid: 140). This was evident throughout Chapter Three, as the friendships depicted were both intense and effusive, and, at times, manipulative and controlling. This was particularly evident in *Me Without You* (Goldbacher, 2001) and *My Summer of Love* (Pawlikowski, 2004). However, within British cinema's depictions of teenage friendship, the characters fail to gain this "representability", instead they remain 'nobodies'. In addition, postfeminist culture claims that the 'true self' of ideal postfeminist femininity can be discovered through the makeover process. While the teenage characters in the films examined in this chapter all participate in makeovers, there is a sense that this makeover is not a permanent transformation because it is not the girls' 'right' and true identity. This is particularly the case for working-class characters, such as Mona (Natalie Press) in *My Summer of Love* and Nicole (Kerrie Hayes) in *Kick*s (Heymann, 2008). Although these friendships do enable the characters to gain a greater sense of their own identity, the idea of an 'authentic' identity is not necessarily equated with the ideal postfeminist identity here.

The final case study chapter explored constructions of young femininity in historical films centred around royal and aristocratic young women. The chapter highlighted the influence of *Elizabeth* (Kapur, 1998) as a film that 'marked a significant change in direction for the British historical film in the 1990s' due to its departure from the more restrained style of heritage cinema during the 1980s (Chapman, 2005: 299). The film's incorporation of postfeminist 'girl power' discourses and notions of 'having it all' are also evident in the more recent films explored in this thesis, which

are 'filtered through the lens of the postfeminist movement' (Vidal, 2012: 105). The films, therefore, engage with the postfeminist discourses explored throughout this thesis within a prefeminist world. *The Other Boleyn Girl* constructs Anne Boleyn (Natalie Portman) as a postfeminist ambitious can-do girl but questions whether she pays the ultimate price for her ambition. Similarly, in *The Young Victoria* Victoria (Emily Blunt) must share her power with Albert (Rupert Friend) when her attempt at ruling by herself leads to a constitutional crisis. In *The Duchess* (Dibb, 2008), Georgiana must choose between her private desire for Charles Grey (Dominic Cooper) and her public duty to the Duke (Ralph Fiennes). This conflict between private desire and public expectations – from which they cannot escape - is evident throughout these historical films. Moreover, it is suggested that the pressure of this conflict leads to anxiety and a fragmented sense of identity as the characters must construct personas as they struggle to 'become' the images we recognise from history books. This struggle with identity is also evident in *Belle* (Asante, 2013), which draws on the conventions of Austen adaptations in contemporary British cinema and television to explore the issue of race and lack of representation in the heritage genre. Here Dido Belle (Gugu Mibatha Raw), an aristocratic woman of colour in eighteenth-century England struggles to find her place in society. However, as with all of the historical films discussed, any pertinent political issues that are raised about women's place in society and lack of freedom are subsumed into a romance narrative and thus depoliticised.

In examining how postfeminist girlhood is mediated in contemporary British cinema through British cinema's constructions of young femininity, I have made the case for a nationally-specific postfeminist framework. The aforementioned work by Ashby (2005) also calls for an understanding of postfeminism within a British context, but this is only examined in relation to *Bend It Like Beckham*, while Wilks (2012) examines British cinema's engagement with postfeminsm in relation to female sexuality. Therefore, this thesis has made a significant contribution to this area: examining a large number of films released over a fifteen-year period has enabled me to demonstrate the ways in which postfeminist girlhood has been constructed within a British context within a crucial moment in its mediation and construction. While, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, postfeminism is a pervasive phenomenon of both British and American popular culture, often marked by a degree

of discursive harmony' (Taker and Negra, 2007: 13), this thesis has highlighted numerous points of divergence within British cinema's constructions of young femininity. Postfeminism is noted for its focus on white, middle-class, able-bodied femininity, and to a large extent the films discussed in this thesis conform to this. However, British cinema is also notoriously preoccupied with issues of class and class hierarchies and a number of films explore the intersection between class and gender. This was particularly evident in the sports films discussed in relation to the idea of the 'can-do' girl (Harris, 2004). As mentioned, both *Fast Girls* and *Chalet Girl* imply that their protagonists' working-class status, and their inability to partake in consumer culture, could hamper their success, even if this is eventually overcome. Indeed *Fast Girls* suggests that class is a bigger barrier than race when it comes to girls achieving success. The intersection between class and gender is most apparent here in the construction of Mia in *Fish Tank* as an 'at-risk' girl who has ambitions but cannot achieve them. The paring of a working-class character with a middle-class character was also a key feature of the films discussed in Chapter Three's examination of girl friendship through the pairing of working-class Mona and middle-class Tamsin (Emily Blunt) in *My Summer of Love*, and Nicole (Kerrie Hayes) and Jasmine (Nichola Burley) in *Kicks*. Within these films, there is a sense that, although none of the girls really manage to achieve "representability" (Negra, 2009) and the postfeminist 'perfect self' (Winch, 2013: 2), the working-class characters in particular seem to *know* they will not be able to achieve and maintain this, despite their best efforts.

Postfeminist culture depicts women as 'empowered consumers' of fashion and beauty products, where the makeover is 'key ritual of female coming into being' (Negra, 2009: 123) that allows for the 'revelation of the self that has been there all along' (ibid: 124). The makeover trope is evident in a number of films discussed in this thesis, particularly Chapter Three, where it is seen as playing an important role in the development of girls' friendships. However, there are two key points of divergence here. Firstly, these films the makeover is facilitated by the swapping of clothes the girls already own, which undermines the idea of the makeover as inextricably linked to consumer culture. In addition, in these films there is sense that the makeover does not reveal the 'self that has been there all along' (ibid) but rather it is merely a temporary transformation that is inauthentic and not the 'real' self.

This is evident not only in the films that explore friendship, but also in *An Education* and in the historical films, where clothes enable the construction of an artificial persona. There is also a sense that consumer culture is excessive and characteristic of American culture. This is most evident in *Wild Child*, where British girlhood is constructed in opposition to the seemingly brash and excessive American consumer culture exhibited by Poppy (Emma Roberts), as the Abbey Mount girls attempt to construct a postfeminist identity through second-hand clothes purchased from charity shops. Poppy's attachment to designer labels is constructed as ridiculous within the context of the British boarding school and she undergoes a 'make-under' that enables her to reveal a more 'natural' feminine identity that is deemed more authentic.

This idea of excessive American consumer culture is also evident in *St Trinian's* and its engagement with celebrity culture. When the girls appear on television, they enlist the help of American PR expert J.J. French (Mischa Barton), who instructs them on how to behave and the reveals the opportunities they could have, which suggests that participation in contemporary celebrity culture is something Britain has learnt from America. Celebrity culture is intrinsically linked to contemporary postfeminist girlhood, and this something that *Kicks* specifically engages with. The film's exploration of contemporary celebrity culture is nationally - and, to an extent, locally – specific as it is positioned within the UK's 'WAG' culture that has strong associations with the city of Liverpool, in which the film is set. However, the film depicts celebrity culture as hollow and the girls are unable to 'become' (Kennedy, 2012) celebrities, instead they remain 'nobodies'.

In examining constructions of young femininity in British cinema, this thesis is also positioned as an attempt to counter the masculine, author-led bias within British cinema. Many of the filmmakers featured in this thesis claimed they had created films that were atypical within British cinema. This is evident in discussions of *Fast Girls*, *StreetDance*, *Kicks* and *Albatross* in particular. The production discourses surrounding these films all positioned the films as in opposition to 'typical' British films, where British film was synonymous with 'dark', 'gritty' and 'drab' social realism. The fact that British cinema is considered in this way highlights the masculine auteurist bias within it. In including a number of commercial films aimed

specifically at young girls alongside more 'typical' independent auteur films, I have provided these critically and culturally maligned films with much needed academic attention and demonstrated that they are worthy of consideration in relation to British cinema's output in the twenty first century. Moreover, the fact that I have been able to link these diverse films together in ways that highlight the commonalities within the films' constructions of young femininity demonstrates that British cinema's engagement with contemporary girlhood extends across a variety of genres and intended audiences, reinforcing the idea that these films should be valued in academic discussions of British cinema.

Although this thesis has gone some way to intervene in work on young femininity in contemporary British cinema, it has also presented avenues for further research. One such potential area of investigation is to examine young femininity in British television during this period. In the introduction to this thesis I acknowledged British cinema's close relationship with television through production companies such as BBC Films and FilmFour but comparing British cinema's constructions of young femininity in relation to television went beyond the scope of this project. In her work on the female ensemble drama, Vicky Ball notes how the FED is part of 'television's attempt to construct and address a more pluralized sense of female identity' (2013: 246). Therefore, it would be useful to find out if British television since the millennium offers a greater range of young feminine identities than is apparent here in this exploration of contemporary British cinema.

In exploring British cinema's engagement with discourses of girlhood, this thesis draws on work by sociologists working in Girlhood Studies, such as Anita Harris (2004), Jessica Ringrose (2013) and Kim Allen (2011), whose work often seeks to challenge dominant ideas about girlhood through ethnographic research. However, the main aim of this project was to explore how young femininity is *constructed* in contemporary British cinema. As such, I could not possibly – nor would I want to – speak on behalf of the girls who make up the intended audiences for many of the texts I analyse. Therefore, a second area of further research would be to carry out ethnographic research into young female audiences and their responses to the representations of femininity within these films. Moreover, while critical reception study was a useful method in terms of gauging how discourses of girlhood circulate

outside of the films themselves, I am aware that journalistic film criticism is comprised of mainly middle-aged male critics, who are not part of the intended audiences for the majority of these films. As Peter Bradshaw states in his review of *Wild Child*, 'Here is another girly-tweeny movie on which I suspect I am about as qualified to pass judgment as on variant patterns of weather on the moons of Saturn' (Bradshaw, 2008b). This discrepancy between the film's intended audience and film critics also contributes to the aforementioned lack of cultural value attributed to these films. While I have made attempts to address this within the scope of this thesis, audience research would help to further my intervention.

Overall, although some films attempt to challenge this, British cinema's constructions of young femininity in the twenty-first century adhere to the somewhat narrow neoliberal postfeminist feminine identity in line with broader culture. As a feminist researcher, I find this lack of range of feminine identities disappointing. However, the fact that there has been a proportionate increase in female-centred films during this period – particularly films with young female protagonists – across a variety of genres is heartening given British cinema's well-documented preoccupation with masculinity, particularly during the 1990s (Leggott, 2008; Monk, 2000; Spicer, 2001). In undertaking this research, I have demonstrated that girl-centred films have formed a significant part of British cinema's output since the millennium as a response to the increased visibility of girlhood in popular culture more broadly, and that these films deserve be included within current discussions and debates within the field of British cinema.

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The Young Victoria (2009) [DVD] Directed by Jean-Marc Vallée. UK: Momentum Pictures.

This is England (2006) [DVD] Directed by Shane Meadows. UK: Studiocanal.

Tomb Raider (2001) [DVD] Directed by Simon West. UK: Paramount Home Entertainment.

Trainspotting (1996) [DVD] Directed by Danny Boyle. UK: Channel 4.

Under the Skin (1997) [DVD] Directed by Carine Adler. UK: BFI.

Victoria the Great (1937) [DVD] Directed by Herbert Wilcox. UK: Optimum Home Entertainment.

Wild Child (2008) [DVD] Directed by Nick Moore. UK: Universal Pictures UK.

Wings of the Dove (1997) [DVD] Directed by Iain Softley. UK: Optimum Home Entertainment.

Wish You Were Here (1987) [DVD] Directed by David Leland. UK: Channel 4.

Wuthering Heights (2011) [DVD] Directed by Andrea Arnold. UK: Artificial Eye.

Television Programmes

Ally McBeal (1997-2001) Fox.

Benefits Street (2014-) Channel Four.

Boys From the Blackstuff (1982) BBC Two.

Bleak House (2005) BBC One.

Britain's Got Talent (2007-) ITV.

British Film Forever (2007) BBC Two.

Brookside (1982-2003) Channel Four.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003) Fox.

Dawson's Creek (1998-2003) Channel Four.

Downton Abbey (2010-2015) ITV.

Drifters (2013-) E4.

Fawlty Towers (1975-1979) BBC One.

Girls (2012-) HBO.

Gossip Girl (2007-2011) CWTV/ ITV.

Hannah Montana (2006-2011) Disney Channel.

Made in Chelsea (2011-) E4.

Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley (2008) Channel Four.

My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding (2011-) Channel Four.

My Super Sweet 16 (2005-) MTV.

Pride and Prejudice (1995) BBC One.

Sex and the City (1998-2004) HBO.

The O.C. (2003-2007) CTV/ E4

The Tudors (2007-2010) HBO.

Two Broke Girls (2011-) Warner Bros.

X Factor (2004-) ITV.

Music

Dance of the Knights (1935, written by Sergei Prokofiev).

*Life's a Bitc*h (1994, written by Ronnie Wilson, Oliver Scott, Nasir Jones and Anthony Cruz, performed by Nas).

On the Rebound (1961, written by Floyd Cramer, Floyd Cramer, Duke Ellington, Barney Bigard and Irving Mills

One in a Million (2010, written by P.Neil, S.Naqui and K.Qazzaz, performed by Swiss Feat. Music Kidz).

Start Again Tomorrow (2010, written by Dan Glendining, performed by BackCar).

Voyage of the Moon (1969, written by Donavan, performed by Mary Hopkin).