WHAT ARE LITTLE (EMPOWERED) GIRLS MADE OF?
THE DISCOURSE OF GIRL POWER IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. POPULAR CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

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Beginning in the late 1990s, U.S. popular culture has been inundated with messages promoting "girl power." This dissertation examines representations of girl power in the mass media, as well as popular literature and advertising images, in order to interrogate the ways in which the discourse of girl power has shaped cultural understandings of girlhood in the past twenty years. It also examines the ways in which that discourse has functioned as both an extension of and a response to social concerns about the safety, health and emotional well-being of girls in the United States at the turn of the millennium. Girl power popular culture texts are often discussed by commentators, fans and their creators as attempts to use media narratives and images to empower girls, either by providing them with models for how to enact empowered femininity or by providing them with positive representations that make them feel good about themselves as girls. However, this project is arguably limited by the focus in girl power texts on girls' individual (as opposed to their structural) empowerment, as well as the failure of these texts to conceive of the exercise of power outside of patriarchal models. Girl Power as it has been articulated in U.S. popular culture is full of contradictory messages about adolescent female empowerment, as well as girls' places within U.S. society. This dissertation argues, however, that rather than trying to reconcile these contradictions, girl power must be understood in terms of the inconsistencies in and tensions between its

varying articulations, all of which shape how we as a culture understand what it is and

what it means to be an empowered girl at the present moment.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

IT'S ABOUT POWER

In the Episode "Lessons" from the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy begins schooling her younger sister, Dawn, in the training methods of the all-female vampire slayer tradition. As Dawn engages in her first solo fight with a vampire in the local cemetery, Buffy offers her the following insight into gaining the advantage in combat:

> Buffy: It's about power—who's got it, who knows how to use it. So, who's got the
>
> power, Dawn?
>
> Dawn: Well, I've got the stake.
>
> Buffy: The stake is not the power . . . Who's got the power?
>
> Dawn: (grudgingly) He does.
>
> Buffy: Never forget it. It doesn't matter how well prepped you are or how well armed
>
> you are. You're a little girl—
>
> Dawn: Woman.
>
> Buffy: Little woman . . .
>
> [At this point the vampire lunges at Buffy, but she directs him to attack Dawn instead.]
>
> Buffy: Power. He's got it, he's going to use it. You don't have it, so . . . [Dawn trips
>
> the vampire and attempts to stake him] . . . use that. Perfect.

Scenes such as this one have become common in the U.S. media in the last two decades, as popular culture productions examining both girls' victimization and their empowerment have appeared in large numbers. From the Spice Girls, to The Disney's Channel's wildly popular *Hannah Montana,* to films like *What a Girl Wants* and *Legally Blonde*, recording artists, television series, films, Web sites, and magazines with vaguely pro-girl messages have infiltrated

the cultural mainstream, ostensibly celebrating girl culture, while simultaneously rendering girlhood both a highly valued consumer market and a commodity with a highly marketable consumer value. This rise in girl-centric mass media texts has coincided in the United States with an increase in public attention focused on the physical and emotional welfare of girls and the opportunities available to them. Concerns arising out of these issues have also been articulated at a number of institutional sites within U.S. society in recent years, including both print and television news coverage focused on a host of reported crises threatening the development and the well-being of girls. At various points such concerns have encompassed everything from eating disorders to school bullying to rising instances of HIV infection and pregnancy, the latter of which reached its highest rate among U.S. teenagers in 1991 (Stodgehill 54).

At the same time, questions of how representations of femininity across popular culture texts might contribute to the psychic and the social barriers encountered by girls coming of age in the United States in the transitional years between the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries has given rise to the suggestion that a possible remedy to these crises might be found in the generation of independent, confident and assertive media role models who can offer young women alternatives to hegemonic constructions of femininity and female power. Beginning in the 1990s there has been a proliferation of texts within the U.S. pop culture arena that appear to take part in this project through their endorsement of what has come to be popularly identified as "girl power." These anthems, narratives and images of young women who talk back, fight back and attempt to take back the power denied to them on the basis of their gender have determined the parameters through which girl power has come to be understood as a discursive strategy aimed at promoting adolescent female empowerment, as well as establishing the terms through

which the discourse of girl power itself has been analyzed.

However, while the phrase "girl power" has become ubiquitous within the popular vernacular in recent years, and calls for the empowerment of young women have resonated at a number of sites within U.S. society, the precise definition of girl power remains decidedly unclear. Its varied (and often contradictory) manifestations within those cultural artifacts identified as expressions of the girl power ethos make it difficult to determine exactly what girl power is, either as a philosophy or as a set of cultural or political practices. Similarly, while the phrase has been used by both media scholars and members of the popular press to discuss so-called girl power texts, few attempts have been made to examine girl power in its own right, or to specify the values it may or may not be thought to encompass. This has left the discourse of girl power undertheorized in media studies, cultural studies and girls' studies scholarship, even as the term has been widely used to discuss various aspects of contemporary girl culture. Given the effect that girl power rhetoric has had on the way that girls are represented within U.S. popular culture, and the influence that that rhetoric has had on the way that we as a culture conceive of girlhood, this dissertation seeks to remedy the gaps in existing scholarship surrounding girl power by examining it as a significant cultural discourse in and of itself, rather than as an ancillary by-product of particular media texts or pop culture icons that have been associated with the promotion of girl power messages.

To this end, this study analyzes girl power as a discursive formation in the Foucauldian sense; that is, it takes the discourse of girl power to be constituted through a collection of "objects, types of statement, concepts [and] thematic choices" that delineate a particular version of girlhood (Foucault, *Archeology* 38). This version of girlhood, in turn, is constructed through news reports, legislative initiatives, popular culture representations, cultural practices, and

opinions expressed in interviews, books, or statements originating from "experts" in girlhood that are all concerned with—and influence how we think about—what it is to be an empowered girl in the U.S. at the present social-historical moment. Far from a unified or coherent understanding of girlhood, the various discursive strands comprising girl power rhetoric are marked by divergences, fissures, and contradictions in how they define girls, how and where they locate the power girls are lacking or the power girls have access to, and the strategies for empowerment—as well as the type of empowerment—that they endorse. This study does not seek to reconcile those differences, but rather it aims to explore the ways in which the specific cultural meanings organized under the banner of girl power are created through the inconsistencies in and tensions between its varying articulations. At the same time, while no study of girl power would be complete without considering all of the sites of enunciation from which this discourse emerges, this project focuses primarily on constructions of girl power in the mass media because it has been the principal site at which girl power (in all its various incarnations) has been formulated.

In examining representations of girl power in popular culture texts produced between 1990 and the present, this study has two central goals. The first is to interrogate the relationship between girl power discourse and U.S. feminism. Drawing on Second and Third Wave feminist scholarship, postfeminist scholarship, and theoretical analyses of the anti-feminist backlash, this study considers the ways in which girl power is situated at the intersection between feminist, postfeminist and anti-feminist discourses, constituting a contested ideological space in which definitions of femininity and female power are constantly being negotiated, reformulated and reworked. This enterprise is further complicated by the shifting, and at times overlapping, concerns of feminism, postfeminism and anti-feminism, the values and practices attached to

which are not static, but rather have developed over time and continue to develop in response to one another, and which different theorists define in slightly different ways.

For the purposes of this study, I will be using the term "feminism" to refer to a collection of varied, multifaceted, and, at times, conflicting discourses and social movements loosely unified in terms of their investment in challenging women's devalued status within patriarchal culture and improving the material conditions under which women live their lives. The designators "First Wave," "Second Wave" and "Third Wave" refer to three distinct (yet also overlapping) schools of feminist thought, differentiated by periodization, but also by political goals and philosophical principles. In the United States, First Wave feminisms are generally considered to encompass writings and political activism around women's rights in the period from roughly the mid-nineteenth century to World War Two. It is most closely associated with the suffrage movement, although First Wave activism was also organized around legislative initiatives concerning women's rights to own and inherit property, as well as the abolition movement in the period before the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862. Second Wave feminisms are generally associated with the academic and activist work that came out of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, and are most closely associated with political reforms concerning reproductive rights and an end to workplace gender discrimination, as well as ideological challenges to hegemonic understandings of sexual difference and the conventional cultural divisions between male and female gender roles predicated upon those understandings. Third Wave feminisms are generally considered to have originated in the 1990s, partly as a response to perceived shortcomings in Second Wave feminisms, and partly as a response to the rhetoric of the backlash. They are most closely associated with interrogations of popular culture and representational practices, a reclamation of

hegemonic femininity, and an emphasis on individual women's processes of coming to feminist consciousness rather than on the collective action emphasized by Second Wave feminisms.

Conversely, following Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, I will be using the term "postfeminism" to refer to "a set of assumptions, widely disseminated within [U.S. popular culture], having to do with the 'pastness' of feminism, whether that supposed pastness is merely noted, mourned, or celebrated" (1). The postfeminist cultural turn has been variously situated in both the 1980s and the 1990s, and is most closely associated with a shift in the rhetoric of female empowerment away from an emphasis on institutional equality between women and men and towards an emphasis on increased choices for women in terms of individual lifestyle, career, or consumer habits. In postfeminist discourse, the greater access to such choices enjoyed by (mostly white, heterosexual, middle-class) women in contemporary U.S. society is routinely invoked to simultaneously celebrate feminism's ostensible successes and to confirm that because of those successes feminism is no longer needed. Likewise, following Susan Faludi's examination of the anti-feminist backlash in the United States in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, I will be using the terms "anti-feminist" and "backlash" to refer to widespread attacks on feminism in the media and in the political arena which promote the idea that feminism has left women miserable and unfulfilled, and that it has harmed American society rather than benefiting it. The backlash is also generally considered to have originated in the 1980s and to have developed as a reactionary response to legislative and social changes accomplished as a result of Second Wave activism.

The values of all three of these discourses inform girl power. At their best, those popular culture texts identified as articulations of the girl power ethos exemplify the circumscribed, at times compromised forms in which feminism is able to find expression within contemporary

U.S. popular culture. At their worst, they illustrate the complicity of popular culture texts in undermining feminist politics, either by representing feminism as irrelevant to girls' lives, by asserting that feminism is harmful to girls, or by commodifying feminism so that girls' empowerment becomes a marketing slogan rather than a political goal. Regardless of how it is situated in relation to contemporary U.S. feminism(s), however, as I will argue in the following chapters, girl power is best understood, not as a discourse that is either feminist, postfeminist or anti-feminist, but rather as a discourse that is simultaneously feminist, postfeminist *and* anti-feminist—often within the same text or body of work.

The second goal of this study is to examine both the ideological and the material effects that girl power discourse has had on mainstream U.S. culture. Although many popular expressions of girl power reference social debates surrounding adolescent femininity and the empowerment of adolescent girls, girl power itself has not evolved into a social movement. Individual girls may have been inspired by expressions of girl power to take up activist work focused on issues believed to have an impact on girls' agency, safety or development, but the discourse of girl power does not encompass an explicitly political agenda (feminist or otherwise), nor does it actively encourage any kind of grassroots organizing or activism on behalf of girls. As such, girl power does not position itself as a political strategy for achieving greater institutional power for girls so much as it positions itself as a set of representational practices that depict empowered girls and the power that they exercise in very specific ways. This is not to suggest that girl power is only a representational trope, nor that the discourse of girl power has been entirely absent from activist initiatives surrounding girls, but rather to point out that activism by and for girls is mostly absent from girl power discourse as it has been articulated within U.S. popular culture, where the emphasis seems to be on using media representations of

girls as a means of facilitating both their individual and their social empowerment. [1]

The relationship between representational practices and political activism has long been a subject of contentious debate within the fields of media and cultural studies. It has also been a key issue in scholarly, artistic and activist feminist work surrounding representational politics, which concerns itself with the links between cultural representations and the transmission of cultural values, the part that cultural representations play in individual processes of self-presentation, and the political uses of representational practices in either maintaining or subverting hegemonic constructions of particular identity categories. Laura Mulvey's *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, Mary Anne Doane's *Femmes Fatale: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, Linda Williams's *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible,"* Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, and Teresa de Lauretis's *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* are among the more prominent scholarly feminist critiques of mainstream representational practices to assert cognitive and behavioral connections between popular culture representations, dominant cultural discourses surrounding femininity and female sexuality, and women's individual enactments of their own gendered and sexual identities under patriarchy. At the same time, the work of painter/sculptor Judy Chicago, photographer and filmmaker Lorna Simpson, mixed media artist Joyce Wieland, collage artist Barbara Kruger, photographer Cindy Sherman, and digital artist Juliet Davis, as well as the culture jamming practices engaged in by activist groups like The Guerrilla Girls, all employ representational mediums to comment upon mainstream representational practices, as well as to generate alternative representations of women—and, by extension, to attach alternative meanings to womanhood.

Underpinning these feminist interventions into hegemonic representational practices is the belief that (1) representational practices play a part in shaping how we make sense of ourselves and the world around us; and (2) that because radical social change depends upon ideological change as well as institutional changes in the way that our society is organized and operates, that representational practices can function as a component of political action. The emphasis within girl power discourse on representational practices as a means of actualizing girls' empowerment situates popular girl power texts within this latter enterprise, arguably aligning girl power, at least in part, with the goals of other, more explicitly political, feminist projects. In altering the ways in which girls are represented within U.S. popular culture, what girl power claims to offer girls is a supposedly new model of girlhood, in which young women are granted greater agency through physical and emotional strength, boosted confidence, and increased assertiveness. Within girl power discourse, media representations of this model are imbued with the purported ability to empower real-life girls to similarly assert themselves and to refuse instances of individual oppression. This ostensibly empowering model of girlhood is illustrated by the scene from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* cited at the beginning of this section, in which Dawn thwarts a physical attack through a combination of intelligence, ingenuity and combat skills, in which Buffy provides an overt commentary on gendered power dynamics, and in which the tongue-in-cheek reference to Louisa May Alcott's classic pop culture manual for feminine enculturation, the novel *Little Women*, seems intended to set Buffy and Dawn apart from previous, presumably less empowered, popular culture heroines.

However, while the model of empowered adolescent femininity championed by girl power has had a substantial impact on mass media representations of girlhood, altering the way that girls are depicted in a large number of advertisements and popular culture texts, as well as

the way that both media texts and consumer goods are marketed to girls, it has had a negligible impact—if any at all—on the material circumstances under which girls in the U.S. live their lives as girls. Indeed, the circulation of these texts has done little to contribute to actual girls gaining greater access to educational or employment opportunities, greater autonomy in U.S. society, greater legislative rights and protections, or greater status within U.S. culture. This suggests that, unlike the feminist interventions into representational practices mentioned above, girl power ultimately fails to extend its project of cultural transformation beyond questions of representation, taking media depictions of empowered girls as its goal rather than as a starting point for a larger political project. Girl power's positioning of media representations as the object of activism aimed at adolescent female empowerment, rather than a means towards achieving that end, in turn ends up divorcing questions of girls' oppression from the social and political spheres (as well as from the institutional structures that contribute to girls' subordination). Instead it identifies popular culture representations as both the sole cause of and the sole remedy to girls' social marginalization. Thus, one of the more problematic effects of girl power discourse has been to shift strategies for achieving greater social agency for girls away from collective political action and towards individual (and passive) acts of media consumption, with the result that exposure to images, narratives or songs about empowered girls are taken to be acts that are not only individually empowering for their female audiences, but also vehicles through which they can somehow achieve institutional empowerment as well.

Because of the privileging of representational practices as sites for social transformation in girl power discourse, it is largely representations of girl power in U.S. popular culture texts that will be analyzed in this study. Employing the semiotic methods of analysis associated with British cultural studies and a combination of content analysis and poststructuralist practices of

textual deconstruction, my aim is to examine the various meanings attached to girl power through close readings of literary, film, television and popular music texts, as well as to interrogate the potential social, cultural and ideological implications of the model of female power constructed through those texts. In undertaking this analysis, my interest lies primarily in what representations of girl power reveal about how U.S. culture understands girls and how it defines the power they are or should be able to exercise. Girls' embodied practices are implicated in the deployment of girl power, in so far as girl power discourse provides girls with a particular way of conceiving of themselves both as female subjects and as empowered subjects, and therefore, to a certain extent, provides a template for how they can enact their identities as empowered girls. While the interchange between discursive constructions of girl power and embodied expressions of girl power will be given limited consideration in the analysis that follows, this is not a study of girls themselves, nor the ways in which girls use the discourse of girl power in the construction and expression of their gendered identities. Instead, the primary focus of this inquiry is the ways in which girls are represented in girl power discourse, as well as the ways in which that discourse, in turn, attempts to intercede in how we as a culture think about and understand girls, as well as how girls think about and understand themselves as girls.

The Era of Girl Power: The Origins and Evolution of Girl Power Discourse in the U.S.

Girl power is not strictly a U.S. phenomenon, nor has its manifestations been limited only to U.S. girls or to representations of girls in the U.S. mass media. As the focus of this study is on the discourse of girl power as it has been articulated within mainstream U.S. popular culture, though, it is the genesis and evolution of girl power in the United States that will be addressed in this section. Most analyses of girl power place its origins in popular music, a lineage that will be

traced in greater detail below. However, girl power as both a phrase in the popular vernacular and a set of discourses concerning adolescent girls and their empowerment emerges against a constellation of events that brought girls to the forefront of U.S. cultural consciousness and U.S. social concerns in the 1990s. It also intersects with other discourses about girls circulating at the same time, all of which had an effect on how the discourse of girl power developed, the concerns it came to encompass, and the manner in which it has found expression.

Among the more prominent of these events was the publication of a group of bestselling books between 1992 and 2002 that characterize the period encompassing the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century as one of acute crisis for girls in the United States, and that document a host of social and psychological challenges ostensibly threatening the successful development of those girls into confident, assertive, healthy, and emotionally well-adjusted women. The first of these books, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, the 1992 American Association of University Women study on gender bias in U.S. classrooms, argues that educational practices in U.S. schools place girls at a disadvantage by engendering learning environments in which they are routinely silenced or ignored by educators, underrepresented in curricular materials, and actively discouraged from pursing studies in higher-level mathematics or the sciences. The result, the study concludes, is that "although girls and boys enter school roughly equal in measured abilities . . . [t]welve years later, girls have fallen behind their male classmates in key areas," a situation that has consequences far beyond education, as it significantly impacts the employment opportunities available to girls as adults, as well as their economic statuses (3). *How Schools Shortchange Girls* was followed by a series of treatises by educational specialists and activists, as well as smaller-scale ethnographic studies of girls' educational experiences authored by feminist scholars, all of which built upon the AAUW

findings. The most notable among this latter category of publications is perhaps Peggy

Orenstein's influential *Schoolgirls: Young Girls, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap*,

published in 1994, which examines girls' marginalization in U.S. classrooms through field

observations conducted in two California middle schools.

1994 also saw the publication of psychologist Mary Pipher's widely discussed *Reviving*

Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls, which received a great deal of media coverage

and spawned an educational video produced by the Massachusetts-based Media Education

Foundation for use in high school classrooms.[2] Using case studies drawn from her practice in

treating pre-adolescent and adolescent girls, Pipher argues in this book that U.S. society in the

present moment is dominated by a "girl poisoning culture" that "limits girls' development,

truncates their wholeness and leaves many of them traumatized" (12). According to Pipher, the

damaging messages about their self-worth, their bodies and their sexuality that this culture

communicates to girls today has left them far more vulnerable than ever before to low self-

esteem, depression, and engagement in a number of self-harming practices, as well as at an

increased risk for eating disorders, drug abuse, suicide, sexual assault and sexually transmitted

infections. While Phipher's book drew attention to the harm that our culture ostensibly does to

girls, as well as the harm that they do to themselves in trying to cope with the cultural pressures

placed upon them, Rachel Simmons's *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*

and Rosalind Wiseman's *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques,*

Gossip, Boyfriends and Other Realities of Adolescence, both published in 2002, shifted the focus

of public debates surrounding girls' wellbeing to the harm girls ostensibly do to one another.

Investigating the ways in which "teasing, gossiping, and reputations impact [girls'] sense of self,

social competency [and] friendship" (Wiseman 112), as well as the ways in which girls

supposedly deploy these tools as weapons against one another, these books paint a sensationalistic picture of U.S. middle schools and high schools as sites of psychological warfare, where girls ruthlessly engage in tactics of teasing, gossip, ostracism and public humiliation in order to establish themselves in dominant positions among their peers.

While the circulation of all of these books brought concerns about girls and their development into a central position within the public sphere, with the exception of the AAUW report, they also psychologized the problems that they claim girls face in that development, locating the causes of these problems, as well as strategies for their remediation, in girls themselves rather than in the social and cultural structures under which they live their lives as girls. At the same time, in attributing issues such as girls' reported decline in academic performance during adolescence to emotional or behavioral pathologies rather than to the social institutions that create the conditions under which girls' intellectual development is stifled, individual girls end up being pathologized in this literature for "falling victim" to oppression, while girlhood itself becomes pathologized, with the physical and emotional effects of oppression recast as normative (psychologically inherent) aspects of girlhood.

The impact of this literature on cultural understandings of girls will be examined in greater detail in chapter two in relation to the emergence of the figure of the "problem girl" in feminist, educational, psychological and political discourses circulating in the United States in the last two decades. For now, what is most significant about the books mentioned above in terms of the origins of girl power is that they instantiate a view of girls as perpetually victimized—whether by the educational system, by U.S. society, by gender, beauty and body ideals reinforced through popular culture texts, by their parents, by heterosexual teenage boys, or by each other. In much of this literature, girls are not only portrayed as victims, but they are

largely assumed to be helpless to fight back against their victimization, requiring the intervention of parents, educators, adult feminists, or medical, psychological and sociological experts to rescue them from their oppression. While these books thus imply that girls are incapable of effecting their own empowerment, they nonetheless do insist on a need for that empowerment, a notion that was eventually validated (at least in part) through their dissemination.

The need for girls' empowerment was also examined in, and afforded credence through, a number of scholarly essays and books on girls, their cultural practices, and the popular culture texts that they consume that were also published during this same period. These include *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity*, edited by Sharon Mazzarella and Norma Odom Pecora, *Delinquents and Debutants: Twentieth Century Girls' Culture*, edited by Sherrie Inness, *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity*, edited by Anita Harris, and Mary Celeste Kearney's *Girls Make Media*. This academic interest in girls extended into college classrooms and curricula at around the same time, engendering the field of feminist inquiry that has come to be institutionalized as girls' studies. Although the focus of girls' studies scholarship has largely been on the cultural construction of girlhood rather than girls' psychological development, it shares the concerns over the impact that cultural messages about gender have on girls' subjectivity found in the psychological and sociological analyses of girlhood discussed above. For example, in a passage that echoes, in many ways, the projects outlined by those books, Mazzaerella and Pecora conclude their introduction to *Growing Up Girls* with a call to "encourage and educate girls to resist, deconstruct, and negotiate [cultural] messages and in the process create a sense of self that speaks in a loud voice" (7). Significantly, it is alongside such calls for strategies to empower adolescent girls in both girls' studies scholarship and popular guidance manuals like *Reviving Ophelia*, *Schoolgirls* and *Odd Girl Out*

that the discourse of girl power first appears.

As Sinikka Aapola, Marnina Gronick and Anita Harris point out, there is a way in which girl power can be read as an alternative model of girlhood to the one at the center of "Reviving Ophelia" discourse (their term for the debates concerning girls' social victimization stemming from the investigations into girlhood by Pipher, Orenstein and others writing in a similar vein). In their estimation, girl power "re-writes the passivity, voicelessness, vulnerability and sweet naturedness linked to . . . 'Reviving Ophelia' discourse," by replacing them with "a new, take-charge dynamism" (19). Therefore, they argue that girl power and "Reviving Ophelia" discourse—what I will be referring to from this point forward as girl problem discourse—provide girls with two "different forms of subjectivity available to [them]" (53), which, while competing and contradictory in their claims about girlhood and their models for its enactment, nonetheless both "emphasize young female subjectivities as projects that can be shaped by the individual" and "encourage young women to work on themselves, either through the DIY self-invention and 'girls can do anything' rhetoric of girl power, or through the self-help books and programmes that are available to transform girls in crisis" (54).

The point that Aapola et al. make about both girl power and girl problem discourse positioning girls as works-in-progress, as well as stressing the need for girls to engage in projects of self-transformation in order to successfully negotiate the passage from adolescence to adulthood, is well taken. I would like to suggest, however, that rather than a "rewriting" of girl problem discourse, girl power is both the product of and an answer to the concerns about girls raised within that discourse. In this sense, girl power is not an oppositional discourse to girl problem discourse so much as it is an outgrowth of girl problem rhetoric, with girl power figuring as one more strategy for accomplishing the calls for the empowerment of girls

originating within girl problem discourse. Thus, while their characterizations of girls, the beliefs about girlhood that they instantiate, and the models of embodied girlhood that they offer are indeed different, the goals of these two discourses are aligned in their commitment to facilitating girls' empowerment.

This is not to say that there are not significant philosophical differences between girl power and girl problem discourse. Girl problem discourse emphasizes the toll taken on girls by the purported challenges they face in their development, while girl power emphasizes their ability to meet those challenges. Likewise, girl problem discourse tends to emphasize the role of adults in empowering girls, while girl power tends to emphasize girls' roles in empowering themselves. However, since both discourses insist on girls' need for empowerment, I would like to further suggest that one of the central issues in analyzing and critiquing them should be the differences in the strategies they each endorse for accomplishing this empowerment, the most significant of which is perhaps the differing roles accorded to the mass media by each of them in this project.

Central to much of the girl problem literature cited above is the assertion that media representations play an enormous part in the damage ostensibly done to girls' psyches during their teen years by the United States' "girl poisoning culture." In contrast, girl power discourse identifies the generation of positive media depictions of girls as a principal strategy for their empowerment, and thus positions media representations as a way of *countering* girls' oppression rather than as its cause. A large number of popular culture texts associated with girl power discourse (those originating within the mass media, as well as those originating in literature and the performing arts[3]) appear to take up this project by resignifying interests or activities designated as indicators of girlhood in ways that attempt to invest them with more positive

values than they have traditionally been assigned within U.S. culture as a whole. They also claim to provide young women with role models who (in theory at least) offer them access to empowering versions of adolescent femininity. In this way, within girl power discourse, the empowerment of girls is tied to cultural texts that celebrate girls, encourage them to be confident, assertive, and daring, or promote messages of self-acceptance, self-love and self-worth.

While it is easy to see how media representations that make girls feel good about themselves might contribute to their empowerment on an individual level, as noted above, the question of whether or not such representations can contribute to their empowerment on an institutional level is far more problematic. Girl power discourse is full of messages exhorting girls to be strong, assertive and confident, in which empowerment is constituted through girls' believing in themselves, standing up for their rights, and demanding that their personhood be acknowledged and respected. What such messages tend to ignore, though, is that empowerment for real-life girls is constituted through more than a positive self-image or a confident attitude— largely because telling girls to believe that they can do anything is meaningless unless they live in a society in which they are actually extended the opportunity to do anything. Thus, programs for girls' empowerment like the Rock and Roll Camp for Girls (which is discussed in greater detail in the next section) or the feminist summer camp founded by prominent Third Wave writers and activists Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards,[4] locate girls' empowerment in their engagement in projects for social transformation rather than engagement in the programs for individual self-transformation touted by girl power discourse. To this end, they encourage girls' involvement in the public sphere, whether in the form of activism, public policy work or the production and distribution of creative work, rather than encouraging girls to work on themselves in order to better cope in a society in which they—and their social contributions—are

largely devalued.

At the same time, while girl power as it has been represented in popular culture texts most often takes the form of spirited girls displaying defiance in the face of victimization, the empowerment of actual girls in U.S. society involves much more than just girls refusing to accept their subordinate social status. Indeed, empowerment for girls in the real-world setting of the United States in the twenty first century takes a somewhat different form from the empowerment embodied by girls who populate mass media girl power texts. While their fictional counterparts exercise power almost exclusively on an individual level, the empowerment of real-life girls is often tied to struggles over access to institutional power, whether it is Katie Hnida insisting on her right to play football at the University of Colorado in 1999 in spite of facing resistance from coaches and teammates—as well as being subjected to sexual harassment and sexual assault by her fellow players, Kiri Davis using her award-winning short film *A Girl Like Me* (which she directed in 2007 at the age of sixteen) to challenge cultural attitudes surrounding race and female beauty ideals,[5] or Constance McMillan fighting to take her girlfriend to her senior prom in Fulton, Mississippi in 2010. This is also true of the countless girls who, outside of the national spotlight, decline to play dumb in the classroom or to accept sexual harassment in the hallways as a routine part of high school, refuse to go on diets or to apologize for their weight, come out as survivors of physical and/or sexual violence, speak out against acts of brutality, hostility or discrimination based on their socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identification, and/or physical ability, or reject messages that they are less intelligent, competent, valuable or capable because they are girls. Empowerment for these girls is not about vanquishing their oppressors in fantastic displays of physical force, but rather about countering systemic forms of oppression by engaging in activist

campaigns—but also every-day forms of resistance—aimed at creating a society in which girls have access to social, cultural and political power, and in which empowerment is measured by U.S. society embracing a positive view of girls rather than girls feeling positive about themselves.

In this light, if the question of what kinds of power girls are granted in mass media representations of girl power are central to evaluating the deployment of those representations as instruments for adolescent female empowerment, so too is the question of how girl power narratives depict girls exercising power. In same way that mass media girl power texts tend to limit their conceptualization of empowerment to individual(ist) assertions of agency, they also tend to conceive of both agency and power exclusively in terms of acts of domination and force. Thus, they not only replicate hegemonic understandings of power, but because hegemonic understandings of power are rooted in patriarchal ideology, they also endorse a model of power that is articulated in what are understood within U.S. culture to be decidedly masculinist terms. This points to the ways in which a large number of girl power texts are able to endorse pro-girl messages without promoting feminist values. It also illustrates the ways in which "positive" media representations are not the same thing as subversive media representations, a distinction that is often collapsed in both girl power rhetoric and critical evaluations of girl power texts. Finally, it highlights the ways in which girl power texts can celebrate girls' power while still dismissing or diminishing power that is exercised in what are culturally deemed to be "feminine" ways. Indeed, if a large number of popular girl power narratives are more ambivalent than affirmative when it comes to girls' exercise of power (a claim that will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters), they are also far more invested in supporting patriarchal models of power than providing an alternative to them. As a result, girl power is overwhelmingly

conceived of in patriarchal terms in mass media girl power texts, and girls' power is only

celebrated, recognized and/or legitimated when it reinforces the status quo of patriarchal power

relations—both of which place significant limitations on the efficacy of the deployment of girl

power narratives as tools for the empowerment of real-life girls within the U.S.

These limitations will be discussed more fully in the chapters that follow. For now,

because the emphasis within girl power discourse on positive media representations as

empowering to girls dictates that the role models presented to them in girl power texts are

entirely fictional, and because the focus of this study is thus on representations of fictional

characters in literary, film and television narratives, it is worth acknowledging here that real-life

girls and women have also been invoked as representations of girl power, and are cited (albeit

less frequently) in both the popular press and girls' studies scholarship as empowering role

models for girls. Prominent among these real-life incarnations of girl power are female athletes

like Mia Hamm and women like NASCAR driver Danica Patrick who have distinguished

themselves in fields traditionally dominated by men.   As such, the gold medal victory for the

United States' 1996 Women's Olympic soccer team, the U.S. Women's Soccer Team's World

Cup win in 1998, and the establishment of the WNBA in 1997 all played a significant role in

defining and popularizing the notion of girl power in the United States, even if these events are

often overlooked in historical accounts of its origins, which tend to situate the genesis of girl

power exclusively in the "revolution girl-style now" rallying cry of the 1990s Riot Grrrl scene

and the unapologetically brash, flirty, in-your-face femininity endorsed by the Spice Girls.

Articulations of Girl Power in Popular Music: Riot Grrrls v. the Spice Girls

Although the Spice Girls are generally credited with coining the phrase "girl power,"

accounts of the development of the concept often cite both the Riot Grrrl subculture and the Spice Girls as its originators. Aapola et al. note that girl power "is usually traced back to . . . a loosely formed movement of young, mainly white and middle-class women, a large proportion of whom identified as queer, who gathered in Washington, DC and Olympia, Washington in the United States [in the early 1990s] and who called themselves 'Riot Grrrls'" (20). However, they add that, ultimately, "it is perhaps the British all-girl band the Spice Girls that is most (in)famously associated with the popularization of the girl power motto" (27). In Imelda Whelehan's recounting of the origins of girl power, Riot Grrrl "predates the populist swell of girl power," constituting a "more overtly political appropriation of the term girl" in its articulation of girl power than the Spice Girls (42), whose model of girl power is marked (and ultimately marred in her view) by "assimilation" and an uncritical "celebration of [hegemonic] girlishness" in stark contrast to Riot Grrrl's subversion of feminine gender norms (43). Similarly, while acknowledging girl power's debts to Riot Grrrl, Ellen Riordan suggests that "Riot Grrrl promoted a very different type of feminism from the one being popularized by the media and articulated as girl power" (279), which she characterizes as a de-politicization and commodification of Riot Grrrl discourse exemplified by the music and the stage personas of the Spice Girls (290).

In this way, though genealogical mappings of girl power locate its genesis equally in both the Riot Grrrl movement and the music of the Spice Girls, it is most often to assert that they each provide diametrically opposed, mutually exclusive constructions of girl power, in which the version promoted by the Spice Girls is compared unfavorably with the one promoted by Riot Grrrl, and the version promoted by Riot Grrrl emerges as the positive, empowering construction of girl power, while the one promoted by the Spice Girls emerges as the negative, co-opted—and

thus, ultimately disempowering—version. This narrative of appropriation and commodification, in turn, instantiates a whole series of binary oppositions that structure the relationship between girl power as articulated by the bands and the fans of Riot Grrrl music and girl power as articulated by the Spice Girls and their fans: subcultural/mainstream, authentic/manufactured, political/commercial, subversive/hegemonic, feminist/postfeminist. In each case, the terms associated with Riot Grrrl privilege it as the "true" version of girl power, while the terms associated with the brand of girl power attributed to the Spice Girls condemn it as a false model of empowered femininity. More importantly, this binary division also occludes the ways in which girl power as articulated by Riot Grrrl can never be completely divorced from girl power as articulated by the Spice Girls, as well as the ways in which the discourse of girl power as a whole is not either one or the other of them, but rather both at the same time.

In general terms, Riot Grrrl refers to "an underground, noncommercial womyn's support/action group" the goal of which is "to open people's eyes and promote womyn in society" (R.G. 185). Anna Feigenbaum characterizes Riot Grrrl as "an infusion of punk and feminism" (132), with all the loud-mouthed invective, unruliness, insubordination and defiance of dominant cultural values that both labels commonly call to mind. At the same time, Nadine Monem describes it as "empowerment writ large: inspiring, alarming, forever changing the face of feminist resistance" (7). Given the centrality of registering dissent and enacting resistance in these definitions of Riot Grrrl, it is perhaps not surprising that the term encompasses both a genre of music and a collection of loosely-affiliated community efforts at grassroots activism, nor that the two have been, from its inception, inseparable from one another.

In discussing the origins of Riot Grrrl, Kristen Schilt recounts that

Riot Grrrl began in 1991, when a group of women from Washington, D.C., and

Olympia, Washington held a meeting to discuss how to address sexism in the

punk scene. Inspired by recent antiracist riots in D.C., the women decided they

wanted to start a 'girl riot' against a society they felt offered no validation of

women's experiences. The name 'Riot Grrrl' emerged. The use of the word 'girl'

came from a desire to focus on childhood, a time when girls have the strongest

self-esteem and belief in themselves . . . The rewriting of the word as 'grrrl'

represented the anger behind the movement; it sounded like a growl ("Ironic" 6).

This history grants Riot Grrrl an explicitly political agenda from its very beginning, linking it to

issues of sexism in the punk rock community, the marginalization of women in U.S. society as a

whole, anti-racist activism, and, perhaps most noteworthy within the context of this study, efforts

to empower girls in the face of the loss of self-confidence and self-esteem at the onset of

adolescence documented in the girl problem literature discussed above. Significantly, it is these

credentials that not only position Riot Grrrl as more empowering to girls than the Spice Girls in

most analyses of the two, but they are also what allow Riot Grrrl to qualify as a social movement

where girl power does not.

Girl power as articulated by Riot Grrrl is intimately connected to the various ways in

which Riot Grrrl encourages girls to speak out and take action against structural inequalities,

both through the music produced by Riot Grrrl bands and the activism engaged in by the Riot

Grrrl community. Much has been written about the raw sounds and the angry lyrics of Riot Grrrl

music. In part, the aggressive tone and the political content of this music can be read as a refusal

of the silencing of girls explored in feminist girl problem literature, as well as the feminist

practice of "speaking truth to power" as a strategy of resistance to oppression. In an interview

quoted by Riordan in her essay "Commodified Agents and Empowered Girls: Producing and

Consuming Feminism," Kathleen Hannah, member of the band Bikini Kill and de facto

spokesperson for the Riot Grrrl movement, states

> we have to sit through so much music about being in love or breaking up, and that
>
> is some of the most irrelevant shit out there. Not having health care and having a
>
> bladder infection that I couldn't get treatment for; I think I cried over that more
>
> than I cried over any guy. Where are the songs about being broke or our friends
>
> being broke? (qtd. in Riordan 287)

This insistence that music should not only be political, but that it can accomplish political work,

is echoed in "Riot Grrrl Is . . ." authored by Hannah and band mate Toby Vail and published in

their zine *Bikini Kill*, in which they write that "viewing our work as being connected to our

girlfriends-politics-real lives is essential if we are going to figure out how [what] we are doing

impacts, reflects, perpetuates or DISRUPTS the status quo" (44, emphasis in original).

Implicit in both these statements is the idea that identifying and talking about conditions

of oppression are a necessary step in countering it. If part of this project of speaking out is

focused on raising awareness about girls' oppression or exploitation within Riot Grrrl music,

however, part of it is also tied directly to efforts to empower the girls who experience them.

Elsewhere, Schilt alludes to this aspect of Riot Grrrl by connecting Riot Grrrl's version of girl

power to efforts within the Riot Grrrl community to encourage young women to take political

action through the forming of bands or the creation of zines ("Punk" 42). In this way, the

emphasis in speaking out about girls' oppression in Riot Grrrl encompasses the project of girls'

empowerment by providing a platform from which those girls who are subjected to oppression in

various forms can give voice to their own experiences, and thus fight back in/through their own

voices.

At the same time, Hannah's reference to, and rejection of, the association of female bands with "music about being in love or breaking up" in the interview quoted above challenges cultural expectations about the kinds of music women are "supposed to" produce and consume, linking the disruption of gender norms with the larger political project she attributes to Riot Grrrl. In this way, both girl power as it is articulated by Riot Grrrl and Riot Grrrl's investment in empowering girls is tied to challenges to or rejections of hegemonic femininity, a subject addressed in a large number of Riot Grrrl songs. It also extends to the cultural practices associated with Riot Grrrls. For example, the pairing of baby doll dresses and plastic barrettes with combat boots, or the combination of images of 1940s pin-up girls with statements of empowerment in a large number of Riot Grrrl zines, (re)appropriate signifiers of hegemonic femininity in order to invest them with new meanings, transforming infantilized or sexualized models of femininity into models of empowerment. Similarly, the practice of scrawling terms like "slut," "bitch" or "rape" on their bared arms or stomachs, which Schilt maintains "was intended to draw attention to constraints placed on women's sexuality and to publicize issues such as sexual abuse and rape that were largely ignored by the media" ("Ironic" 8), transforms women's bodies from sites of potential victimization into sites of protest. However, such tactics, as noted above, are not limited in Riot Grrrl only to the individual level of bodily presentation. It is in various forms of cultural production and the support of independent practices for their creation and distribution that Riot Grrrl activism is most often located, but activism aimed at girls' empowerment on the institutional level within the Riot Grrrl movement also encompasses volunteer work and community organizing.

Riordan notes the involvement of local Riot Grrrl chapters in a variety of activist initiatives including volunteer work with women's shelters, organizations like Cincinnati's Food

Not Bombs, and projects to "improve the lives of female, male, and transgendered prostitutes by helping them find medical care and, ultimately, an alternative to prostitution" (288-289). One such example of community outreach is the Rock and Roll Camp for Girls in Portland, Oregon, which was founded in 2001 by Misty McIlroy, and is staffed by volunteers including musicians prominent in the Riot Grrrl scene such as Beth Ditto and Carrie Brownstein. The camp meets for one week each summer, during the course of which girls ages eight through eighteen form bands, are given lessons in songwriting and playing instruments, and are encouraged to "sweat like a pig, scream like a banshee, wail on their instruments with complete and utter abandon" and accept that "it is 100% okay to be exactly who [they] are" (girlsrockmovie.com/ about). The camp was the subject of a 2007 documentary titled *Girls Rock!*, which follows four girls through their experiences as participants. In an interview towards the end of the film, Laura, fresh from performing onstage in front of an audience of close to 700 people composed of campers' family members, the camp staff and their friends, and members of the local community, personifies the camp's (and by extension, Riot Grrrl's) commitment to activism aimed at empowering girls: "Everyone is beautiful in their own way, and they get even better when they decide to be powerful and when they decide to rock. So, I rock. I'm powerful. I sing. I'm incredible."

These sentiments are similarly voiced by Spice Girl fans affirming their "girl power," but in both popular press and academic analyses of the Spice Girls and their status as role models for girls' empowerment, the meaning that gets attached to those affirmations, as well as girls' internalization of the Spice Girls' version of girl power, is quite different. Whereas Laura, as the product of Riot Grrrl, is positioned as empowered when she proclaims that girls are powerful, Spice Girls fans are positioned as cultural dupes at best, and at worst as victims of harmful

messages concerning what it is that constitutes female power, as well as how it is that girls can become empowered.

The Spice Girls became household names in their native Britain after the debut of their first album, *Spice*, in 1997. Very quickly afterward they achieved worldwide distribution and worldwide fame, particularly among the pre-teen girls who made up their core fan base. As Catherine Driscoll notes, "18 months following the Spice Girls' appearance they had produced 'No. 1 singles' in 37 countries, and despite skepticism and predictions of failure, their second album, *Spiceworld*, produced more 'Top 10' hits and more extraordinary sales figures" ("Cybergirls" 178). Although the Spice Girls disbanded shortly after the release of *Spiceworld*, their impact on popular culture and popular conceptions of girlhood has been far reaching, and while scholars of popular music are often dismissive of them as manufactured corporate commodities, their influence on girl culture cannot be overstated.

In part, both the Spice Girls' popularity in the United States and the controversy surrounding them can be traced to their endorsement of a particular attitude, mode of bodily presentation and philosophy concerning being a young woman that they termed "girl power," and which resonated, for both good and ill, with the concerns about the need for the empowerment of adolescent girls voiced at the other sites within U.S. culture in the 1990s discussed in the previous section. Central to girl power as articulated by the Spice Girls seem to be the messages that support for feminist politics and identification with ideals of hegemonic femininity are not contradictory (as they are often positioned in Second Wave feminist writings), that community rather than competition between girls is key to their empowerment, that empowered girls own and take pleasure in their (hetero)sexuality, and that romantic relationships should not take precedence over other aspects of girls' lives. Accordingly, in what might be

viewed as their girl power manifesto in the book *Girl Power!*, they state that

> Girl power is when . . . you help a guy with his bag. You and your mates reply to wolf whistles by shouting 'get your arse out!' You wear high heels and think on your feet. You know you can do it and nothing's going to stop you. You don't wait around for him to call. You stick with your mates and they stick with you. You're loud and proud even when you've broken out in spots. You believe in yourself and control your own life. (6)

There is a way in which many of these formulations of girl power can be read, on the surface at least, as positive models for female empowerment, in some cases even gesturing to explicitly feminist-identified principles or practices. The emphasis on girls' friendships and support for one another, for example, has been a central tenet of much feminist discourse, including that of Riot Grrrl. Indeed, band member Geri Halliwell/Ginger Spice's assertion that "we're about unity and solidarity between female friends" (*Girl Power!* 34) seems to echo Hannah's and Vail's emphasis in "Riot Grrrl Is . . ." on "making music, friends, and scenes based on communication + understanding, instead of competition" (44). This would appear to make the Spice Girls' version of girl power more consonant with the values of Riot Grrrl than oppositional to them. Likewise, promoting a vision of girls as having limitless capabilities and encouraging them to believe in themselves and take control of their lives would appear to align the Spice Girls' version of girl power with the aims of the girl problem literature referenced above, which stresses the need for girls to receive such messages.

However, both the Spice Girls' definitions of girl power and their enactments of it are frequently laced with problematic or contradictory messages that make it difficult to argue for them as feminist role models (and thus, in the estimation of many commentators, as empowering

role models for girls). For example, while the Spice Girls connect girl power to asserting control over one's life in the passage from *Girl Power!* quoted above, later on in the book Melanie Chisholm/Sporty Spice declares that, "this is a new attitude. Girls are taking control. If you want to wear a short skirt, then you go on and wear it" (30). This suggests that whether girl power as articulated by the Spice Girls is about celebrating the power that girls' possess or campaigning for the power girls should have, it is ultimately defined (and limited to) power over one's choice of wardrobe. Similarly, despite Halliwell's claim that "none of us are conventional beauties. That's inspiring for girls because it shows you don't have to be gorgeous to be up there doing it" (*Girl Power!* 67), by even the most conservative criteria all of the Spice Girls fall well within the range of conventional feminine beauty standards, perfectly embodying hegemonic ideals of female attractiveness, body size and desirability. As such, their version of girl power is not only connected to the ability to conform to those ideals through Halliwell's equation of appearance with "be[ing] up there doing it"—and thus, empowerment—but it also limits the attainment of girl power to those girls who both desire to and are able to bring themselves in line with female beauty and body norms.

At the same time, while the Spice Girls' emphasis on assertions of and power over one's sexuality are central to their enactment of girl power, this is often framed in their songs, videos and interview comments in ways that recall patriarchal stereotypes of women using their sexuality to manipulate or take advantage of the men around them. Key to their formulation of girl power is the idea that a large part of that power derives from being the object of the heterosexual male gaze, or else from appropriating that gaze to make men objects for their own sexual satisfaction. As Dafna Lemish points out, the Spice Girls "manipulate the traditional concept of the female 'look' in three senses: in what they look like; how they look at the camera

and others; and how others look at them" (25). All three of these strategies are illustrated by their video for "Wannabe," a song often cited as a ballad of female empowerment for the ways in which it sets out the conditions a prospective lover must meet before qualifying for consideration as a romantic partner, including respecting women's needs, desires and autonomy. In this video, the Spice Girls invade an upper crust social gathering and flirt with a series of men, who appear alternately spellbound and flummoxed by their advances. In the process, the band members pose and dance suggestively for both the men, the camera, and viewers of the video, suggesting that whatever empowerment is signified by women openly asserting their sexual and romantic desires as the Spice Girls do in the vocals, that power is somehow tied to (and perhaps contingent upon) the power they demonstrate in the video to make men desire them.

Lemish argues that the Spice Girls' "conscious exhibition of sexuality continues to challenge the traditional slut–virgin binary division of femininity, and thus provides young girls with alternative images" of female sexuality (23). In this way, according to Lemish, it can be read as empowering for girls because

> rather than controlling their sexuality and desire as a key to maintaining a desired
> 'virgin' image in tact (*sic*), they choose to expose their sexual energies overtly,
> with pride. Control becomes a matter of displaying sexuality rather than hiding it.
> In a world where girls are internalizing conflicting messages—you need to look
> sexy to be noticed, to be worthwhile and appreciated, yet you must not act upon
> that sexiness lest you become the disrespected 'slut'—this is a challenging
> alternative. (23)

 However, as Ilana Nash points out, media representations that locate young women's power in their status as objects of an eroticized gaze (as the video for "Wannabe" does), arguably "signal

little more than a girl's active participation in her own sexual exploitation" (221-222). In this view, far from endorsing girls' sexual empowerment, what the model of girl power embodied by the Spice Girls endorses is girls willingly embracing their fetishization within patriarchal culture. Moreover, this reduction of empowerment to a style of eroticized bodily presentation not only removes questions of girls' empowerment from the social and political realms and situates it entirely in their (hetero)sexual desirability, but it can hardly be considered an "alternative" to patriarchal constructions of femininity, since it reproduces the very positioning of women as sexual objects that contribute to their devalued status within patriarchal culture in the first place.

The strategy mobilized in the video for "Wannabe" of locating girls' empowerment in their ability to use their sexuality to turn the gaze back on itself is common to both girl power and postfeminist discourse, and it will be examined in more detail in chapter four. For now, what is most relevant about it in terms of this discussion of the Spice Girls' version of empowered femininity is that while encouraging girls to claim and take pleasure in their sexuality can be empowering for them, sexual empowerment is only one aspect of girls' empowerment. Locating that empowerment exclusively in displays of their heterosexual desirability thus limits the power girls can exercise solely to their sexuality, while further limiting access to even this circumscribed form of empowerment to heterosexual girls only, since lesbian desire is nowhere acknowledged or given a role in this project of encouraging girls to become, in Emma Bunton/Baby Spice's words, "hot sexy bitch[s]" (*Girl Power!* 12).

Because the Spice Girls' location of girl power in girls' sexual desirability reproduces patriarchal constructions of girls/women as sex objects by claiming that embracing one's status as a sexual object can make one an autonomous subject, it may explain, in part, why Bunton and Halliewll are frequently condemned in feminist analyses of the Spice Girls for their respective

baby doll and pin-up girl stage personas, while Riot Grrrls are applauded for appropriating the markers of these same cultural stereotypes of femininity in their articulation of girl power (and their project of girls' empowerment). What makes it empowering for feminist commentators when Riot Grrrls claim the image of the baby doll or the pin-up and disempowering when the Spice Girls do the same thing is that Riot Grrrls' embodiment of these stereotypes is understood to be an act of critical deconstruction of patriarchal gender norms, while the Spice Girls' embodiment of them are understood to be an uncritical celebration of those norms. Worse, in the case of Melanie Brown, the only woman of color in the band, it is an unacknowledged perpetuation of both patriarchal and white supremacist value systems, as her stage persona as Scary Spice is not even based on a cultural category of womanhood (as Baby's, Posh's, Sporty's and Ginger's supposedly are), but rather on racist depictions of Black women as aggressive, threatening, and "savage."

Within this context, it is worth noting that while it is impossible that this reinscription of racist conceptions of Black femininity through Brown's stage persona can be interpreted as empowering, the Spice Girl's celebration of other aspects of hegemonic femininity, however problematic, could nonetheless quite easily be read as falling within the scope of what Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards have termed "girlie feminism," a type of Third Wave feminism that seeks to reclaim aspects of hegemonic femininity as something other than tools of patriarchy. This would seem to be consonant with the Spice Girls' own characterization of their conception of girl power as a reworking of feminism, typified by Halliwell's statement that "feminism has become a dirty word. Girl Power is just a nineties way of saying it" (qtd. in Whelehan 45). However, the lack of critical interrogation in their celebration of practices and accoutrements associated with patriarchal feminine norms makes it just as easy to read it as a

reinforcement of sexist stereotypes. Indeed, as Nicola Dibben argues, because the Spice Girls'

version of girl power "can be read either as subversive of patriarchal constructions of femininity,

or as reinscribing them . . . the polysemy of [this model of girl power] allows both readings"

(348). Ultimately, though, Dibben points out that even if girl power as articulated by the Spice

Girls does mobilize signifiers of hegemonic femininity in order to recuperate them for feminist

ends, the efficacy of this project as a tactic of resistance is hampered by the fact that it "does not

extend outside the boundaries pre-ordained by . . . patriarchal society" (346).

Given the ambiguity that Dibben ascribes to the politics of the Spice Girls, it is perhaps

not surprising that feminist analyses of their articulation of girl power have variously identified it

as feminist, postfeminist, and anti-feminist, although within the context of this study it is worth

noting that it is almost uniformly seen in such analyses as being either one or the other. In

"Spicy Strategies: Pop Feminist and Other Empowerments in Girl Culture," Bettina Fritzsche

argues that girl power as enacted by the Spice Girls is a recapitulation of the "very common,

playful and body-centered ways that girls cope with society's scripts of identity," the invocation

of which can be considered a feminist strategy for empowerment (161). Similarly, in "I'll Never

Be Your Woman: The Spice Girls and New Flavours of Feminism," Tara Barbazon and Amanda

Evans assert that the Spice Girls' version of girl power "offer[s] a space for a new way of

thinking about feminist theory and a new way of living feminist politics" (39). Meanwhile,

Whelehan's analysis of girl power in *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism*,

which is largely based on the model endorsed by the Spice Girls, concludes that "'girl' power is

not ultimately a radical assertion of gender difference which extols the virtues of biological

femaleness; it is a deep and uninterrogated pleasure in girliness a la Barbie . . . an empty and

defensive assertion of solidarity . . . which encourages more and more young women to believe

the myth that 'sexism's been and gone'" (57). Echoing this assessment, Christine Griffen contends in "Good Girls, Bad Girls: Anglocentrism and Diversity in the Constitution of Contemporary Girlhood" that girl power "in its most popular and pervasive form" (which she too locates in its articulation by the Spice Girls) "operates to represent feminism as simultaneously self-evident and redundant, thereby silencing feminist voices through a discourse that appears 'pro-feminist'" (33).

Along these same lines, in "Girl Power Politics: Pop-Culture Barriers and Organizational Resistance," Jessica K. Taft identifies four separate types of girl power—anti-feminist, postfeminist, individualist and consumerist—with the style of girl power endorsed by the Spice Girls located in the "anti-feminist" category. However, in spite of the fact that she acknowledges that girl power can and has taken more than one form, she still limits individual articulations of girl power to only one category. Thus, while conceding that the Spice Girls' version of girl power "may indeed be empowering, celebratory, and affirmative of girls' strength" Taft asserts that it is not feminist because it "[discourages] girls from feminist politics," and must therefore be unequivocally anti-feminist. It is unclear, though, if the Spice Girls' message of girl power only turns girls away from engagement in feminist politics, or if instead it has also acted in some cases as their entrée into those politics, even if the Spice Girls themselves do not support or promote feminism (which is a far from uncontested claim). Indeed, the very fact that the Spice Girls' enactment of girl power can be identified as feminist, postfeminist *and* anti-feminist in the critical assessments quoted above suggests that far from being either one or the other, it may actually be all three at the same time.

Likewise, in addressing the impact that the versions of girl power promoted by both Riot Grrrl and the Spice Girls have had on the empowerment of the girls who consume their music,[6] it

is worth noting that in spite of their differing models of girl power and their differing associations with feminism, girl power as articulated by Riot Grrrl and girl power as articulated by the Spice Girls have had *both* positive and negative effects attributed to them by their female fans themselves. As Schilt discusses in "'The Punk White Privilege Scene: Riot Grrrl, White Privilege and Zines," in spite of claims on behalf of Riot Grrrl bands to address racism as well as sexism and heterosexism in their music, race has been at best a peripheral focus in the Riot Grrrl movement (both in terms of the music and the activism). Indeed, women of color involved in the movement have often found themselves marginalized, as well as frustrated by the unwillingness of white members to acknowledge white privilege or to examine their own unconscious racism. As a result, young women of color often do not experience Riot Grrrl's version of girl power as empowering. This is exemplified by the interviews Schilt quotes with Leah, who states that she left the Riot Grrrl community because she found it didn't "understand or respect my colored girl . . . self," and Lauren, who questions ". . . some of you say we are 'out to kill the white boy mentality' but have you examined your own mentality? Your white upper-middle class girl mentality?" (qtd. in Schilt 44).

Conversely, while the Spice Girls are often accused of promoting a brand of pseudo-empowerment that encourages girls to "reproduce oppressive behaviors" (Riordan 291), their fans nonetheless often find empowerment in those messages all the same. Fritzsche quotes a young woman named Rebecca as attributing her self-confidence to the Spice Girls, crediting them with inspiring in her the determination to pursue her dream of becoming an artist when she grows up: "You want to do it, but you don't know where it will lead. But the Spice Girls helped me to say, 'I will do this and it will amount to something'" (qtd. in Fritzsche 159). I am not in any way suggesting that this means that girl power as articulated by the Spice Girls does not

reproduce patriarchal ideology, or that it is not deeply problematic in the values and practices

that it endorses. I am suggesting, however, that it does mean that we can't simply dismiss those

girls who find empowerment in the Spice Girls' music as cultural dupes or victims of false

consciousness. To do so is to deny them the very agency we as feminists and advocates for girls

want them to be able to claim. Susan Douglas makes a similar point when she argues that

"despite all the huffing and puffing of adults, one way or the other, it doesn't really matter what

we think of the Spice Girls. What matters is what they mean to their preteen fans" ("Girls 'N'

Spice" 23).

It appears that what both Riot Grrrl and the Spice Girls have meant for those fans is, in

Douglas's words, a way of "experience[ing] the transition to womanhood in a society in which

boys are still very much on top" ("Girls 'N' Spice" 23). Both arguably provide their female

audiences with models for how to negotiate being a girl in a world in which girls are devalued

culturally and granted a subordinate social status. Both communicate messages about what it is

and what it means to be an empowered girl, and girls can choose to follow these models in whole

or in part, adopting the values and practices they encompass in toto, or picking out the aspects

that speak most directly to their beliefs and experiences. Or they can choose to reject them

entirely. Either way, the models of girl power articulated by both Riot Grrrl and the Spice Girls

become a particular way of being a girl in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, both

of which have differing cultural meanings attached to them, but both of which nonetheless have

provided girls with ways of understanding—and seeing—themselves as powerful.

It is worth pointing out here, however, that if Riot Grrrl's and the Spice Girls' models of

girl power provide guidelines for what it is to be an empowered girl, they also establish a very

specific girl as the subject of girl power, a fact that is often occluded (or lost altogether) in all

this talk of girls and their empowerment, which tends to treat the category "girl" as homogonous, as if all girls are the same and all girls experience oppression equally and in the same ways. The girl problem literature cited in the previous section, while acknowledging the intersectionality of both identity and oppression, tends to focus mostly on the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied girls, ignoring the ways in which girlhood as experienced by girls of color, poor and working-class girls, lesbian girls, and disabled girls—to say nothing of transgendered girls—differs because of the ways in which race, class, sexual identity and physical ability all factor as axes of difference along which privilege and oppression operate in U.S. society. This is not to suggest that girls of color, poor and working-class girls, lesbian girls, transgendered girls, or disabled girls are fundamentally different from white, middle-class, heterosexual or able-bodied girls, but rather to acknowledge that they are often treated differently within U.S. society such that the barriers to empowerment that they face differ in many ways from those faced by girls who may experience inequality as a result of being girls, but otherwise occupy categories of privilege that afford them opportunities and advantages not experienced by girls in additionally marginalized groups.

Likewise, the girl power promoted by both Riot Grrrl and the Spice Girls assumes, by and large, that it speaks to all girls, and that as such all girls are included in their projects of empowerment. And yet the girls associated with these projects have been mostly white and middle class, both in terms of the performers and in terms of the girls assumed to be their fans. As a result, the version of girl power that emerges from the texts discussed in this and the previous section is one in which representations of empowered girls, as well as the girls whose empowerment is being advocated for, are almost entirely limited to those who fit the white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, feminine gendered paradigm. More troubling, because

these girls become the only ones this project encompasses, they also become, by extension, the only ones who qualify for inclusion within it.

This may explain why in genealogical mappings of girl power, recording artists like Alanis Morrisette, Meredith Brooks, Fiona Apple, Avril Levigne, Pink, Gwen Stefani and even Christina Aguilera, Britany Spears and Miley Cyrus/Hannah Montana are included in its lineage, while Salt N Peppa, TLC and Queen Latifah (to cite just a few examples) are not. Although Queen Latifah and the members of Salt N Peppa and TLC are all represented in publicity materials, interviews, videos, performances and profiles in the popular press as strong, assertive women who champion girls/women's empowerment, and whose music often touches on feminist issues such as domestic violence, women's sexual agency, and women's negative representations in hip hop culture, they are rarely identified among the progenitors of girl power. One of the few exceptions occurs in a collection of reflections on girl power printed under the title "Girl Power: What's the Real Deal" in the feminist journal *H.U.E.S.*, in which Tara Roberts, editor of *Am I the Last Virgin?: Ten African-American Reflections on Sex and Love*, states

> I remember growing up to the flavor and stylings of teenage female rappers like
> Salt N Peppa, MC Lyte and Queen Latifah and seeing 'girl power' served up
> constantly as a spicy dish of independence, pride, and assertiveness throughout
> hip hop music. For me, girl power is in no way a particularly nineties thing, and it
> certainly does not just have a White (*sic*) girl's face. (5)

However, the fact that she feels the need to make a case for girl power having more than just "a White girl's face" suggests that this is the dominant construction of girl power in U.S. culture, which may be a large part of the reason why Britany Spears, Christina Aguilera, and Miley Cyrus can be so readily associated with girl power in spite of the lack of political content in their

music, while Queen Latifah, Salt N Peppa and TLC are not, despite the political content in theirs.

These questions of who is included and who is excluded from both pop culture representations and scholarly examinations of girl power are extremely important, because they suggest that while girl power as a strategy for empowering adolescent girls may be flawed due to its lack of attention to the structural nature of girls' oppression, it is equally flawed by its circumscription of the girls it seeks to intervene on behalf of (and the girls it gives representation to) to predominantly white, heterosexual, able-bodied, feminine gendered girls from middle-class backgrounds. In doing so, as I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapters, girl power effectively constrains both the power girls have access to within/through girl power discourse and the political potential of media representations of girl power by limiting its expression to one very specific—and already culturally dominant—group of girls. Therefore, while girl power's ambiguous relationship to feminism is a key concern, and certainly an area for critique, so too is its apparent blindness to racial/ethnic, class, sexual, and bodily differences among girls, as well as the ways in which, in ignoring those differences, it does more to contribute to girls' oppression than to counter it.

The Selling of Girl Power: Girl Power Discourse as Marketing Slogan

While its ambiguous politics have been one of the more consistent foundations for critiques of girl power discourse, the deployment of girl power rhetoric as a marketing strategy for media texts and consumer goods has also led to charges that girl power is not only aligned against feminist interests, but that its most successful tactic in undermining feminism has been to commodify feminist goals such that the "power" in girl power becomes defined by girls' spending power, and the courting of girls as a consumer demographic is celebrated as proof of

their empowerment. *Time Magazine*'s evaluation in 1998 that "for the next generation, feminism is being sold as glitz and image" is emblematic of these critiques, which, like much else in terms of girl power, have their origins in the Spice Girls' popularity with pre-teen and teenage girls (Labi 60). A *Newsweek* article on the "selling of girl power" in popular music notes that "never in pop history have female singers been so aggressively, shrewdly marketed on the basis of gender alone" as they have been in the wake of the unprecedented profits the Spice Girls netted for Virgin Records, although what the author seems to find most objectionable in this trend is not that the Spice Girls have gone on to "attach their name to everything from Pepsi and potato crisps to backpacks and lollipops" (Schoemer 90), but rather that the astronomical sales of Spice Girls paraphernalia inspired advertisers, couturiers, cosmetics companies, record labels, television networks and film studios to similarly attempt to capitalize upon social anxieties concerning the empowerment of adolescent girls circulating in the 1990s by deploying messages of female empowerment as a means of marketing products to teen and pre-teen girls.

As a February 1998 piece in the *New York Times* notes, the blockbuster film *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), which centered on a tragic love affair between an aspiring artist and an intelligent, assertive, free-spirited socialite, shattered box office records chiefly because of repeat viewings by adolescent girls, sending Hollywood studios scrambling to produce more adolescent female friendly fare (Weinraub E1). Similarly, *Entertainment Weekly* credits the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—and its mobilization of girl power rhetoric—with turning around the fortunes of the fledgling WB television network, in large part because, like The WB's other early hit *Dawson's Creek*, it was hugely popular with young female viewers, "a group . . . coveted by Madison Avenue" (Jacobs). This, in turn, not only made the otherwise ratings-challenged network attractive to advertisers, but it altered the network's business model. Hoping

to mirror the successful formula followed by the Fox television network, The WB started off targeting its programming to a generalized 18-24 year old viewing demographic when it debuted in 1995, utilizing a combination of "in-demand writers . . . envelope-pushing scripts . . . [and] teen idol" stars (Jacobs).   However, after *Buffy* began gaining a cult following among viewers and garnering praise from TV critics for its (re)formulation of girl power, the network made a decision to rebrand itself by "corner[ing] the market on smart, youth-directed, female-driven programming" (Fretts). This decision played a major part in the prominence that girl power discourse assumed in late twentieth/early twenty-first century U.S. popular culture, as several influential girl power-identified television series, including *Charmed*, *Felicity*, and *Gilmore Girls*, also aired on The WB and were developed out of this business model.

Of course, the demographic importance of teenage girls to the culture industries had been established long before the success of either *Titanic* or the Spice Girls. As Kelly Schrum points out, as early as the 1920s, "high school girls . . . established themselves as important arbiters of clothing, beauty products, music and movies—consumers with dedicated opinions and preferences" that "manufacturers, marketers, and retailers . . . [recognized] as a discrete social group with purchasing power" (3). She further argues that "one of the unique characteristics of high school girls' consumer culture has been its enthusiastic 'discovery' year after year" (2), in light of which the push towards targeting media and consumer products to adolescent girls in the wake of the advent of girl power appears as another such (re)orientation on the teen girl market. Likewise, using female empowerment as a marketing tool is also not exclusive to the period from the 1990s to the present. As both Susan Faludi and Susan Douglas have demonstrated, advertisers, TV networks and film studios have been appropriating feminist discourse and using it to sell to women since at least the 1970s, when the Women's Liberation Movement

institutionalized Second Wave feminism within U.S. culture.[7] I would argue, then, that what is remarkable about the mobilization of girl power rhetoric as a way of marketing mass media texts to adolescent girls is not the invocation of female empowerment as a marketing tool, but rather the ways in which, given the emphasis within girl power discourse on using media representations as a means of empowering girls, girl power becomes both a strategy for selling media texts and a product to be sold to consumers of those texts.

It is against this backdrop (and perhaps, towards these ends) that the discourse of girl power has also developed within U.S. popular culture. Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown argue that, within girl power rhetoric, empowerment often gets reduced to purchasing consumer products or consuming media texts that espouse girls' empowerment. In their estimation, "the beginning of a genuine movement to give girls more power and more choice got co-opted and turned into a marketing scheme that reinforced age-old [gender] stereotypes" (1). This point is also made by Joan Jacobs Brumburg who, in reflecting on the meaning of girl power in the *H.U.E.S.* article cited above, opines that "'girl power' should be about empowering young women in adolescence to be bold, strong and creative—both individually and in groups . . . [and] promoting the idea that they can make something better at school—or in the world—by working together" not "invoked as a marketing strategy to sell more clothes or cosmetics to girls" (5). In this light, girl power can be conceived as both a strategy for empowering girls' through media representations and a tool for promoting media products to girls. I will argue in the following chapters that girl power must therefore be understood as both of these things, since, whatever political motives may have underpinned the creation of girl power texts, their circulation within U.S. popular culture has been largely contingent upon their profitability for the media companies that produce and distribute them.

The Power in Girl Power

The rest of this study traces the evolution of girl power through its articulation in a number of popular culture texts, as well as critical analyses of the versions of girl power promoted through those texts. What emerges is a contradictory picture, in which girls' are represented at once as victims and warriors, sexual agents and sexual objects, gender benders and the embodiment of orthodox feminine gender norms. Girls' power is alternately located in these texts in their identities as girls, in their physical strength, in their appearances, in their intelligence, and in their consumer habits. At the same time, empowerment simultaneously figures as the product of supportive networks of friends, encouragement on the part of parents or mentors, mystical powers, or some kind of intrinsic "girl" essence encoded on the XX chromosomes in girls' DNA.

As stated previously, it is not the aim of this dissertation to try to reconcile these conflicting definitions of girl power. Instead, my goal is to examine the effects that girl power discourse in all its variations has had on the way that U.S. culture conceives of girlhood. Viewed across texts rather than in terms of its articulation in any one single text, girl power appears as a set of cultural discourses and mass media representations that claim to promote the empowerment of adolescent and pre-adolescent girls, either by celebrating girlhood and aspects of girl culture routinely devalued within hegemonic U.S. culture as a whole, or by challenging hegemonic constructions of girlhood and offering girls an (ostensibly) alternative conception of what it is—and also what it means—to be a girl. In some cases representations of girl power in the mass media do depart radically from the ways that girls have traditionally been represented in earlier pop culture texts. However, as suggested above, in doing so it is not always the case that

they also constitute a departure from patriarchal understandings of sexual difference or patriarchal conceptions of girlhood. Thus, whether or not representations of girl power offer viewers a more empowered/empowering version of adolescent femininity depends not only on how empowerment is defined in girl power texts—as well as girl power discourse more generally—but also on what the ultimate goal of its articulation is imagined to be. More often than not, as the rest of this study will demonstrate, when it comes to popular media representations of girl power, that goal appears to be less about facilitating girls' empowerment within patriarchal culture than policing girls' empowerment in order to ensure that the patriarchal social structure remains unchallenged, even as girls' places within that structure *are* challenged. In this sense, while mass media representations of girl power do indeed advocate for the exercise of power by girls, they are also directed on an ideological level towards the exercise of power over girls and/or the containment of the kinds of power that girls have access to.

Chapter One of this dissertation, titled "Producing Girls: Discourse, Subjectivity and the Enactment of Identity," examines girlhood as both an ontological and a discursive category. Using Michel Foucault's work on discourse-knowledge-power, and Judith Butler's work on gender performativity, it interrogates the processes through which cultural constructions of girlhood influence how we understand "girl" as an identity category, as well as impact the ways in which individual girls express their identities as girls.

Chapter Two, "The Girl of the Period: Representations of Adolescent Girls in Twentieth Century U.S. Popular Culture," examines major developments and shifts in U.S. discourses surrounding girlhood during the twentieth century, focusing on the ways in which different categories of girls appeared through these discourses and found representation in popular culture texts. In doing so, this chapter argues that anxieties about and concerns for girls' empowerment

have been central to discourses about girls throughout the twentieth century. As such, it attempts to locate girl power discourse within this pattern by suggesting that while representations of girl power can be read in some ways as a radical break from earlier cultural constructions of girlhood, in other ways it can also be read as an extension of them.

Chapters Three, Four and Five examine the central representational tropes of mass media girl power texts by focusing on the discursive figures at the center of those texts: the warrior girl, the girl avenger, the outsider girl and the girlie girl. These chapters interrogate the ways in which girls' power is conceived of and exercised within U.S. popular culture, as well as the different ways in which girls' empowerment is conceptualized. They also consider the ways in which, while challenging girls' status within patriarchal culture, mass media girl power texts frequently reinforce patriarchal ideology, as well as patriarchal understandings of power, so that ultimately girl power in these texts can only be exercised in patriarchal terms and only in ways that support (rather than resist) patriarchy.

Chapter Six, "Girl Power's Twilight Years: Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* and the Backlash Against Girl Power," looks at the waning of the popularity of girl power discourse at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century and speculates on some of the possible reasons why girl power seems to be fading from popular culture, as well as from the U.S. social agenda. It examines Stephenie Myer's *Twilight* series of books as the preeminent example of this recent turn towards a rejection of girl power discourse, in which characters who embody hegemonic ideals of feminine submission, passivity and dependence have replaced girl power heroines as pop culture icons. This chapter also considers the ways in which texts featuring such characters appropriate aspects of girl power discourse to represent adolescent female empowerment as the relinquishment of agency rather than its assertion, thus encouraging the

acceptance of—rather than resistance to—girls' disempowered status within U.S. culture by celebrating the renunciation of power as empowering.

It is this question of resistance to hegemonic culture, and the extent to which popular culture texts can ever function as sites of ideological resistance, that underpins this study of mass media representations of girl power. While girl power frequently positions itself as a resistant discourse, and while many scholars have read it that way, the contradictory messages concerning gender and empowerment transmitted by mass media girl power texts makes it difficult to read girl power as a discourse that is anything more than subversive in some instances and ideologically orthodox in others—in both cases in highly qualified and inconsistent ways. For all its contradictions, or perhaps because of them, what the discourse of girl power tells us as a culture about who girls are, what they desire, what they fear, and what they are capable of matters because it has a direct influence, on how we as a society view girls, how we treat them, and how much—and what kinds—of opportunities and agency we grant them. Ultimately then, as this study will suggest, the "power" at the center of girl power discourse, and what is at stake in this discourse, may very well be the power to determine how girlhood is defined and understood at the present moment.

CHAPTER I.

PRODUCING GIRLS: DISCOURSE, SUBJECTIVITY, AND THE ENACTMENT OF
IDENTITY

Before examining the ways in which girl power discourse claims to shift U.S. cultural

conceptions of girlhood, it is necessary to consider the ways in which we as culture produce girls

as subjects. This is partly because representations of girl power in popular culture texts purport

to intervene in the discursive processes through which the identity category "girl" is established

and consolidated. At the same time, however, both girl power texts and girl power discourse

more generally are also implicated in those processes, not just engendering particular ways of

thinking about girls, but also producing a particular kind of girl who emerges out of this

discourse.

Discussions of the influence of culture on identity formation inevitably struggle with

questions of how and to what extent discourse and embodiment intersect in the constitution of

subjectivity. It is difficult to pinpoint where cultural discourses end and the body begins in this

enterprise, mainly because our bodily behaviors only become intelligible to us through

discourses concerning those behaviors, and discourses about identity often shape not just how we

understand, but also how we enact, the identities we claim. One thus becomes a girl in the U.S.

through processes of enculturation that instantiate particular ways of being that establish one as a

girl, as well as provide models for how to be a girl or what to expect girls will be like. This is

not to suggest that discourse solely or absolutely determines how girls enact their girlhood.

Actual girls very often defy or exceed discursive constructions of the subject category girl,

embodying those constructions either in part, or, in some cases, not at all. However, if cultural

discourses surrounding girlhood frequently have at their center an idealized version of the

symbolic figure "girl," they also establish norms concerning who girls are and what they do through which actual girls gain meaning as girls, and against which their identities as girls are measured—either positively or negatively—in relation to those norms.

Making Girls Into Girls

The term girl as a marker of identity refers to an ontological state determined by both gender and age, but it is also a discursive category that delineates the criteria through which this state is defined, the interests, behaviors, character traits, etc. through which it expressed (and thus, through which one qualifies as a girl), and the cultural meanings that are attached to it. In spite of its appeal to ontological grounding, the designation girl is also not a fixed identity category, as discursive constructions and embodied enactments of girlhood vary between cultures and historical periods. Moreover, in the U.S. the label girl is also often applied to adult women as well as to females under the age of eighteen, the demographic group that is conventionally considered to be girls both biologically and culturally. As Yasmin Jiwani, Candis Steenbergen and Claudia Mitchell point out,

> outside legal frameworks, the category 'girl' has been used freely as a signifier of
> a wide range of groupings. The very word 'girl' is highly context specific: it can
> connote community and inclusiveness among friends ('one of the girls,' 'you go
> girl!) or denote status (little girl, young girl, older girl). It is an index of age. It
> can also be an insult ('you throw like a girl'), condescension ('the girls at the
> office'), or a term of endearment. Overlapping definitions—coupled with often
> contradictory meanings—illustrate that 'girl' is a far more complicated word (and
> identity) than many acknowledge. (ix-x)

Even if it is limited in its application to females under the age of eighteen, however, girl is still a difficult subject position to clearly demarcate, as anthropological, sociological, psychological, medical, educational, and marketing discourses establish different categories of girls within the larger designation (infant girls, pre-pubescent girls, teenage girls, girlie girls, tomboys, etc.), as well as assigning significant developmental and cultural differences to each category, and thus instituting equally significant differences between them. Because the girl at the center of girl power discourse is most often figured as an adolescent (girls ages thirteen-eighteen), it is this category of girls that I will be referencing in this and the following chapters when I use the term girl in my analysis of girl power, and it is the discursive development of female adolescence as a particular category of girlhood that will be explored in this chapter. At the same time, I would also like to make it clear at the outset of this study that while the sex of "girl" is assumed to be female in popular discourse in the United States, the identity girl can be performed by both male and female bodies. Thus, while the cultural construction of girlhood examined in this chapter assumes a link between biological sex and gendered identity that only extends recognition as girls to individuals who are biologically female, and the representations of girls that I will be analyzing throughout this study reaffirm that assumption, it should be acknowledged that the criteria through which one only qualifies as a girl if one is anatomically female is, in and of itself, a discursive construction that places limits not just on which behaviors constitute enactments of "normative" girlhood, but also *who* is able to enact girlhood in a way that qualifies as "normal."

In his writings on the interplay between discourse, knowledge and power, Michel Foucault argues that the various discourses surrounding a particular object of inquiry determine (and also set limits upon) what is known or can be known about it. Discourse marks out the

boundaries around and between things, ideas, practices or categories of subjectivity, defines them, provides explanations for their origins, development, operation and usage, establishes what can or cannot be considered to fall within their domain, places them in relation to other things/ideas/practices/categories of subjectivity, and sets values upon them. In this way, "effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false," but which establish what we know—and therefore what we hold to be true—about ourselves and the world around us (Foucault, "Truth" 60). Accordingly, discourses about girls delineate who and what girls are, how they behave, what they are interested in, what they desire, fear, like and dislike, what character traits they possess, what their physical characteristics are, what skills they excel in and what skills they lack, which cultural practices they engage in, how they dress, groom and style their bodies, what their temperaments are, and what their emotional and intellectual capacities and tendencies will be—in the process determining not only what we know about girls, but also what we hold to be true about them.

This information about girls is produced and circulates from multiple points within U.S. culture. Scientific and medical pronouncements, psychological case studies, anthropological and sociological writings, educational models, educational curricula, religious doctrines, familial paradigms, practices of kinship relations, legislative codes, political rhetoric, demographic data, studies by scholars in academic disciplines such as women's studies or cultural studies, advertizing campaigns, and representations of girls in popular culture texts (to cite just a few examples) all produce knowledge about girls. To take an example from popular culture, the nursery rhyme "What Are Little Girls Made Of?" provides a particularly obvious illustration of the ways in which discourses about girls produce knowledge about them. It is significant that this nursery rhyme appears in two parts, one that addresses the question "What Are Little Boys

Made Of?", and one that addresses the question "What Are Little Girls Made Of?", since it instantiates a number of cultural beliefs, not only about the natures of boys and girls, but also about sexual difference. Accordingly, it is equally significant that the section addressing boys' nature appears first, reiterating the cultural statuses of masculinity as the privileged gender expression and femininity as the Othered term against which masculinity's privileged status is established and secured. Likewise, the nursery rhyme itself, as it is generally indexed in children's books, is most often listed only under the title "What Are Little Boys Made Of?", thus reiterating girls' subordinate position to boys within the culture at large.

In answer to the question posed by its title, we are told by this nursery rhyme that little boys are made of "snips and snails and puppy dog tails," while little girls are made of "sugar and spice and all things nice" (Opie and Opie 116-117). This association of boys with an interest in animals—and, by extension, in the outdoors—and with an enjoyment in things dirty and slimy, reproduce Western constructions of males as action-oriented, rebellious, strong-stomached, and possessed of a tendency towards conquest (whether of knowledge, the natural world, or simply creatures that are weaker than themselves). More importantly, the nursery rhyme also places these qualities at the core of boys' identities as boys, suggesting that boys are "made of" these qualities, rather than that the exhibition or reproduction of these qualities are what our culture uses to make male children into boys.

Similarly, the association of girls with sugar (connoting sweetness), with domestic chores (sugar and spices are both common ingredients used in baking), and with all things nice—and, therefore, by extension, with obedience, docility and compliance, as well as that which is pleasing—defines girls in ways that reiterate characteristics conventionally associated with hegemonic constructions of femininity (passivity, nurturing, an outwardly pleasant nature, a

tendency towards satisfying and accommodating others). At the same time, it also reinforces

knowledge about how girls are "made of" these qualities established in other places. For

example, the allusion to girls' essential sweetness and niceness in this nursery rhyme both

reinforces and is reinforced by anthropological, sociological, medical and psychiatric literature

that asserts that girls are inherently more polite, meek, submissive, quiet-natured, and well-

behaved than boys. At the same time, the assertion of girls' predisposition to the domestic

sphere, specifically to baking—and, by extension, caregiving—is reiterated by the large number

of toys for girls that emphasize domestic tasks and/or nurturing behavior (tea sets, Easy Bake

Ovens, baby dolls, doll houses, etc.). Girls' niceness and obedience are also routinely

encouraged through guidance manuals and advice imparted through agony columns in girls'

magazines (particularly when that advice is directed at winning the affections of members of the

opposite sex). It is also encouraged in/through fairy tales like *Cinderella*, *Snow White* and

Beauty and the Beast, in which girls who are dutiful, virtuous and uncomplaining are praised—

and ultimately rewarded—for their niceness.

The qualifier "little" before the term "girls" in this nursery rhyme suggests that the girls it

is describing are younger than the adolescent girls at the center of girl power discourse, whose

specific cultural constructions at various points in U.S. history will be examined in detail in the

next chapter. For now, what is important here is that discourses concerning girls operate

similarly no matter which specific category of girl they address, at once establishing knowledge

about girls, as well as social expectations for what girls are and how they will behave. In

discussing the function of discourse as an instrument of power, Foucault suggests in the

introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality* that "it is in discourse that power and knowledge

are joined together" (100). That is, in establishing what we know, and therefore what we hold to

be true, about ourselves and the world in which we live, discourse is invested with the power to instantiate particular ways of thinking and being, and to foreclose or to negate others. Significantly, ways of thinking and ways of being are intricately enmeshed in Foucault's theorizations of knowledge-power, with subjectivity and knowledge equally effects of an operation of power that "produces reality . . . produces domains of objects and rituals of truth," in which "the individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him (*sic*) belong to this production" (*Discipline* 194). Thus, for Foucault, the power exercised through discourse is never merely repressive power aimed at prohibition or coercion. It is also, and perhaps primarily, productive. It produces knowledge, but it also engenders social and cultural practices, as well as ways of living and comporting oneself in one's daily life, which are themselves deployed, in turn, to establish and support particular relations of power (*History* 97).

In the same way that Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality* that discourses about sexual practices and desires produce sexual(ized) subjects, discourses about girls and girlhood also produce girls as subjects, in addition to (and through) producing knowledge about them. Discourses about girls therefore grant girls intelligibility, providing us as a culture with a set of normative criteria constituting the subject position girl through which girls can be identified and made sense of. They also provide girls themselves with models for signifying their identities as non-adult females, supplying them with sets of behaviors, character traits and bodily stylizations through which to mark and express themselves as girls.

The processes through which discourses about the self shape subjectivity is described as "subjectification" by Foucault, who likewise terms the processes through which discourse shapes embodied expressions of the subject positions we claim "bio-power." His theorizations of subjectification and bio-power in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, together

with his conceptualization of technologies of the self in "Technologies of the Self," *The Uses of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, have been widely appropriated by feminist scholars examining a range of issues related to women's gendered subjectivity and embodiment. In particular, these concepts have proven useful for feminist inquires into the acquisition and expression of gender (Judith Butler), the regulation of and resistance to sexual norms (Jana Sawicki, Eve Sedgwick), women's disciplining, styling and/or adornment of their bodies (Susan Bordo, Sandra Bartky), discourses surrounding reproductive technologies and reproductive rights (Jennifer Terry), the production of the feminine self/feminine subjectivity (Elspeth Probyn, Teresa de Lauretis), the effects of subjectivity on the production of knowledge (Donna Harraway), and the question of women's ethical relationships to and care of themselves (Lois McNay, Diana Taylor, Karen Vintges).[1] Subjectification, bio-power and technologies of the self also provide useful paradigms for understanding how discourses about girls affect both how we as a culture conceive of girls and how the normalization of particular discursive models of girlhood allow girls to enact their identities as girls through the adoption of behaviors, the participation in everyday practices, and the reproduction of modes of bodily stylization and comportment deemed constitutive of normative girlhood.

Central to the operation of bio-power for Foucault is the ability of discourse to establish behavioral norms. As he asserts in volume one of *The History of Sexuality*, the "consequence of this development of bio-power [in the eighteenth century] was the growing importance assumed by the action of the norm," to "qualify, measure, appraise and hierarchize" individuals in order to ensure their compliance with both legal and social codes of behavior (144). In other words, the deployment of bio-power requires the standardization of bodies, as well as ways of being and practices of living, the enforcement of which Foucault argues necessitates a move away from the

punishment of deviance or transgression and towards disciplinary practices aimed at "correcting" irregular behaviors by conditioning subjects to comply with behavioral norms. In the present day, this project encompasses the surgical modification of bodies classified as abnormal (as in the placement of cochlear implants in deaf individuals), behavior-modification programs employed to "correct" ways of being and/or living deemed socially unacceptable (as in the evangelical Christian camps that promise to "cure" gay and lesbian individuals of their attraction to members of the same sex), as well as state-administered penal or psychiatric rehabilitation programs for individuals who engage in violent or criminal behaviors (as in the protocols of psychotherapy and/or pharmaceutical treatments [so-called "chemical castration"] used in the attempted rehabilitation of perpetrators of sexual assault).

In his examination of disciplinary institutions such as prisons, schools and hospitals in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault suggests that observation, classification, and what he terms "normalizing judgment" are critical to the discursive implementation of both behavioral and identity norms (170). Individuals are observed, their behaviors documented and categorized, and then judged against a set of criteria demarcating licit and illicit behaviors, legitimate and illegitimate expressions of identity, in order to determine how they are classified and what (if any) steps need to be taken to bring them in line with social, psychological or juridical standards. In one sense, then, the discursive establishment of norms marks out the dividing lines between the normative and the pathological, allowing us to classify which things fall into which category. At the same time, however, Foucault also intimates that all subject positions, behaviors and practices are subject to processes of normalization, through which they are assigned a norm specific to them regardless of whether they fall within the larger discursive categories of "normal" or "abnormal." Thus, transgressive identities/behaviors/practices have a norm—a set

of criteria through which they are measured and classified—every bit as much as normative identities, behaviors or practices do. The identity category "tomboy," for example, is generally considered to fall outside of normative expressions of girlhood when measured against hegemonic constructions of girls' gendered identities. However, the category of tomboy itself has a set of standards though which insertion into this category is determined—an interest in masculine-coded leisure activities, athletic prowess, a refusal to wear feminine-coded clothing, deviation from conventionally feminine forms of bodily appearance and comportment, etc.—and one can only qualify as a tomboy if one complies with these standards.

Likewise, hegemonic constructions of girlhood also have a set of standards that one must conform to in order to qualify as a "normal" girl in cultural terms. *The Big Book of Girl Stuff*, published in 2006 and touted on the front cover as "the hip handbook for girls," provides an example of the behavioral standards used to demarcate "normal" girls in U.S. culture, but it also provides an excellent illustration of the ways in which processes of normalization are carried out through the documentation, classification and codification of particular ways of being a girl. The topics discussed in this book provide a template for the interests, activities, and behaviors that U.S. culture considers constitutive of normative girlhood. They include (from the table of contents), "Boys" (as in "How does flirting work?", "How can I tell if a boy has a crush on me?" and "How do I tell a boy I like him?" [34-35]), "Dance and Cheerleading," "Dolls and Stuffed Animals," "Beauty," "Sleepovers and Slumber Parties," and "Food and Dieting."

The advice given to girls in this handbook likewise instantiates a whole set of normative behaviors that girls are encouraged to adopt in relation to each topic, but which nonetheless are presented as being "natural" expressions of their identities as girls. For instance, the chapter "Fun Stuff to Do" includes the following instructions for an activity called "The Ultimate

Makeover":

> . . . two girls sit and face each other. One girl will apply makeup to the other's
>
> face, but the trick is that the girl applying the makeup has to do it blindfolded! . . .
>
> When she's done, the two girls switch roles, but nobody's allowed to look in the
>
> mirror until both are done . . . A different version of this game is getting a supply
>
> of hairclips, barrettes, combs, and brushes and having the girls do each other's
>
> hair. (63)

Implicit in these instructions are the messages that (1) only girls will enjoy playing this game; (2) that all girls will find this activity a "fun" thing to do; (3) that girls therefore enjoy styling hair and applying makeup; and (4) that because girls enjoy doing these things they can be expected to have the required supplies (cosmetics, hairclips, barrettes, etc.) on hand at any time should they desire to participate in this activity. Thus, particular ideas about girls (that they enjoy engaging in beauty regimens) and particular ways of being a girl (girls apply makeup and style hair and take pleasure in doing these things) are both normalized through their codification as "girl stuff" in this book.

Where bio-power comes into play is in girls' presumed internalization and reenactment of the model of girlhood outlined in the book after reading it—a result that is in no way guaranteed, as girls could just as easily reject this model of girlhood as conform to it. However, in the event that girl readers do incorporate the ways of being a girl normalized by *The Big Book of Girl Stuff* into their individual enactments of their identities as girls, they effectively discipline their bodies to reproduce the behaviors described in the book in order to bring themselves in line with the norms delineating the "typical" girl that are instantiated through those behaviors. This internalization and reenactment of discourses concerning particular identity categories in the

expression of one's own individual subjectivity is what Foucault termed "subjectification," which he describes as "the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" by adopting the discursive criteria through which the subject position one claims is constituted ("Subject" 208).

Judith Butler's conceptualization of gender as a performative practice in *Gender Trouble* provides a particularly useful explanation of how subjectification manifests on the level of the body. According to Butler, "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (43-44). This stylization of the body is predicated upon

> words, acts, gestures, and desire [that] produce the effect of an internal core or
> substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of
> signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of
> identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are
> *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport
> to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs
> and other discursive means. (173, italics in original)

Rather than an ontological state, then, Butler suggests that "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (33). Instead, gendered subjects are created through the bodily reproduction of normative gendered behaviors, which "performatively [constitute] by the very 'expression' that are said to be its results" the identity category they claim to be determined by (33). In this sense, girls do not enjoy applying makeup or styling hair because they are girls; it is through the enjoyment of applying makeup or styling hair that girls become girls.

As the product of discourses that normalize particular ways of being a particular kind of girl, girlhood therefore might also be considered to be a "doing" rather than a state of being. Girl as a subject position is consolidated through the reproduction of behavioral norms and norms of appearance inscribed onto and through the body, and it is in the repeated bodily citation of those norms over time that one's identity as a girl is established. Significantly, for Butler, to say that identity is an imitative practice constituted through the performance of a set of identity norms is not to say that the enactment of identity is volitional, nor that it is even necessarily conscious. Because discourses about identity establish particular characteristics as an effect of identity categories rather than acknowledging them as that which institutes those categories, they make the reproduction of these characteristics appear as a natural expression of one's identity, an expression that is internalized to the point where it becomes "second nature," and does not have to be consciously or intentionally enacted.

In this way, Butler's model of gender identity as a set of reiterative performative practices recalls Foucault's discussion of self-correction as the aim of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish*, in which he suggests that "the chief function of disciplinary power is to 'train'" individuals to think, act and be in particular ways (170). Foucault uses Bentham's model of the panopticon as a metaphor for the process through which practices of external conditioning become internalized to the point where individuals will monitor and correct their own behavior without outside force or the threat of punishment for non-compliance. For Foucault, this process is dependent upon the guarantee (and the fear) of perpetual surveillance; because those imprisoned in the panopticon have no way of knowing when they are under observation, they will behave as if they are under observation at all times (*Discipline* 201). However, while Butler's theory of performativity incorporates aspects of this self-policing and self-correction, in

her schema self-correction becomes self-expression, and is therefore not only enacted without the threat of punishment, but also without the condition (or the threat) of observation. Instead, she suggests in regard to gender that because the enactment of our gender identities is taken as a "natural" expression of subjectivity, individuals will comply with gender norms without coercion, but also without having to be prompted—or monitored—in any way.[2]

Girls thus internalize the rules of girlhood they are enculturated into, and they not only comply with those rules without being forced, but also without conscious effort. In terms of everyday practices, the act of being seated provides an instructive illustration of this process. In U.S. culture there are particular social codes that govern the bodily comportment of males and females, and which affect everything from how they sit and stand to how they walk and carry their bodies. In teaching these codes to girls, it is common in the United States for them to be told to sit with their legs crossed from the time that they are very young. As they age, and as they are repeatedly corrected to sit in a particular way, however, it is equally common for girls and women to sit with their legs crossed without being prompted, and, indeed, without always being conscious of this action as they are performing it. Likewise, it is not unusual for girls/women to comply with this dictate even when they are alone and unobserved. In this sense, girls/women who internalize these corrective measures might be considered to be exemplars of what Foucault terms "docile bodies," the "body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful" according to how it is instructed, and in ways that render the body subject to institutional control (*Discipline* 136).

Foucault has been widely criticized for this conception of disciplinary power as producing docile bodies because it does not take account of individual agency, nor does it allow for any resistance to disciplinary practices. This is a shortcoming that Foucault himself

acknowledged, and which he sought to redress in his later work on what he termed "technologies of the self." In the essay "Technologies of the Self," he describes such technologies as sets of practices that "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, [or] perfection" (18). Technologies of the self might be understood, therefore, as a range of discourses concerning the maintenance, care and health of the body, the development and nurturance of the psyche, and practices of everyday living that individual subjects utilize in their own projects of self-realization, self-care or self-improvement.

As Moya Lloyd notes, this model of the enactment of discourses about the self on the level of the body acts as a corrective to Foucault's docile bodies model by "involv[ing] the subject in the active (though not always necessarily independent) production of themselves" (246). That is, it grants agency to the subject by allowing for a spectrum of options she or he can choose between in the enactment of identity. However, these options are not limitless, nor are they outside of the operations of discourse-knowledge-power, since they are ultimately circumscribed by the discourses in which they are codified. To return to the examples of tomboys and more conventionally-gendered girls discussed above, girls may be free to choose between these two models (or any number of others) in expressing their identities as girls, but their enactment of those identities is still contained within the discursive criteria through which each identity category is constituted. Thus, the agency that individuals are granted in Foucault's model of technologies of the self is not one of absolute self-creation (which, in any case, would be impossible in Foucauldian terms), but rather the agency to choose one's own method of subjectification.

At the same time, while transgressive enactments of identity are often linked in feminist discourse to projects of resistance to cultural norms, and therefore associated with libratory practices, within the Foucauldian schema the only liberation they can offer is from hegemonic ways of living or being, not from the exercise of power over practices of living or being themselves. Ultimately, both dominant and transgressive discourses surrounding identity still impose a series of operations on the bodies of those they subjectify; the difference is merely in the aim to which that power is exercised. This is an important point, because for Foucault discourse as an instrument of power is not only a mechanism for controlling individuals; it also contains the potential to produce strategies of resistance to institutional control over the self. Indeed, as he makes clear in volume one of *The History of Sexuality*,

> we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable . . . Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (101)

It is as one such attempt at formulating a "point of resistance" in relation to hegemonic girlhood that girl power discourse positions itself. Girl power is conceived in its own terms as a means of exposing, undermining and/or countering the ways of being imposed upon girls by dominant U.S. culture. However, because girl power is also a discursive program for the enactment of an "alternative" form of girlhood, it raises a number of questions beyond merely

the degree to which it deviates from the cultural meanings assigned to girls and the behaviors imposed upon them by hegemonic models of girlhood—namely what ways of being a girl are instantiated through girl power discourse and what ends are served by encouraging girls to adopt these ways of being. These questions will be explored in detail in chapters three, four, five, and six. For now, because girlhood, like all discursive categories, has a particular history of development, it also becomes necessary to trace the evolution of the identity category girl in the United States in order to be able to place the girl at the center of girl power discourse in relation to this history.

The Origins of Girlhood and The Emergence of Girl as an Identity Category

Jane H. Hunter ascribes the emergence of "girl" as an ontological category in Western culture to a shift in middle class social practices in the late nineteenth century, as a result of which it became increasingly common for families who could afford to educate their daughters past the point where they were old enough to be apprenticed or sent to work in the industrial or domestic sectors to keep female children in school throughout their teenage years. According to Hunter, the subject position girl evolved from the figure of the schoolgirl, who appeared in public discourse and popular culture representations during this era in response to this trend. Before this time, girlhood was widely viewed as nothing more than a precursor to womanhood, with girls conceived of merely as younger versions of women rather than as subjects with a separate set of interests and desires or a separate psychic makeup. Thus, all females who had not yet reached adulthood were considered to be "young women," while, according to Hunter, prior to 1880 "the term *girl* . . . referred to both age and status," with the idiom equally deployed as a descriptor for prepubescent children, a slang expression connoting sexualization when applied to

adult women, and a referent for "a servant, or a social inferior" (393, italics in original). As middle class girls remained in school long enough to complete high school educations, however, the phrase "schoolgirl" entered colloquial speech as a compliment to "schoolboy" (Hunter 393). Eventually, as the term came to stand in for all females of a certain age, the qualifier "school" was dropped from the label, and young women were increasingly identified simply (and uniformly) as "girls" (Hunter 394).

Girls as a demographic group appear in Western discourse around the same time that adolescence is also first identified and codified, and thus when the figure of the teenager is also first instantiated through medical, psychological, anthropological and sociological writings. The idea of adolescence as a transitional phase of development between childhood and adulthood is often credited as having its origins in Sigmund Freud's work on the Oedipus complex, which in many ways still continues to shape contemporary understandings of aspects of gender and sexual development that are associated today with the teenage years. In fact, many popular beliefs about teenagers that are widely held within U.S. culture in the present moment have their roots in late nineteenth and early twentieth century psychological treatises. Anna Freud's theory of adolescence as a time of extreme emotional turmoil and G. Stanley Hall's "Sturm und Drang" model of adolescence, which posits the teen years as ones of rapid and turbulent psychological and physical change, have both contributed to current views of teenagers as moody, combative and given to unpredictable and intense shifts in emotion. Likewise, Erik Erikson's conceptualization of adolescence as a period of "identity crisis" during which subjects pass through successive phases of self-discovery and socialization, begin to realize their individual potential, and find their places in the world, colors everything from contemporary self-help books to coming of age stories.

As feminist critics have widely noted, these models of adolescent development, although applied universally to both girls and boys, nonetheless assume a gendered difference between male and female development, while at the same time focusing almost exclusively on male development. As a result, they only discuss—or conceive of—female development in terms of its deviations from the male model that they institute as the developmental norm. Catherine Driscoll argues that in the work of the elder Freud in particular, girls are "constituted as a new form of deviant subject," defined by either "recalcitrant femininity or fantasizing hysteria," and she points to Freud's infamous case study of the young woman identified as Dora as the most explicit illustration of his tendency to theorize female adolescence in terms of "neurotic and hysterical girls . . . who have failed to accomplish the repressions and cathexes necessary for maturity," thus inaugurating the view of female psychic development as both pathological and a failed version of male development (*Girls* 59-60). Similarly, Nancy Lesko maintains that Hall's multi-volume *Adolescence: It's Psychology and It's Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*, published in 1904 and widely regarded as the first in-depth psychological study of adolescence, is "a discourse about the making of [male] middle-class whiteness" (68), which exclusively traces the subject formation of the white, heterosexual, masculine-identified male, and then generalizes that subject formation to encompass all of adolescent development, even, as Lesko points out, when the adolescents in question are white girls, boys and girls of color, gay and lesbian youth, or transgendered youth (11).

Hall's work on adolescence therefore also becomes significant because it explicitly points to the ways in which all of the developmental models mentioned above are not only gendered, but also raced, classed and sexualized in very specific ways that reflect Western culture's

positioning of the white, male, middle class, heterosexual, masculine-identified subject as the "universal" subject, while simultaneously relegating all other subject positions to the place of "minority," "deviant" or "Other."   Hall's recapitulation theory of adolescent development, which posits that the maturation process reproduces the evolutionary move from "primitive" to "civilized" states, with adolescence functioning as the transitional phase between the two, draws upon racist associations of the "primitive" with men and women of color, as well as with the child-like and the feminine. It likewise equates "civilization" with the practices and values of white Western patriarchal culture during late modernity. Thus, as Lesko argues, Hall's theory of adolescent development also becomes a theory of "manhood and dominance, coded as civilization" upon which rests not just the (male) individual's successful passage from childhood to maturity, but also the dominant social positions of white men in patriarchal Western society (55).

Hall's conceptualization of adolescence as a passage from a "savage state" to a "developed, superior Western selfhood" (Lesko 55) is reflected in popular representations of adolescence dating from the same period in which he was writing, which invoke the identity category "teenager" in similarly gendered and racialized terms. For example, in *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture*, Jon Savage cites a series of newspaper reports on male youth gangs in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Paris in which the term "Apache" was popularized to refer to violent or unruly groups of male teens (46). This term is weighted with both gendered and racial connotations, as it not only invokes stereotypes of Native Americans as "savages" in order to attribute to the youth gangs in question an assumed adolescent male penchant towards brutality, but it also references a specifically *masculine* construction of Native American identity, as the warrior image conjured by the term "Apache" is one that has been traditionally applied by white

American and European cultures only to Native American men. Thus, while "Apache"

eventually became a term synonymous with "hooligan" in early twentieth century popular

vernacular, the construction of adolescence that it references is one specifically based upon

Native American men, whose racial identities are simultaneously stereotyped and erased through

the appropriation of the term to refer to disorderly male youth in general.

Within this context, it is worth noting here that much in the same way that nineteenth

century psychological models of adolescence still color contemporary understandings of teenage

identity and behavior, the racializing and gendering of adolescence most obvious in Hall's work

also persist in present-day discourses concerning teenagers. This is perhaps evinced most

explicitly by Thomas Hine's characterization of U.S. teens in *The Rise and Fall of the American*

Teenager: A New History of the American Adolescent Experience as "the noble savage in blue

jeans" (10). Hine's entirely unselfconscious and uncritical use of racist language to depict U.S.

teenagers as "messy, sometimes loutish character[s] who [are] nonetheless capable of performing

heroically when necessary" (10), similarly references a specifically masculinized construction of

the figure of the adolescent-as-savage, in which the term "savage" is understood as a referent for

"non-white" even as Hine uses this figure to construct a history of adolescence in which it is

discussed almost exclusively in terms of the experiences of white teenagers. Far from a "new"

understanding of adolescence, then, Hine's work, which was published in 1999, reproduces the

same "technology of whiteness that supported white boys and white men as superior [and] also

echoed the rightness of racialized dominance" that Lesko attributes to nineteenth century

writings on adolescence (46). As such, it also suggests that contemporary discourses about

adolescence are still haunted—at least in some cases—by a tendency to generalize the

assumption of a male-sexed, masculine-gendered, white, middle class, heterosexual subject

position as the "typical" developmental trajectory enacted during the teenage years.

If girls are absent from late nineteenth and early twentieth century psychological theories of adolescent development except as illustrations of the pathological, however, they are frequently featured as subjects of popular writings on adolescence dating from this period, in which girls are alternately treated as sites of anxiety, complaint or intervention—in all three cases, centered on their "proper" gendered and (hetero)sexual development. Eliza Lynn Linton's opinion piece "The Girl of the Period," which appeared in the London newspaper *The Saturday Review* in 1868, is indicative of such texts. Decrying the emergence of First Wave feminism's "New Woman" and her effect on young women's attitudes and behaviors, Linton laments

> time was when the phrase, 'a fair young English girl,' meant the ideal of
>
> womanhood . . . It meant a creature generous, capable, modest . . . It meant a girl
>
> who could be trusted alone if need be, because of the innate purity and dignity of
>
> her nature, but who was neither bold in bearing nor masculine in mind; a girl who,
>
> when she married, would be her husband's friend and companion, but never his
>
> rival; one who would consider his interests as identical with her own, and not hold
>
> him as just so much fair game for spoil; who would make his house his true home
>
> and place of rest, not a mere passage-place for vanity and ostentation to pass
>
> through; a tender mother, an industrious housekeeper, a judicious mistress. (108)

Embedded within this protest against the rebelliousness of female youth—figured here as a refusal of young women to take up their socially-mandated places within the domestic sphere or to embody the ideals of modesty, purity and docility mandated by nineteenth century discourses of true womanhood—are cultural anxieties concerning shifting ideas about women, their social roles, and their entry into the public sphere brought about by the advent of First Wave feminism.

In this sense, Linton's condemnation of girls who are "bold in bearing" and "masculine in mind" reflect contemporaneous anxieties about women appropriating masculine-gendered behaviors—and, by extension, positions of social, political and economic power (not to mention cultural privilege) denied to women under patriarchy by virtue of their non- masculinity.

At the same time, however, Linton's demonizing of girls who would "rival" men rather than serve them as "a tender mother," "industrious housekeeper" or " judicious mistress" also reflect nineteenth century hegemonic differentiations between proper and improper ways of being a girl, in which the alignment of "proper" girls with culturally orthodox enactments of femininity displaces social anxieties about First Wave feminism onto adolescent females by framing those anxieties in terms of concern for future generations rather than fears about changes to current social conditions. In the process, Linton's essay also positions girlhood as a battleground for the preservation of patriarchy. This latter point is particularly significant, because in shifting concerns about feminist politics onto the figure of the Girl of the Period, and then characterizing her refusal to take a subordinate position to the men around her as an instance of youthful rebellion, Linton's essay attempts to discredit First Wave feminism by reducing its goals and practices to acts of adolescent misbehavior.

Indeed, while bemused, bewildered or condemnatory ruminations on the generation gap are a common feature in writings on adolescence from Hall to Hine, Linton's essay serves a dual ideological purpose, in that it seeks to preserve the status quo of patriarchal culture from incursions on the part of feminist reformers, as well as from members of the next generation who may or may not subscribe to values and systems of belief different from than their parents. This may explain, in part, why although unruly teenagers are positioned as social problems in both Linton's piece and the newspaper reports on the Parisian youth gangs that Savage discusses, the

criminal enterprises of the Parisian gangs arouse far less vitriol than the Girl of the Period's appropriation of masculine gender roles. The activities ascribed to the Parisian gangs, while certainly exceeding the limits of socially-acceptable behavior, at least fulfill hegemonic gender expectations, conforming to Freud's Oedipal model of male development, in which challenging adult male authority is a necessary step towards assuming the Father's place, the final stage in the Oedipal process. The Girl of the Period, on the other hand, categorically refuses to conform to models of hegemonic femininity, and because this refusal aligns her (at least in Linton's eyes) with First Wave feminist campaigns for women's suffrage, the rights of women to own and inherit property, and legal recognition of women as autonomous citizens rather than as property of their husbands/fathers, it renders her doubly threatening—and doubly in need of containment, whether in the form of psychoanalysis, incarceration in a juvenile reform facility, or participation in character-building organizations like the Girl Scouts or the YWCA, all of which have their origins in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

This is not to suggest that male delinquency was excused in the nineteenth century on the grounds that it was a normative feature of male psychic development, but rather to point out that male delinquency was most often conceived of in legal, sociological, and psychological discourses from this period in terms of an excessive display of masculine-gendered traits,[3] while female delinquency was most often conceived of in terms of a rejection of feminine-gendered traits. Accordingly, the Parisian youth gangs are not considered delinquents because they engage in aggressive behavior, but instead because they carry their aggression too far, jeopardizing public safety. In contrast, the Girl of the Period forms the prototype for female delinquency as campaigned against by social reform groups, the popular press, and the legal systems in both Western Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth century precisely because she acts

aggressively, asserting herself—and, more to the point, asserting herself sexually—where "proper" young ladies of the time remained silent, subservient, and, above all else, chaste.

It is worth noting here that among the transgressions committed by Linton's Girl of the Period, her assertion of sexual desire is at least as problematic in Linton's estimation as her "bold bearing." Indeed, the two are not separable from one another in Linton's essay, which is rife with denouncements of the Girl of the Period's overt sexuality. In this way, assertions of adolescent female desire are linked to girls' rejection of traditional gender roles, and both are positioned by Linton as dangers not just to the patriarchal social order, but also (and perhaps more seriously) to the patriarchal symbolic order. Significantly, as Lesko notes, in the United States during the period in which Linton's essay was published in Britain, girls appeared before juvenile delinquency courts "almost exclusively for alleged early sexual exploration and received harsher punishments [for such offenses] than did boys" (82). Likewise, Savage reports of Chicago's Juvenile Court, the first in the United States, which was established after the enactment of the Juvenile Court Act in 1899, that "girls were most commonly charged with 'immorality,' 'disorderly conduct,' 'incorrigibility,' and associating with 'vicious persons.' Most of the young women who appeared before the court were in danger of losing or had already lost their 'virtue'" (65). While the disproportionate prosecution of girls for engaging in heterosexual activity by the nineteenth century legal system thus effectively limited U.S. cultural conceptions of female delinquency almost exclusively to sex (much in the same way that the disinclination to prosecute boys for engaging in heterosexual activity likewise framed male delinquency almost exclusively in terms of the acts of violence or theft that they were prosecuted for), social discourses on female delinquency during this period also tended to frame girls' defiance of sexual mores as moral transgressions rather than as political or economic acts.

As a result, delinquent girls—i.e. girls who engaged in sexual activity not sanctioned by patriarchal society—were either positioned as victims who needed to be saved from their "immoral" ways, or else malefactors who needed to be punished for them. In cases of prostitution (and not cases in which girls were prosecuted simply for having sex outside of marriage) the social and economic factors that might force girls into trading sex for money were left completely unacknowledged, in spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of the girls who appeared before nineteenth century U.S. juvenile courts were members of the poor or the working class. Thus, adolescent female desire is rendered illicit through nineteenth century discourses on juvenile delinquency, since all sexual activity on the part of girls becomes a criminal act in the eyes of the juvenile justice system. At the same time, in divorcing girls' sexual activity from considerations of either assertions of agency or questions of economic necessity (depending on the circumstances), adolescent sexual activity on the part of girls ends up conceived of only as a willful defiance of judicial law, as well as, in the case of Linton's essay, Lacan's Law of the Father. That it might be an effect of girls' asserting their personhood (in instances of consensual sexual activity), or the result of girls' oppression under capitalist patriarchy (in instances of prostitution) becomes—literally—inconceivable within this discursive framework, where only girls deemed delinquent or pathological act on their desires (sexual or otherwise), and in which the acting upon of desire on the part of girls is conceived of in no uncertain terms as a threat to the stability of the patriarchal order because it is linked to a defiance of women's roles as desired objects rather than desiring subjects around which the patriarchal symbolic is largely organized.

In this way, almost from their emergence as subjects in Western discourse, girls are conceived of in both social sciences literature and popular culture representations as problems

for patriarchy, whether it is Dora refusing Freud's diagnosis and treatment or Linton's Girl of the Period refusing to subordinate her interests and desires to those of her husband. This, of course, is not a position unique to girls, as adult women have been and continue to be positioned within hegemonic Western culture as the patriarchal male subject's unruly, unknowable Other. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that like their adult counterparts before them, nineteenth century girls also quickly became the subjects of institutional forms of policing, regulation and correction aimed at ensuring their "proper" gender and (hetero)sexual development, as well as their compliance with—and acquiescence to—girls'/women's subordinate socio-cultural status. As Lesko points out, "by the late 1800s the 'girl problem' came into its own [in the United States]. Private civic groups, such as settlement houses, women's clubs, the YWCA, and the Girl Scouts inaugurated efforts, and governments followed with a proliferation of reformatories for girls" (82). These efforts at correcting delinquent behavior were paralleled by efforts to encourage willing conformity to dominant models of normative girlhood, exemplified by the abundance of guidance manuals for girls published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as advice columns in popular girls' magazines like *The Girls' Own Paper* in England, both of which provided readers with guidelines for how to be/become "proper" young women (see Driscoll, *Girls* 37-42).

It should be noted here that Hunter links the emergence of a consumer culture targeted specifically to girls in the United States in the late nineteenth century, of which popular magazines for girls were also a part, to an increased social liberty enjoyed by middle class girls, that, together with their participation in secondary education, "marked a substantial break with an economy of self-denial otherwise advocated for girls' domestic lives" and "allowed for a greater sense of fun and play than their elders encouraged" (5). In Hunter's view, this

engendered the development of "'new girls' en route to becoming the New Woman of the new century," so that the schoolgirl of the late nineteenth century can be seen in many ways as the precursor to the New Woman (368). However, if middle class "girls' growing freedom to indulge themselves in small transactions" during this era can be equated with a limited freedom from the constraints placed upon girls' behavior under patriarchy (Hunter 5), such freedom is circumscribed not only by the fact that it was only accessible to those girls who could afford the regular purchase of the consumer products through which this "liberation" was achieved, but also by the fact that, as in the case of girls' magazines, those consumer products overwhelmingly encouraged girls to comply with their culturally-determined gender roles rather than to rebel against them. In this sense, the emergence in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century of a consumer culture organized around adolescent girls' greater social freedom is less an endorsement of that freedom than it is evidence of attempts to capitalize upon it, a commodification of the figure of the New Woman on par with the mobilization of illustrator Charles Dana Gibson's "Gibson Girl" in popular advertisements from this same period, which were, after all, far less concerned with encouraging women to adopt First Wave feminist politics than in containing First Wave social reforms by limiting women's "empowerment" to their purchase of various consumer goods.

At the same time, much as nineteenth century guidance manuals and girls' magazines enforced hegemonic models of femininity, popular literature for and about girls during this period also functioned to assert dominant patriarchal models of girlhood by providing readers with either celebratory models of "proper" Victorian girls or cautionary tales of the social, physical and spiritual ruin that supposedly awaited girls who strayed from the path towards true womanhood. Tales of fallen girls like Henry James's *Daisy Miller* (1878) and Theodore

Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) are typical of this latter category, at once providing adult readers with fantasies of youthful female rebellion and ensuring that that rebellion is suitably quashed by the close of the narrative. Both novels evince a fascination with the "American Girl," the Girl of the Period's U.S. counterpart, and her scandalous flouting of social convention that is surpassed only by the satisfaction both seem to take in their eponymous heriones' ultimate downfall and punishment.[4] Indeed, despite the prevailing critical tendency to read *Daisy Miller* as a condemnation of European Victorian morality, with the character of Daisy functioning as the personification of U.S. modernity and the disapproving society matrons who shun her as personifications of an anachronistic continental traditionalism, James's own attitude towards the figure of the American Girl seems to mirror the extreme ambivalence his narrator expresses towards Daisy. This is suggested most forcefully by James's description of the American Girl as "the least bit *hard* . . . painted and touzled [*sic*] and wantonly *chiffonee* . . ." (qtd. in Helsinger et al. 122, italics in original)—sentiments that, while by no means reflective of how all of late nineteenth century U.S. culture assessed the American Girl, are certainly indicative of the mixture of captivation, anxiety and scorn with which she was represented in most popular culture texts dating from this period.

In contrast, no such ambivalence marks the representation of the March sisters, whose attempts to school themselves in obedience, docility and "goodness" over the course of Louisa May Alcott's 1868 novel *Little Women* are couched in terms of unequivocal approbation. Now considered a classic of young adult literature, and a staple text in U.S. middle school curricula right through to the present moment, Alcott's story is practically a handbook for the mastery of true womanhood, with Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, despite their very different temperaments and ambitions, all concluding their transition from childhood to adulthood by learning to put aside

their dreams and desires in favor of becoming selfless, devoted "angels in the house" (although

patiently-suffering Beth, who dies of scarlet fever before she has the chance to fully reach

adulthood, is by far the most accomplished in self-abnegation). Even defiant, independent-

minded Jo, who spends much of the novel insisting that she wants to remain single and pursue a

career as a writer, eventually—and wholeheartedly—subordinates those goals to fulfill the social

expectation that she will marry and maintain a family, and while she does manage to succeed in

becoming a professional author, that achievement is somewhat eclipsed in *Little Women* by her

engagement to Mr. Bhaer (the event with which the novel concludes), and it is entirely

overshadowed in the novel's two sequels *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886) by her role as

surrogate-mother to the students in the school her husband runs, as well as caregiver to her own

children.

  In *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century*

America, Francis B. Cogan cites fictional characters like Jo as embodiments of an alternative

discourse to true womanhood, which she terms "real womanhood," and which she suggests

circulated in the second half of the nineteenth century alongside of (and in tension with) true

womanhood, ostensibly offering women "another, more open, completely autonomous and

indigenous American ideal . . . to emulate . . . [that] advocated intelligence, physical fitness and

health, self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance, and careful marriage" (4). However, the medical

literature, popular magazine stories and popular fiction that Cogan cites to develop the concept

of real womanhood appear to encourage the cultivation of these qualities and pursuits *in addition*

to those promoted by the cult of true womanhood, not in place of them, suggesting that real

womanhood was more a variation on true womanhood than an alternative to it. Furthermore, as

Cogan herself notes, discourses of real womanhood almost always presented "self-sufficiency"

and "economic self-reliance" for women as pursuits limited to the period before marriage rather than as coextensive with it—nevermind as an alternative to marriage—which may explain at least in part why Jo's bid for autonomy, like many of the other heroines in the fictional stories Cogan discusses, is confined to "a brief stint of self-supporting employment" (245), after which Jo, like Meg and Amy before her, must eventually take up the more conventional female occupations of wife and helpmeet.

In this way, *Little Women* inaugurates a trend present in much (although not all) twentieth century young adult literature, in which coming of age stories featuring female protagonists tend to center around spirited, intelligent, precocious girls who express a desire to dress, act, be educated and/or live out their adult lives like their male counterparts, and who are required to put aside these desires along with the rest of their childhood things and to embrace hegemonic femininity upon attaining adulthood. As Driscoll notes, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, "bildungsroman generally focused on boys/men—not because there were no novels written about girls growing up, but because a novel about girls' development tends to be romance fiction, a novel about how she grows up and into love, is made by love" (*Girls* 51). However, coming of age narratives about girls from this period do not merely structure female maturation such that the path to womanhood ends in heterosexual union; rather they do so in a way that makes the assumption of both hegemonic femininity and heterosexual ties inevitable— not just the expected path that girls will take, but the only viable path open to them. Thus, novels like *Little Women*, L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series (1908-1921), and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) all support a version of female maturation in which childhood resistance to gender norms and/or heteronormativity is a mark of immaturity, and in which rebellious girls outgrow their rebelliousness as they age, with their desire for individual

autonomy and social equality abandoned once they reach adulthood and discover the pleasures of conforming to the very gender and sexual scripts they once rejected. In the process, such novels also appropriate central tenets of U.S. feminism (that women and men should be equal subjects under the law and have equal access to the same social opportunities) and equate them with childish fancies such that "growing up" means not only accepting women's subordinate social status, but also abandoning any efforts to resist or to change it.

At the same time, bildungsroman that conceive of women's passage to adulthood in terms of an assumption of hegemonic femininity also inaugurate a view of childhood as a magical, pre-gender period, in which female children are untouched by cultural pressures to conform to their expected gender roles. This idea that it is puberty that marks girls' entry into the gender order, and that puberty not only signals adulthood for women, but also the loss of their ability or their willingness to resist compliance with feminine norms, has been taken up by a number of feminist writers of late twentieth and early twenty-first century girl problem literature, who overwhelmingly assert that girls "loose" themselves in adolescence because the onset of puberty marks their acquisition of gender, and thus their psychic decimation under the weight of social expectations to conform to hegemonic gender codes. The first, and perhaps most influential girl problem work to make this claim is Lyn Mikel Brown's and Carol Gilligan's *Meeting at the Crossroads*, published in 1992, which grew out of the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development, and which argues that adolescence is "a time of heightened psychological risk for girls" during which they "lose their vitality, their resilience, their immunity to depression, their sense of themselves and their character" (2).[5] Guided by *Meeting at the Crossroads*, Orenstein's *Schoolgirls*, Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia*, and the AAUW's *How School's Shortchange Girls* all make similar assertions, effectively depicting adolescence as a de

facto passage through the gates of hell for girls, beyond which they are transformed from outgoing, curious, confident individuals to withdrawn, silent, self-effacing ghosts of their former selves.

Typical of this conception of childhood as an idyllic, gender-free zone is Pipher's contention in *Reviving Ophelia* that prior to adolescence girls "have a brief respite from the female role and can be tomboys, a word that conveys courage, competency and irreverence . . . [t]hey can be androgynous, having the ability to act adaptively in any situation regardless of gender role constraints" (18). It is also typically problematic, in that it is based on a number of questionable assumptions about gender and culture that haunt all of the books mentioned in the previous paragraph. For one thing, much in the same way that coming-of-age novels that link female adulthood to an acceptance of hegemonic femininity use puberty as the point of transition from gender resistance to gender conformity, these psychological and sociological studies of girlhood likewise position the onset of puberty as the onset of cultural pressures to conform to hegemonic gender roles, occluding the ways in which gendered behaviors are both inculcated in and monitored throughout childhood. From the moment that a child is designated female or male, whether it is in the delivery room upon birth or upon the reading of a sonogram image while still a fetus in the womb, an entire set of gendered expectations is mobilized that determine everything from the child's name to her/his toys, clothes, the leisure activities she/he will be encouraged to participate in, and the interests and skills it is presumed she/he will develop. Indeed, children are not only assigned a gender long before they reach adolescence, but contrary to Pipher et.al., there is never a time when children—whether female or male—are beyond the reach of societal expectations regarding their compliance with that gender.

At the same time, while Sally Mitchell may be correct in her suggestion that because

childhood is regarded as something of a liminal space in Western culture, girls in the West are

sometimes able to "behave in ways that might not be appropriate for a woman" (245), this does

not mean that girls are free to break with gender norms during childhood without facing censure

or being subjected to methods of correction, as many girls categorized as tomboys can attest.

Pipher's romanticizing of the tomboy figure aside, "courage, competency and irreverence" are

not the only associations attached to this figure in dominant U.S. culture, and most of those

associations carry far more negative connotations. Moreover, even if it were true that childhood

is a time of "androgyny"—a claim that I strongly contest—we do not live in a culture that

embraces (or condones) gender ambiguity of any kind, and in the same way that children are

gendered from the moment their biological sex is determined, children who act outside of gender

expectations are rarely free to "to act adaptively in any situation regardless of gender role

constraints."   Instead, while gender-bending may be tolerated—within extreme limits—in

children up to a certain age, children who defy gender expectations are far more likely to be met

with anxiety, suspicion or disciplinary measures than with approval. This is not to suggest that

transgender children do not exist, but rather to point out that transgender children, like

transgender adults, face a tremendous amount of social pressure to declare themselves either

female or male and to act accordingly; they are not, as Pipher would seem to have them be, a

model for an "androgynous" world beyond gender expectations, but instead fellow inhabitants of

a world wholly structured by the male-female gender binary and all the confusion, hostility and

rejection that results when one does not fit easily or neatly into either of those categories.

Ultimately, then, as with the bildungsroman discussed above, these girl problem books that

endorse the myth of childhood as a pre-gender space not only ignore the very real ways in which

gender expectations structure our experiences from our earliest childhoods, but they also make it

seem as if gender equity is something that girls lose with the onset of puberty, conveniently covering over the fact that within patriarchal culture gender equity is something that girls don't ever have to begin with.

However, girls' social equality (or lack thereof) is not determined solely by gender. Race, class, sexuality and physical ability also factor into the cultural, political and economic power that girls have access to, as well as the degree to which they find their experiences reflected within—and validated through—popular culture representations. Thus, it should be acknowledged that both the figure of the Girl of the Period and the American Girl, although dominant representations of girlhood throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, are not universal constructions of girlhood, but rather are representative of a very specific white, heterosexual, middle and upper class version of girlhood. In contrast, adolescent girls of color were largely limited to representation in U.S. popular culture during this period to autobiographical narratives like Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and disabled girls only found representation as either tragic figures like the character of Clara in Johanna Spyri's *Heidi* (1880) or inspirational figures who managed to "transcend" their physical "infirmities" like Helen Keller. Similarly, working class girls mainly entered into popular discourse as subjects of the labor reform movement, most notably through newspaper exposes on working conditions in factories and mills.

Thus, when girl first emerges as an identity category in the West in the late nineteenth century, the ways of being an adolescent girl and expressing one's identity as an adolescent girl that became instantiated as the norm through popular discourse and popular culture representations were based on a very specific model of white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, feminine-identified girls, their performance of identity, and the cultural practices they

were most commonly associated with. This, in turn, did not merely exclude girls who fell outside of these subject categories from consideration as "typical" girls, but in many cases it disqualified them from representation as girls of any kind. This is significant not only because it reinforces the cultural hegemony of white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, "correctly" gendered individuals in U.S. society, but also because the discursive construction of "typical" girls as members of these dominant subject categories continued to shape mainstream representations of girlhood throughout the twentieth century, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Consequently, while the term girl was coined within U.S. culture to designate *all* non-adult females, from the nineteenth century onwards it has traditionally functioned on an ideological level to universalize the identities and experiences of one very specific type of girl, and to marginalize or to erase the identities and the experiences of others.

Within the same vein, it is also worth noting here that at the same time that nineteenth century discourses about girlhood established the first set of cultural criteria through which the identity category girl was constituted, they also established a discursive differentiation between licit and illicit performances of girlhood based on compliance with gender norms that has remained more or less constant ever since, even as cultural conceptions of girlhood have shifted and evolved. More significant within the context of this study, popular discourse surrounding girls and popular culture representations of girls in the nineteenth century also establish a discursive link between gender transgression and female empowerment (negatively positioned in terms of the Girl of the Period's depiction as "masculine in mind" and "bold of bearing" and the ways in which her appropriation of masculine social roles is perceived as a threat to patriarchal hegemony), as well as a further link between gender transgression, female empowerment and feminist values and practices. The next chapter traces these discursive links throughout popular

representations of adolescent girls in the twentieth century up to the advent of girl power. In doing so, it reveals a history of the cultural construction of girlhood in the United States that has always been inflected with concerns for girls' empowerment and anxieties about empowered girls, against which the girl at the center of girl power discourse emerges at the end of the twentieth century not as a radical break from earlier cultural conceptions of girlhood, but rather as a variation on popular understandings of the connections between girls' enactment of gender, their social empowerment and their relationship to feminism.

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL OF THE PERIOD: REPRESENTATIONS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN
TWENTIETH CENTURY U.S. POPULAR CULTURE

This chapter examines representations of adolescent girls in U.S. popular culture

throughout the twentieth century up to the emergence of girl power in the late 1990s. In doing

so, it traces the evolution of five representational tropes that have structured popular depictions

of girls within U.S. culture from the nineteenth century onwards, and which popular

representations of girl power position themselves as radical departures from: (1) the conception

of girls as either the causes or the victims of social problems; (2) the depiction of deviations from

hegemonic femininity as pathological and/or constitutive of female juvenile delinquency; (3) the

establishment of discursive connections between the rejection of hegemonic femininity and

adolescent female empowerment; (4) the association of the transgression of adolescent female

norms with feminist political projects; and (5) the depiction of transgressive girls as disruptions

to the patriarchal order. This chapter is concerned primarily with the variations on each of these

tropes embodied by the discursive figures that have shaped dominant cultural constructions of

girlhood during different periods, from the dance hall girl in the 1910s to the girl at the center of

girl problem discourse in the 1990s. However, it would be a mistake to read the account of

representations of girlhood in the U.S. detailed here as a teleological progression that inevitably

leads to and culminates in popular culture representations of girl power at the turn of the

millennium. As this chapter will demonstrate, cultural understandings of girlhood vary within

historical eras as well as between them. There is never any one single model of girlhood, but

always multiple models that in some cases are complimentary with one another, and in other

cases are contradictory to one another. Thus, the history that is traced here is not one that views

girl power as an endpoint, but rather one that views girl power as one of a number of variations on cultural conceptions of girlhood, and which is concerned with tracing the relationship of popular depictions of girl power to other representations of girlhood within U.S. culture.

Few cultural histories of girlhood have been written, and those that have been published tend to focus narrowly on a particular historical period or cultural trend. Jane H. Hunters' *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood*, for example, looks at late nineteenth century attitudes concerning girls. Susan Douglas' *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female With the Mass Media* examines media representations of Baby Boomer generation girls/women between the 1950s and the 1990s, while Kathy Peiss' *Cheap Amusements: Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* devotes quite a bit of its focus to young women's participation in popular entertainments in a particular geographical location in the first decades of the twentieth century. There is little existing scholarship, however, that traces the social understandings, embodied practices and cultural representations of girls across historical eras.

Such an undertaking, while vitally needed within the field of girls' studies research, is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, what follows here is an account of the various ways of thinking about and understanding adolescent girls that have been culturally dominant within the United States at specific periods from the turn of the twentieth century to the present.   The history that is traced here is not that of actual girls, their lived experiences, or their embodied practices. Rather, following Foucault's method of genealogical inquiry, it is an examination of the ways that girls in the abstract, girls as discursive figures, have been conceived of and spoken about over time. Unlike traditional historical analysis, which is concerned with synthesis, and which arranges events in cumulative progression in order to uncover continuity between them,

genealogical analysis as Foucault advocated it seeks to "record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality . . . [to] be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes in which they engaged in different roles" (Foucault, "Nietzsche" 76). In other words, genealogy is a type of history that seeks to "map how things and ideas [become] possible within a given context" and at a given place and time (Driscoll, *Girls* 3). Thus, what follows is an examination of how particular cultural and historical contexts engendered particular knowledge about teenage girls, as well as particular ways of being a teenage girl.

Of course, the embodied practices of actual girls are encompassed within such a project, just as they are imbricated within cultural discourses concerning girls. However, the overlap between girls' embodied practices and discourses about those practices is partial and selective. There is often a disconnect between the way that girls are discussed and represented on a discursive level and the way that actual girls enact their identities as girls in particular times and places. This is perhaps most cogently illustrated by a May 1948 story in the *New York Times* recounting a luncheon for fashion magazine writers, editors and publishers, at which five adolescent girls were asked to share "their ideas of appearance, behavior, ideals and ambitions" ("Teen-Agers View World"). At a time when the term "bobby soxer" was frequently used in the press as a synonym for teenage girls in general, and in which representations of adolescent girls in U.S. popular culture were dominated by the figure of the bobby soxer, these girls "fiercely disclaimed the label of 'bobby soxers'" and appear to have taken great pains to point out the ways in which their every-day lives as teenage girls differed from contemporaneous popular culture representations of girls' interests, appearances and leisure activities. Given the disparity these girls point out between their expression of themselves as teenage girls and the way that

U.S. culture understood teenage girls during this era, it is worth reiterating here that while the embodied practices of actual girls are reflected to a certain extent in the discourses about girls that are traced in this section, this history is less concerned with the ways in which actual girls experienced their girlhood during a given historical period than with the ways in which U.S. culture framed the experience of girlhood during that period.

Similarly, as this *New York Times* piece also demonstrates, while girlhood is always multi-faceted and is continually evolving, on the level of popular culture, the figure of the teenage girl has been and continues to be narrowly defined according to hegemonic models. As such, what follows is not a complete accounting of all of the different ways in which girlhood has been conceived of and enacted. Instead, it is a history of the culturally dominant forms that girlhood has taken. At the same time, while discourses about girls are transmitted from a number of sites, this history focuses exclusively on articulations of girlhood in the news media and popular culture texts because of the emphasis within girl power discourse on media representations as tools for transmitting, reinforcing or subverting particular beliefs about girls and particular ways of being a girl.

Intersections of Liberation and Delinquency in Popular Representations of the Dance Hall Girl

In the first decade of the twentieth century, both popular discourse concerning adolescent girls and representations of teenage girls in the popular press were dominated by the figure of the dance hall girl, a "working-class variant of the 'New Woman'" (Peiss 6), who became the subject of intensive social reform efforts. The dance hall girl was a product of the rise of popular entertainment venues such as cinemas, amusement parks and commercial dance halls in the United States in the early twentieth century, all of which catered to members of the working

class, and all of which provided spaces for socialization to working class girls in their teens and

twenties, who otherwise lacked the time, money or freedom to indulge in leisure activities.

According to Kathy Peiss, participation in dance hall culture, which centered around "popularity,

dancing ability, fashionable clothes, and male attention," not only provided girls with "a few

hours of dancing and camaraderie," but also with "an opportunity to experiment with

unconventional sexual and social roles" (114). While the perceived eroticism of the rag time

music featured in dance halls and dance crazes like the Turkey Trot challenged sexual mores by

encouraging heterosexual couples to dance together in close proximity (and in a manner that was

shocking at the time for its suspected approximation of sexual intimacy [see Savage, 126]),

dance hall culture also encouraged girls to engage in other forms of "uninhibited behavior,"

including "[l]oud talk, boisterous laughter, and cigarette smoking," all of which similarly

challenged culturally-approved models of "proper" femininity (Peiss 108).

Randy D. McBee argues that, as a result, in the early twentieth century dance halls

functioned as sites of young women's emancipation from hegemonic gender roles, providing

them with "the chance to define what were acceptable heterosocial relations and to challenge the

conventional gender norms they confronted in their day-to-day lives," as well as "afford[ing]

women new ways to manage intimacy and to define what it meant" (83). In no small part

because they facilitated such challenges to the patriarchal gender and heterosexual orders, dance

halls—and along with them dance hall girls—also became a source of anxiety for dominant U.S.

culture during this period. They were at the center of a moral panic fuelled by their depiction as

dens of iniquity in fictional films like George Loane Tucker's 1913 *Traffic in Souls*, as well as

reform campaigns initiated by youth workers and social crusaders, who used claims that girls as

young as thirteen frequented the dance halls to heighten concerns over the spiritual and physical

dangers they ostensibly posed to the nation's female youth. As Peiss notes,

> where young women saw an aura of sensual pleasure, middle class observers of
>
> the commercial halls found immorality, drawing a lurid connection between
>
> working girls' recreation and vice. The press was filled with dramatic accounts of
>
> innocent daughters tempted by glittering dance halls, seduced and drugged by
>
> ruthless 'cadets' or pimps, and held against their will in brothels. (98)

 A large measure of the unease surrounding both girls' sexual freedom and their sexual

exploitation within the dance halls arose from the practice of "treating," a common feature of

dance hall culture, in which young women "would have sex in return for gifts and good times,"

but also, more importantly, "because [they] wanted to" (Hine 189). Peiss notes that for Dance

hall girls

> treating was not always a one-way proposition, but entailed an exchange
>
> relationship. In the male subculture of the saloon, treating rounds of beer asserted
>
> workingmen's independent status while affirming common ties among groups of
>
> equals. Women, however, were financially unable to reciprocate in kind and
>
> instead offered sexual favors of varying degrees. (109)

In this way, the practice of treating enabled working class girls to negotiate both socio-economic

and gender restrictions, allowing them access to material goods, as well as to sexual freedoms,

that otherwise would have been denied to them in the early twentieth century equally on account

of their sex and their economic status. As such, Peiss suggests that the practice of treating also

afforded dance hall girls a means of realizing "the pleasure and freedom they craved" as an

antidote to the oppressive conditions under which they lived their daily lives (Peiss 110-111).

Ultimately, then, while the moral panics surrounding the dance hall girl ostensibly stemmed from

working class girls' pursuit of (hetero)sexual relationships outside of the bonds of marriage—and occasionally as a means of material acquisition—the anxieties aroused by dance hall culture were equally situated in the ways in which that culture both encouraged and facilitated those girls' resistance to gender norms, as well as provided them with strategies for defying their subordinate socio-economic positions within dominant U.S. culture.

While the moral panic surrounding the figure of the dance hall girl may have been rooted in her defiance of gender and heterosexual norms, however, this defiance was almost exclusively linked in popular discourse during the 1910s to forms of delinquency manifesting as either the corruption of innocent girls preyed upon by the unscrupulous denizens of the dance halls or as the willful engagement in illicit activities like treating on the part of deviant girls who wantonly flouted social conventions governing adolescent female behavior. It is only in contemporary feminist scholarship that the dance hall girl has been retroactively reclaimed as a participant in grassroots forms of First Wave resistance. At the time, she was primarily viewed as either the victim or the cause of social problems—in either case a cause for societal intervention and concern. Thus, in the figure of the dance hall girl, the transgression of hegemonic models of femininity is positioned as a mark of delinquency, and adolescent girls who deviate from feminine norms are discursively positioned as either troubled or troublemakers.

The "Frivolous Flapper": Gender Transgression as Both Feminist Empowerment and Youthful Rebellion

The depiction of girls who step outside of their patriarchally-proscribed gender roles as troublemakers continues in the 1920s in the figure of the flapper, who gradually superseded the dance hall girl as the locus of popular fascination and public concern in relation to adolescent

girls, and who came to dominate both popular culture representations and popular discourses surrounding young women during the Jazz Age. With her bobbed hair, abbreviated hemlines, kohl-ringed eyes, and her penchant for red lipstick—not to mention her habits of smoking, drinking alcohol, and going about in public unescorted—the flapper challenged the gender and heterosexual mores of hegemonic U.S. culture in a manner similar to that of the dance hall girl, adopting an enactment of femininity "unrestrained by . . . old-fashioned notions of sex" (Latham 7). However, whereas the dance hall girl's deviation from compliance with traditional female gender codes tended to be depicted as a result of the corrupting influence of morally questionable individuals who were believed to frequent the commercial dance halls in order to tempt unsuspecting young women into vice, the flapper's sexualized manner of dress and her purported engagement in illicit sexual activity tended to be depicted as intentional rejections of hegemonic cultural values. As a result, rather than being seen as a victim of corruption or temptation, the flapper was herself portrayed at best as a wanton flirt, and at worst as a corruptor of men, a sexual temptress who toyed with, and often wrecked havoc upon, the male admirers who fell victim to her charms.

In this way, while the dance hall girl became a site for social concern and social intervention during the early twentieth century, the flapper became a site for social anxiety and social censure, in no small part because of the threat that her overt sexuality was believed to constitute to the patriarchal order. This is perhaps most evident in popular representations of the vamp, a discursive variant of the flapper, whose power to seduce and destroy the men around her was instantiated through a series of silent film characters played by Theda Bara and Pola Negri in the teens and twenties, as well as, perhaps most infamously, by Louise Brooks' portrayal of Lulu in G.W. Pabst's 1929 film *Pandora's Box*. It is also suggested through the characterization

of Daisy Buchanan, in many ways the prototypical flapper, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel

The Great Gatsby.   Daisy's impetuousness, her dread of boredom, and her single-minded pursuit

of amusement are just as damaging to Gatsby as Lulu's predatory sexuality is to Dr. Schoen in

Pandora's Box—albeit less calculating—suggesting that both the flapper and the vamp came to

be viewed equally within the popular imagination in the U.S. during the 1920s as threats in need

of suppression, rather than, as in the case of the dance hall girl, victims in need of salvation.

This positioning of the flapper as a more overt threat to patriarchy may stem from the fact

that the flapper was much more closely allied with First Wave feminism in popular discourses of

the period. In Britain, the flapper was so closely associated with the campaign for women's

suffrage in the early twentieth century that it was popularly dubbed "the flapper vote" (Melman

1). In the United States, where the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote was

approved by Congress in 1919 and signed into law in 1920, the flapper was often viewed

contemporaneously as a byproduct of the First Wave's successful campaign to expand women's

rights through the suffrage movement, as well as—in the eyes of patriarchal culture at least—the

social and moral decline that followed from women gaining access to participation in the public

sphere. Thus, although the flapper's mode of dress and the social behaviors associated with the

flapper shared with the behavioral codes and bodily stylizations enacted by the dance hall girl a

"'challenge' to gender and sex codes that had been handed down from the [feminist campaigns

of] the nineteenth century" (Latham 21), the strategies through which the flapper was perceived

to subvert hegemonic gender norms were figured as much more explicitly political in nature and

intent because they were directly linked to First Wave feminism in popular discourse, in spite of

the fact that First Wave feminists themselves were often reluctant to claim the flapper as a model

of empowerment, viewing her brand of rebellion as essentially apolitical.[1]

As a result of this conflation of the flapper and the feminist in popular rhetoric, the flapper not only became a repository for social anxieties concerning the purported decadence and moral decay that came to characterize the Jazz Age within dominant U.S. culture during the 1920s, but she also functioned as an inscription point for patriarchal anxieties over feminist reform. Perhaps more important for the purposes of this study, the association of the flapper with the newly enfranchised female voter also meant that the flapper was frequently represented in popular culture texts as a young woman in her twenties, pushing adolescent girls to the margins of mainstream U.S. popular culture, where they found representation chiefly in novels and magazines produced for consumption by girls rather than in more widely circulated texts intended for general audiences. One notable exception is the *Little Orphan Annie* comic strip, which was introduced in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1924, and which, through widespread syndication, did manage to reach an audience that extended beyond just young female readers. Although it's protagonist was not a teenager, but rather a pre-adolescent girl, the *Little Orphan Annie* comic also becomes significant within the context of this study because Annie's spunk, ingenuity and fighting spirit make her, in many ways, a precursor of the 1990s girl power heroine, although it should be noted that in Annie's case her ability to positively act outside of gender norms in the 1920s may have been made possible in no small part by the fact that she was too young to be depicted as either a flapper or a feminist.

At the same time, while a large number of teenage girls in the 1920s adopted the flapper look (see Schrum 27-43 and Latham 18-63), if not the feminist politics popularly associated with the flapper—which, it should be noted, many adult flappers eschewed as well—when the flapper was depicted in popular culture texts produced in the U.S. during this period, she was almost always portrayed as college-aged or older. This is certainly the case in the large number of

narrative films in which the flapper was featured, such as *The Flapper* (Alan Crosland, 1920), *Manslaughter* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1922), *Flaming Youth* (John Francis Dillon, 1923), *Wine of Youth* (King Vidor, 1924), *The Plastic Age* (Wesley Ruggles, 1925), *Our Dancing Daughters* (Harry Beaumont, 1928) and *The Single Standard* (John S. Robertson, 1929), in all of which the flapper is portrayed as an adult woman. Conversely, in the few instances in which adolescent girls appear as central characters in films from this period, as in the case of Norton S. Parker's 1928 feature *The Road to Ruin*, those films tended to be cautionary tales of the grim fate that awaited girls who took up the flapper lifestyle.

In many ways, this cinematic positioning of adolescent girls as sites for intercession in relation to the figure of the flapper echoes discussions of adolescent girls in the popular press during this same period, which were largely centered around calls for programs to either prevent girls from becoming flappers or else to reform those girls who had already begun to stray down the dangerous path towards Jazz Age debauchery and dissolution. For example, the *New York Times* ran a story in May 1921 detailing the efforts of the East Nineteenth Street Girls' Service Club to rehabilitate "dizzys," a "sort of 'flapper,' a bit more gay than the ordinary girl, who paints and powders and wears her skirts to her knees" ("Saving the Dizzy"). Similarly, in October 1921 and February 1925, the paper ran stories on the efforts of the Girl Scouts of American and the YWCA respectively to turn girls away from the flapper lifestyle (Lowrey 39 and "Tells What Drives Girls From Homes"). Indeed, as the 1920s progressed, a curious split develops in popular perceptions of the flapper within public discourse, in which adult flappers remain sites for public disapproval, while teenage flappers become sites for public intervention.

While the adult flapper was routinely condemned in the popular press for her transgressive femininity and her sexual promiscuity, the teenage flapper was alternately

ridiculed, pitied and dismissed for her indulgence in unconventional dress and behavior, which observers like the Dr. Reverend James Fosdick sought to strip of their political usage as a tactic of resistance to gender norms by insisting that the enactment of the flapper identity was nothing more than conformity to a youthful fad. To this end, Fosdick noted (quite patronizingly) in an address to Yale undergraduates in 1927 that, far from being models of independent women, flappers "all look alike; they all dress alike; they all paint alike; they all think alike; they all talk alike; they all act alike. Independence is no name for that" (qtd, in "Fosdick Sets Ideal for Yale Students"). Significantly, through such analysis, the flapper is also transformed in the popular imagination from a feminist icon to an embodiment of youthful foolishness—albeit foolishness that will lead to ruin if the teenage flapper is not corrected. As a result, the flapper's defiance of hegemonic femininity is transformed from a threat to patriarchal authority to a source of bemused contempt on the part of patriarchal authority figures.

This is not to suggest that the adult flapper was not also viewed with a great deal of derision and scorn, as is evidenced by her characterization on the part of a Florida legislator in an April 1925 story in the *New York Times* as "like a house, painted in the front, shingled in the back, and empty in the attic" (qtd. in "No Flappers for Florida"), as well as the 1921 statement of Dr. William W. Guth, President of Goucher College, that "the test today for the educated woman is her usefulness in the community as well as in the home and in business. Certainly there will be no room for the 'frivolous flapper'" (qtd. in "Bars 'Frivolous Flappers'"). In the case of the teenage flapper, however, references to her deviation from hegemonic femininity as just another form of youthful rebellion have a similar ideological effect to that discussed in the last chapter in regard to Eliza Lyn Linton's equation of the Girl of the Period's defiance of gender norms in the with adolescent forms of acting out. Both seek to render young women's rejection of

conventional gender roles silly, as well as entirely inconsequential. Thus, the opinion of Dr. Lee A. Stone, head of the Chicago Department of Health in 1922, that "flapperism—or modern feminism—is just the revolt of youth" mobilizes the association in U.S. popular culture between the feminist and the flapper to similarly undermine feminist politics by reducing them, as Linton does in the nineteenth century in her "Girl of the Period" essay, to proof of the perennial foolishness of youth ("Flappers 'Merely Humans'").

Accordingly, while popular discourse and popular representations of the adult flapper in the 1920s both link the transgression of hegemonic femininity to First Wave feminist projects, and through those projects to forms of female empowerment, the discursive connection between the flapper and the feminist also positions the flapper as a disruptive force within patriarchal culture precisely because the "liberated" attitudes attributed to the flapper are taken to constitute a refusal of women's subordinate social status. At the same time, the reduction of flapper identity to a form of youthful rebellion when enacted by adolescent girls functions on an ideological level to contain this threat by stripping it of political significance via its discursive positioning as proof of the foolishness of female youth. Thus, in discourses surrounding the flapper in the 1920s, gender transgression becomes at once a mark of feminist affiliation, a source of female empowerment, and an index of adolescent female folly—in all three cases, a cause for social concern requiring either suppression or correction.

"Hundreds of Little Long-Haired, Round-Faced Girls in Bobby Sox": Popular Representations of the Bobby Soxer

It is this presumed (or, more accurately, this discursively conferred) youthful foolishness that unites popular rhetoric surrounding the teenage flapper in the 1920s with that surrounding

the bobby soxer in the 1930s. Indeed, although the bobby soxer may be in every other way the flapper's discursive opposite, embodying cultural ideals of hegemonic femininity where the flapper eschewed conventional gender roles, both figures were viewed with equal condescension on the part of mainstream U.S. society, and both were invoked in similar ways within popular discourse to cement what Susan Douglas describes as patriarchal culture's view of adolescent girls as "mindless, hysterical, out-of-control bimbos," hopelessly flighty on account of both their femininity and their youth, who are not capable of rational thought or behavior (*Where the Girls Are* 5). However, whereas popular depictions of the teenage flapper as a "silly girl" served to diffuse social anxieties concerning challenges to traditional female gender roles in the 1920s, the silliness attributed to the behaviors and desires of the bobby soxer in the 1930s was deployed to confirm—and thus to reassert—hegemonic gender norms, a similar ideological aim, but with a slightly different inflection.

Accordingly, while the advent of the bobby soxer returned teenage girls to a central position within both popular discourse and popular culture representations, it also ensured that they returned in a decidedly non-threatening guise, depicted as "quasi-angelic creature[s], praised for [their] bubbly charm, [their] obedience to authority, and [their] chastity" rather than delinquents or rebels who defied gender norms and challenged patriarchal hegemony (Nash 2). With her ankle socks and saddle shoes, her sweater sets, and her pencil skirts that morphed into poodle skirts as the decades and the fashion trends progressed, the bobby soxer dominated popular conceptions of teenage girls in the United States from the 1930s through the early 1960s, codifying their representation as celebrity-crazed, jitterbugging, slang-using habitués of soda fountains, cinemas and record shops, whose youthful enthusiasm and frivolity—epitomized by their tendency to scream or faint at even the mention of male crooners or matinee idols—

rendered them, at times, "exasperating agent[s] of chaos," but ones who could be easily contained (Nash 2).

This discursive construction of the bobby soxer is evident in opinion pieces and features in the popular press from the bobby soxer era, most of which portray them—and, by extension, teenage girls in general—as screaming, swooning, "rabid consumers of swing music" (Nash 90), whose near fanatical fandom was driven, not by their own musical appreciation or ability, but rather by their infatuation with particular male performers. Such views are typified by a July 1943 profile on Frank Sinatra in *Time Magazine*, which begins by noting that his fan base is made up primarily of "hundreds of little long-haired, round-faced girls in bobby sox" who appear "transfixed" whenever he performs ("That Old Sweet Song"). It then goes on to relate the following anecdote:

> As Sinatra intoned Night-And-Day-You-Are-The-One, the juvenile assemblage
> squealed 'Ohhhhhhh!' He aimed his light blue eyes and careless locks at a front
> row devotee. It was too much; she shrieked: 'Frankie, you're killing me!' An
> usher gently shook her; she came to for a moment, relapsed into reverie. A girl in
> the second row held a pair of powerful field glasses glued to her eyes. Another
> minced to the stage, raised herself on tiptoe and tenderly deposited a white flower
> at the crooner's feet. ("That Old Sweet Song")

Adopting the tone of an anthropologist expounding on a slightly disdainful cultural ritual, this article at once mocks and condemns teenage girls for what it implies is their excessive expressions of enjoyment in Sinatra's performance, which are rendered doubly contemptuous— as well as doubly ridiculous—in the eyes of mainstream U.S. culture because that enjoyment is presumed to stem from Sinatra's physical appearance and not from his skill as a signer.

The attitude of judgment underpinning this evaluation is echoed by another piece published in *Time* in November 1955 that opines that "Americans have learned to accept, if not quite understand, the strange delirium that takes place when a frail-looking crooner confronts a crowd of bobby soxers"—who are subsequently described by the author as "screamers and shriekers and long, ecstatic moaners" ("Humility at the Hip"). It is also evident in a March 1944 story in the *New York Times* that derogatorily refers to bobby soxers as "croon-swooning adolescent[s]" (cited in Schrum 62). In all three cases, the extreme displays of adoration towards pop culture icons attributed to bobby soxers paint them as mindless, hysterical mobs who embody the epitome of the silly girl stereotype both because their behavior is deemed absurd by adult observers and because their perceived lack of control over themselves in the presence of their musical idols is superseded in the eyes of mainstream culture only by the lack of refinement they exhibit in their enjoyment of such culturally-debased forms of music as swing and (later) pop.

Thus, the bobby soxer is rendered a foolish figure because she does not behave with gravity or decorum, as well as because her tastes do not run to serious—read high culture—forms of entertainment. Nowhere is this more apparent than in a November 21, 1949 story in *Time* recounting an incident that occurred two weeks earlier during the broadcast of the *Arthur Godfrey and His Friends* television program on CBS, in which Godfrey was reportedly forced to rebuke a group of "swoon-happy teenagers" for "rustl[ing] impatiently" during a segment on atomic energy because they were anxious to see singer Bill Lawrence perform ("Atomic Blast"). According to *Time*, Godfrey interrupted the broadcast to "scold" the (exclusively female) rabble rousers, telling them "I'm not very happy about the reception you folks give to a serious discussion when you come in here . . . I'd like to ask that the folks who came . . . to hear the

singer wait a few minutes, or there will be no more audience at this show" (qtd. in "Atomic Blast," ellipses in original).

If this incident confirms popular views of the social disruption the bobby soxer allegedly posed through her inability to reign in her enthusiasm or control her actions, however, Godfrey's admonishment of the girls in his audience for their inattentiveness and his threat of punishment for their boisterous behavior mimics a purported counterbalance instituted through a string of 1930s and 1940s cinematic representations of bobby soxer escapades, in which narrative closure—and along with it the restoration of social order—becomes dependent upon the intervention of a male authority figure who subdues the bobby soxer, straightens out the chaos that she has caused, and, in the process, ensures that the patriarchal status quo is maintained. This pattern structures the narrative trajectories of films like *Three Smart Girls* (Henry Koster, 1936), *That Certain Age* (Edward Ludwig, 1938), *Janie* (Michael Curtiz, 1944), *Junior Miss* (George Seaton, 1945), *Kiss and Tell* (Richard Wallace, 1945), *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer* (Irving Reis, 1947), and *A Date With Judy* (Richard Thorpe, 1948), in all of which impulsive, scatterbrained girls who are full of good intentions, but lacking in wisdom or foresight, undertake madcap schemes that sometimes revolve around the pursuit of romance, sometimes around resolving domestic discord, and sometimes around advancing their father's business interests, invariably resulting in disaster, and thus requiring that their fathers or surrogate father-figures step in to repair the damage. In each of these films, teenage girls, their fanciful notions, and their ineffectual meddling constitute both the source of the film's comedic plot lines and the butt of its jokes, reinforcing the silly girl stereotype even further by portraying adolescent girls as inept, in addition to being foolish and entirely lacking in self-discipline. At the same time, as Ilana Nash argues, these films also invoke their protagonists' incompetence in

order to justify their subordination to patriarchal authority—and, by extension, to reinforce girls'

subordinate places within patriarchal culture—since they are portrayed as being incapable of

functioning without male authority figures to guide them and to keep them in line.

Such attempts at keeping girls "in their places" ideologically speaking are particularly

evident in the sub-genre of bobby soxer films Nash dubs "Daddy's Girl" narratives (100-102), in

which father-daughter relationships are a central thematic concern, and in which indulgent,

fathers are alternately delighted and exasperated by the exploits of their unruly but loveable

daughters, who are likewise alternately portrayed as the apples of their fathers' eyes and thorns

in their fathers' sides. While Daddy's Girl narratives are not unique to the cinema or to the

period between 1930 and 1960,[2] in the case of the bobby soxer films Nash discusses, the

flightiness of teenage girls is contrasted with the wisdom and the patience of their put-upon

fathers, whose ability to tame—and, more importantly, to contain—their reckless offspring is

invoked in order to cement their phallic authority. Indeed, although the protagonists of these

films are ostensibly teenage girls, more often than not their subject matter is the affirmation of

Lacan's Law of the Father, with adolescent females functioning thematically as a challenge to

patriarchal authority, and their sexual agency predictably becoming the battleground upon which

that authority is tested and reasserted. To this end, while the bobby soxer is depicted as a foolish

girl in Daddy's Girl narratives, she is also depicted as a desiring girl, one positioned somewhat

uneasily between the sexual innocence of the March sisters in *Little Women* and the sexually

precocious child-seductress of Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel *Lolita*. As such, it is *both* the

bobby soxer's flightiness and her budding sexuality that require her to be "kept in line" by male

authority figures in these films, since both are linked to her feminine excesses, and both are

portrayed as equally disruptive forces.

George Sidney's 1963 film version of *Bye Bye Birdie* becomes significant within this context, because in its satirical representation of the frenzied sexual response that the popular press attributed to teenage girls in relation to Elvis Presley, the musical also hints at the sexual edge to the displays of fandom ascribed to bobby soxers more generally within U.S. culture. Fears of teenage girls' sexuality "out of control" are just on the other side of the contempt for teenage girls' ostensible loss of control in the presence of their pop culture idols expressed in the newspaper and magazine articles quoted above, as is evidenced by their descriptions of bobby soxers screaming and fainting at concerts—behavior that is arguably more indicative of sexual ecstasy than of youthful foolishness. This is perhaps most explicit in *Time Magazine*'s characterization of bobby soxers as "screamers and shriekers and long, ecstatic moaners," as well as the *Time* profile of Frank Sinatra that depicts a female fan "shrieking" during one of his performances before lapsing into an insensate "reverie," both of which are cited above, and both of which use language evocative of orgasm to discuss the bobby soxer's fandom practices. However, the connection between mainstream culture's scorn for the bobby soxer's devotion to male actors and singers and mainstream culture's anxieties over adolescent girls' sexuality is also less obviously asserted through Edward Buzzell's 1943 film *The Youngest Profession*, in which teen protagonists Joan and Patricia seek out celebrity autographs with an obsessive zeal, and in which, as the title's allusion to prostitution suggests, their stalking of male stars is invested with sexual overtones.

If anxieties over adolescent girls' sexuality run just beneath the surface of cultural discourses surrounding the bobby soxer, though, such anxieties are neutralized by the fact that within those discourses the bobby soxer's desire remains entirely contained, sublimated through displays of adoration for pop culture icons rather than actualized through sexual overtures

towards those icons. Thus, while the bobby soxer was mocked and/or dismissed as a silly girl by mainstream culture for her infatuation with male actors or singers, she was nonetheless still viewed as a "good" girl, and therefore granted societal approval, because that infatuation took the form of fantasies of heterosexual romance, but not necessarily of sex, and certainly not of engaging in sex outside of the bonds of marriage.

At the same time, in investing the bobby soxer's fandom practices with a sexual dimension, popular rhetoric concerning the bobby soxer also establishes a link between her attraction to her favorite male stars and her consumption of the records and films featuring those stars—not to mention ancillary products like magazines, posters, or fan club paraphernalia— such that her desires are effectively channeled away from sexual acts and towards acts of consumerism. As a result, the bobby soxer becomes a good girl within U.S. culture not just because she remains a virgin until marriage, but also because she replaces sexual activity with consumer activity, thereby discursively establishing the good girl from the 1930s onwards as a good consumer, as well as a girl who represses her sexual desires, accedes to adult male authority, and fully complies with the dictates of hegemonic femininity. (That the good girl is also a heterosexual girl is never explicitly stated, but it is certainly implied by the fact that within mainstream cultural discourses concerning the bobby soxer she is only ever represented swooning over male objects of attraction.)

Given this discursive tendency to insist on the bobby soxer's sublimation of sexual desire through material consumption, it is perhaps not surprising that consumerism factored as a predominant feature of both bobby soxer identity and bobby soxer culture. As Kelly Schrum notes, although we generally associate the 1950s with the rise of the teenager as a distinct social and consumer demographic in the United States, marketers actually began turning their attention

to teenage girls in the 1930s, when the terms "teen" and "teenager" were first "linked with consumer culture as manufacturers experimented . . . [with] marketing products for high school girls" (18). This attempt to court teenage girls as consumers took the form of developing products marketed specifically to girls, as well as using the popularity of particular products with girls to make those products more attractive to retailers. For example, Sears department stores and the *Sears Catalogue* both inaugurated a "Collegiate Shop for the Junior Miss" in 1933 in order to provide adolescent girls with clothes designed specifically for and marketed specifically to them (Schrum 39), while the Fall 1940 *Sears Catalogue* made a direct bid to corner the bobby soxer market by touting itself as "Saddle Headquarters" in advertisements for saddle shoes (Schrum 61). At the same time, the frequency with which bobby soxers were mentioned in the popular press during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s in conjunction with particular fashion trends, popular music, and popular films attests to the cultural cache this demographic was invested with in terms of their ability to make or break the careers of popular entertainers, as well as the fortunes of producers of popular culture. Nowhere is this more graphically illustrated than in the incident concerning Bill Lawrence's appearance on *Arthur Godfrey and His Friends* discussed above, in which it was subsequently revealed that the disruptive behavior of the girls in the audience had been incited by one of Lawrence's promoters, who allegedly planted teenage girls in visible places in the studio and "told them that they should agitate and squeal and holler" ("Atomic Blast"), presumably in the hopes that this display of Lawrence's popularity with bobby soxers on national television would boost his career more than just his appearance on the show by itself would have done.

However, music and movies were not the only divisions of the culture industries to begin targeting adolescent girls as consumers during this period. As Nash notes, mass market fiction

for teen and pre-teen readers, what is now commonly referred to as young adult literature, has its origins in the books created by the Stratemeyer Literary Syndicate beginning in 1905 (30). While the Syndicate oversaw the production of series books for both boys and girls, by far one of its most profitable and most popular titles was the *Nancy Drew Mysteries*, the girls series corporately authored under the pseudonym Caroline Keene, which Stratemeyer began publishing through Grosset and Dunlap in 1930, and which remains in publication through the present day, with new books released under the Simon and Schuster imprint from 1980 up until 2003.[3] Nash describes the *Nancy Drew Mysteries* as "the longest-lived and most enduringly popular series for girls in America" (29), and they occupy a significant place in the cultural history of girlhood in the United States not only because they established a market for female-oriented young adult literature, but also because their widespread circulation and their unusual longevity have made Nancy a cultural icon for multiple generations.

Although it has gone through several cycles of retooling and rebranding as the decades have progressed, the first cycle of the series, comprising the books released between 1930 and 1959 (when the series underwent its first major overhaul) is still the one most closely associated with the Nancy Drew character within U.S. popular culture, and it is difficult to overstate the influence that this particular incarnation of Nancy has had on both girl culture and cultural conceptions of girls even into the present day. More significant within the context of this study, Nancy Drew is also frequently invoked in both popular discourse and academic analysis as a role model for female readers. While her credentials as a feminist icon are hotly contested, prominent feminist-identified women like Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg have cited Nancy Drew as an early inspiration (Burrell), thus positioning her, much like girl power heroines in the current era, as the embodiment of an alternative and

more empowered model of adolescent femininity to that exemplified by the bobby soxers that dominated popular culture representations of teenage girls from the 1930s through the 1950s.

The *Nancy Drew Mysteries* are set in the fictional suburb of River Heights, where Nancy, having finished her high school education at sixteen, divides her time between charity work, travelling, and amateur sleuthing, sometimes in aid of local law enforcement officials, sometimes in aid of her father, attorney Carson Drew, and sometimes in aid of acquaintances or strangers whom she attempts to help out of trouble by employing her mystery-solving abilities. Nancy is occasionally joined in her investigations by her friends George and Bess and her long-term boyfriend, Ned. However, in the first cycle of the series at least, Nancy is rarely in need of assistance from anyone, possessing an encyclopedic knowledge on a wide variety of subjects and an impressive range of skills, as well as the poise, intelligence, and courage to not only thwart the most accomplished of criminals, but also to stand up to anyone who doubts her abilities or tries to get in the way of her investigations. It is this intelligence and competence that most clearly set Nancy apart from the protagonists of the bobby soxer films discussed above, and while, as Bobbie Ann Mason points out, Nancy is no less a product of patriarchal ideology than those protagonists are, inevitably "acced[ing] to the protective role of the proper male authority figures" in ways that preserve rather than subvert the patriarchal order (74), she does exercise a level of autonomy that none of the girls in the other texts comes even marginally close to achieving.

Nancy may prefer receiving the praise of adult male authority figures to challenging their dominant social positions—or even questioning women's exclusion from those positions—but she is afforded a reciprocal measure of respect from them that stands out in sharp contrast to the derision and contempt towards teenage girls articulated in both the fictional texts and the

newspaper and magazine articles cited above. At the same time, although Nancy is every bit as much a patriarchally-identified daddy's girl as the protagonists of *That Certain Age*, *Junior Miss*, *Kiss and Tell*, and *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer*, she is most often portrayed (again, in the books comprising the first cycle of the series at least) as living and working with her father as an equal rather than being commanded by him as a subordinate. Nash suggests that part of Nancy's appeal to readers stems from the unusual degree of agency (for an adolescent girl in a mainstream popular culture text) that she exercises in the early *Nancy Drew Mysteries*, what Nash terms the "personhood" that enables her to "draw the shape and boundaries of her own self-definitions, and, more importantly, to demand that those definitions receive respect from others" where so many other girls of the period—both fictional and actual—did not have this kind of power (45). Significantly, Nancy Drew shares this exercise of personhood with the contemporary heroines of girl power texts, making *The Nancy Drew Mysteries* a precursor to those texts, if not a direct influence upon them. Ultimately, then, while Nancy may not be the feminist icon many cultural scholars claim her to be, since neither the character nor the books she appears in endorse—or, indeed, see a need for—a more equitable distribution of institutional power to that within patriarchal culture, she does provide a more empowered alternative to other U.S. popular culture representations of teenage girls from the 1930s through the 1950s, in that she is portrayed as capable, independent and intelligent, where in almost all other aspects of popular culture during this time teenage girls were represented as foolish and incompetent.

If readings of Nancy as an empowered girl depend upon her exercise of agency, though, it is important to acknowledge that that agency, as well as a large part of the way in which Nancy stands out from the protagonists of the bobby soxer films discussed above, is attributable to her high level of participation in the public sphere, whether that participation takes the form of

investigating crimes, interacting with public officials, or travelling around River Heights—not to mention around the globe—without adult supervision. While it must be reiterated that Nancy is only able to operate authorized and unimpeded within the public sphere in the novels because her activities in no way threaten patriarchal hegemony, her freedom to engage in even this compromised form of participation becomes significant within the context of popular culture representations of girls in the 1930s because this era saw the beginning of a cultural trend in the United States in which girls' leisure activity—and along with it girls themselves—were increasingly pushed out of public spaces and out of public life. Indeed, whereas the 1910s and 1920s saw both middle class and working class girls entering the public sphere through the consumption of popular entertainments and/or (indirectly) through changes in women's legal, economic and social status as a result of First Wave feminist reforms, the 1930s ushered in a return of adolescent girls to the domestic sphere, fueled in part by a loss of money for leisure activities during the Depression, and in part by an insistent cultural reassertion of hegemonic femininity in the wake of patriarchal anxieties surrounding women's changing gender roles in the wake of feminist reforms.

Thus, while bobby soxer culture in the 1930s through the 1950s was organized to a large degree around consumerism, it also inaugurated the model of teenage girl culture that Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber have termed "bedroom culture," a culture in which the products consumed and the practices engaged in by teenage girls are largely limited to the spaces of the home. According to McRobbie and Garber, by the 1950s a large number of consumer products marketed to girls were meant to be used privately, giving rise to a whole set of cultural practices that likewise revolved around adolescent girls gathering and interacting in their bedrooms rather than in the public spaces of the street or the park that increasingly became the exclusive domain

of adolescent boys in hegemonic social discourse from this point forward.   This trend can be seen taking shape as early as the 1930s, however, with a large number of the products marketed specifically to teenage girls from this point forward (such as girls' fashion magazines like *Seventeen*, which began publication in 1944) designed for consumption within the home rather than outside of it. It is also visible in what McRobbie and Garber identify as the dual uses of products like records or radios that were marketed to teens of both sexes, but which they argue girls likewise used "in a different context from those in which boys used them" and in a manner that rendered them objects of private consumption rather than public consumption, even when consumed collectively as part of a group (16).

Indeed, most of the cultural practices that we routinely associate with teenage girls in the United States—talking on the telephone, reading magazines, mooning over posters of celebrity heartthrobs, writing in dairies, gossiping, daydreaming about boys, taking part in sleep-overs, giving each other makeovers—not only have their roots popular culture representations from this era, but they also overwhelmingly involve engaging in activities that take place away from the public sphere. Moreover, as McRobbie and Garber argue, they equally encompass activities that encourage the internalization and enactment of traditional female gender roles, as the majority of these practices not only reinforce hegemonic cultural associations of girls/women with the domestic sphere, but they also promote adolescent girls' investment in their physical appearances, as well as in heterosexual romance, two areas conventionally invoked as measures of girls' value and success within patriarchal culture.

In this way, while the figure of the bobby soxer shaped cultural understandings of girlhood from the 1930s through the 1950s, she also functioned to enforce particular patriarchal ideals concerning adolescent girls' "proper" behavior, as well as their "proper" places in U.S.

society. Discourses surrounding the bobby soxer stressed the embodiment of hegemonic

femininity, obedience to patriarchal authority and the willing forfeiture of participation within

the public sphere such that these criteria not only became the markers of normative girlhood

during this period, but they also became the criteria differentiating "good" girls from "bad" girls

in both popular rhetoric and popular culture representations. Indeed, while popular

representations of the bobby soxer may have depicted teenage girls as troublesome for their

feminine excesses, they did not depict them as the cause of trouble for U.S. society. This is in no

small part what guaranteed the bobby soxer's cultural coding as good girl, as well as what

ensured that the Victory Girl and the female juvenile delinquent, the popular archetypes of the

bad girl during this period, were coded as aberrant girls precisely because they transgressed

normative gender roles—but also the boundaries between the public and the private—in ways

that troubled the patriarchal social order.

Victory Girls and Juvenile Delinquents: Representations of "Bad Girls" in the 1940s and 1950s

　　　　The Victory Girl, or V-Girl, assumed the cultural status of "bad girl" in the 1940s and

became the predominant foil for the bobby soxer in popular discourse during the WWII era. She

was a young woman, generally in her teens or twenties, who frequented the canteens that sprang

up around military bases in the U.S. during the war, and who, in Hine's words, was "willing to

provide memorable experiences"—including sex—"to as many young men as possible" (229),

whether out of a misguided sense of patriotism or out of a sense of fatalism that, according to an

editorial in the *Ladies Home Journal*, supposedly inspired these girls to "take the pleasure of

today for fear they might not have tomorrow" (qtd. in Hine 229). The V-Girl was classified as a

juvenile delinquent and became a target of social reform due to these presumed sexual

transgressions, but also because she transgressed public spaces in order to carry them out, thus constituting a double threat within the patriarchal imagination for her assertion of sexual agency, but also for her assertion of her presence within the public sphere.

Cultural anxieties about adolescent girls' engagement in sexual activity unsanctioned by patriarchal society, as well as the ways in which teenage girls "out of control" were linked in popular discourse at the time to fears about a loss of patriarchal control in the midst of the social upheavals wrought by the war, are reflected in the portrayal of the V-Girl as a troubled teen whose wayward behavior was the result of an absence of male authority figures, as fathers, uncles, and older brothers were shipped overseas for military service. According to the popular press, her delinquency was also compounded by a lack of supervision on the part of middle class mothers, who temporarily entered the paid labor force in large numbers during the war in order to fill gaps caused by the conscription and deployment of male workers. [4] In this way, the V-Girl's transgression of patriarchal sexual codes is also linked in popular rhetoric of the period to the loosening of social restrictions on female gender roles occasioned by the war. Thus, much like the Girl of the Period in the nineteenth century and the flapper in the 1920s, the V-Girl functioned as an inscription point for social anxieties concerning women's entry into the public sphere that were projected onto adolescent girls, and that, in the WWII era, coalesced around the figure of the V-Girl as a fast living, morally lax good-time girl, whose sexual liaisons with soldiers passing through town on their way to or from the battlefields of Europe were invoked as symptoms of the social degeneration that patriarchal culture insisted would result if the social divisions between the sexes were allowed to collapse.

This discursive positioning of the V-Girl as at once a challenge to patriarchal hegemony and a consequence of the loss of patriarchal authority is most evident in a February 1945 story in

Time Magazine on the wives and sweethearts of U.S. servicemen, which indirectly reinforces the popular connection between the V-Girl's transgression of sexual mores and women's cooptation of male social roles during the war by contrasting the V-Girl with the faithful keeper of the homefront, for whom "new work in factories and more work at home" may have brought "new responsibilities," but who, unlike the V-Girl, did not find any enjoyment in this disruption in traditional gender roles ("They Think of the Moment"). While the V-Girl is depicted as the initiator of "tawdry infidelities" that "end up in police court," readers are assured that the majority of "American women by & large are O.K. There has been no great moral collapse." Significantly, though, the index of moral collapse or lack thereof in the article is women's desire to work outside of the home rather than their engagement in sexual activity unsanctioned by patriarchal society, in spite of the fact that it is the V-Girl's engagement in premarital or extramarital sex that ostensibly separates her from the women profiled by the authors. Indeed, the proof offered by the authors that these women are "O.K." where the V-Girls are not has less to do with their sexual fidelity to their absent husbands/boyfriends than it does with the fact that

> with a unanimity which would startle oldtime feminists, they want to quit their
> jobs, settle down and have children . . . The wives of the soldiers & sailors want
> to get back to the kitchen—if possible, the bright, new kitchens of the alluring
> advertisements, but, anyway, the kitchen. They want all the gadgets. They want a
> better, freer, easier world. But they want to leave the blueprinting of it to their
> husbands. ("They Think of the Moment")

In this way, the article not only conflates the V-Girl's purported sexual infidelities with unfaithfulness to the patriarchal order, but it also conflates the V-Girl with both feminists and women who aspire to participation in the public sphere through paid employment outside of the

home, since all three groups are positioned as insurgents who threaten the stability of patriarchal society. Furthermore, the good girl/bad girl binary that separates the V-Girl from the keeper of the homefront becomes divided along the axis of the willingness to leave the "blueprinting" of society to men, of which compliance with patriarchal sexual codes is positioned by the authors as a key component rather than the sole criterion through which good girls and bad girls are differentiated from one another. The two issues are not, in fact, entirely separable in popular discourse from the WWII era, since the link asserted by this article between First Wave feminists, female war workers and V-Girls is precisely their entry into the public sphere, albeit in different forms. The V-Girl may have been too young to engage in political activism or to take up factory work or other forms of paid employment outside of the home, but her unsupervised consorting with male soldiers at the military canteens constitutes a form of participation in the public sphere that aligns her with both First Wave activists and female war workers in so far as it represents an equal infringement of the ability to enter and move freely within public spaces reserved as a male privilege under patriarchy. Thus, while the social crisis occasioned by the V-Girl was most often framed in moral terms in popular rhetoric from the period, with the V-Girl routinely condemned for her involvement in "all sorts of irregular, immoral, anti-social kinds of behavior" ("Girl Delinquency Found Increasing"), it was actually a perceived crisis of patriarchy that underpinned such condemnations, since the V-Girl's defiance of hegemonic sexual codes figures in this rhetoric as a defiance of patriarchal authority in such a way that the reclamation of the patriarchal order becomes the stake in her rehabilitation.

At the same time, in ascribing the V-Girl's sexual promiscuity to either social conditions resulting from the war or to wartime psychological despair, and in citing that promiscuity, in turn, as the cause of a whole host of social problems ranging from unintended pregnancy

("Schools and Mothers Are Urged to Unite to Check Rise in Juvenile Delinquency") to a public health crisis—in the form of an increase in venereal disease—brought about by "amateurs" providing sexual services to soldiers (Savage 404), the V-Girl's wartime trysts are coded in popular discourse as manifestations of social and sexual pathology, while even the possibility that they might constitute assertions of social or sexual agency is resolutely denied. In fact, while public discussions of the V-Girl focused almost exclusively on her sexual relationships, analysis of her motivation in pursuing those relationships, as well as her experience of them, refused to consider either the desires that might have prompted her to transgress patriarchal sexual codes or the pleasure that she may have derived from her encounters with the men she became sexually involved with. As a result, the V-Girl's sexual assertiveness is at once positioned as a threat to the patriarchal order and neutralized by depicting her promiscuity as an effect of self-destructive impulses and social maladjustment. Furthermore, while the V-Girl's indulgence in casual sex may have ensured her coding as the virginal bobby soxer's discursive opposite in U.S. culture during the 1940s, she was nonetheless aligned with the bobby soxer in terms of the ideological function she was deployed in service of, in that while the bobby soxer's silliness was invoked in popular representations to dismiss her as a threat to patriarchal authority, the pathologizing of the V-Girl was invoked to contain her challenge to that authority by transforming her from an agent of patriarchal subversion to a victim of wartime social disruption, in which the V-Girl's refusal of chastity becomes a cry for help rather than an assertion of agency.

This discursive positioning of girls' engagement in illicit sexual activity as a form of "acting out" carries over into the 1950s, where it informs a large number of psychological and sociological studies, news reports, and popular culture examinations of juvenile delinquency.

Indeed, while the V-Girl quickly faded from U.S. popular culture at the end of the war, her construction as a troubled teen shaped depictions of adolescent female rebelliousness well into the post-war era, where adolescent girls' sexual activity not only continued to function as a cultural marker of the bad girl, but also increasingly doubled as a symptom of the social and the psychic problems such girls were simultaneously positioned as both the causes and the victims of. The bobby soxer and the Daddy's Girl remained pop culture icons throughout the 1950s, where they formed the templates for the depictions of teenage daughters on family-themed sitcoms like *Father Knows Best* and *The Donna Reed Show*. As the decade progressed, however, and as the juvenile delinquent film emerged as a popular Hollywood sub-genre, the sweet, all-American wholesomeness of the bobby soxer was contrasted against the fatalism, alienation and ennui exhibited by the disaffected female youth who populated those films, and whose delinquency most often manifested as sexual pathology of one kind or another.

The moral panic surrounding juvenile delinquency in the 1950s was in no small part a reflection of cultural anxieties surrounding the atomic age and the emergent Civil Rights movement in the United States, with the social upheavals caused by these developments often invoked as explanations for the behavior of youth "out of control" in both popular discourse and popular culture representations from the period.[5] As Nash notes, though, in the case of popular culture portrayals of delinquency, while narratives of troubled youth abounded during the 1950s, the most prominent texts—from J.D. Salinger's 1951 novel *The Catcher in the Rye* to the films *The Wild One* (Laslo Benedek, 1953), *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955)—focused almost exclusively on male protagonists, with female characters appearing in minor roles, if at all (174-175). There were, nonetheless, a handful of delinquency films that did feature female protagonists, such as *Susan Slept Here*

(Frank Tashin, 1954) and *My Teenage Daughter* (Herbert Wilcox, 1956), as well as highly-visible female characters who played pivotal (if secondary) roles in culturally influential male-centered texts, such as Judy in *Rebel Without a Cause*. Significantly, the portrayal of these girls as problem girls hinges on their libidos, with sex often figuring as both the cause and the effect of their delinquency in ways that lent credence to the cultural construction of the bad girl in the 1950s as sexually active, but also psychologically damaged.

Perhaps the preeminent troubled teen film from this period, *Rebel Without a Cause* also serves as a prototype for the ways in which adolescent female delinquency and sexual pathology overlapped in popular culture representations of problem girls in the immediate post-WWII era. In the film, the character of Judy is portrayed as acting out in order to get the attention of her father, whom she feels neglected by. To this end, she is brought to the police station at the beginning of the film after she is found wandering the streets late at night in a scarlet coat and bright red lipstick, prompting the youth officer questioning her to ask if she had been out "looking for company." This veiled reference to prostitution, together with her subsequent confession that she ran away after a fight with her father in which he called her a "dirty tramp," hints that Judy's particular form of acting out is sexual in nature, although it is never clear in the film whether she is actually seeking sex as a substitute for her father's affection or merely pretending to be sexually active in order to get her father to pay attention to her. At the same time, a later scene in the film, in which Judy's father admonishes her for what he perceives to be her somewhat inappropriate displays of affection towards him, reveals that Judy's delinquency not only manifests itself in sexual behavior, but may also itself be a manifestation of psycho-sexual pathology in the form of an unresolved Electra Complex. Ultimately, then, while Judy's sexual acting out is pathologized by the film, so too is her sexuality, and the thematic overlap

between the two signals the ways in which, in the prevailing viewpoint of the 1950s, sexually

active girls were not just conceived of as delinquent girls, but were also determined to be

emotionally unstable girls.

In this light, the troubled teenage girls that dominated popular representations of female

juvenile delinquency in the 1950s are not only aligned with the V-Girls of the 1940s in terms of

their cultural construction as sexual "deviants" whose pathological behavior stemmed from

emotional problems, but also because, in both cases, this construction denies adolescent girls

sexual agency by reducing them to victims of mental illness, unstable family environments

and/or turbulent social conditions. Moreover, the discursive positioning of the post-war troubled

teen as a delinquent, like the similar positioning of the wartime V-Girl, can be read in direct

relation to cultural anxieties surrounding the disruption in traditional gender roles in the United

States during the Second World War, since in both cases the connection established between

their refusal of hegemonic sexual codes and their rebellion against the values of the patriarchal

order suggests that depicting them as emotionally disturbed serves to deny—and therefore to

contain—whatever political connotations their departure from heterosexual norms might

otherwise be invested with. Thus, in both popular rhetoric and popular culture representations in

the 1940s and 1950s, the transgression of patriarchal sexual codes on the part of adolescent girls

is invoked as a mark of delinquency in ways that, once again, position girls who reject gender

and heterosexual norms as the cause of social problems. However, by representing the V-Girl

and the female juvenile delinquent as emotionally troubled, representations of transgressive girls

during this period effectively foreclose the possibility of interpreting acting outside of those

norms as a form of adolescent female empowerment, unlike the figure of the adult flapper in the

1920s, since coding their sexual activity as a symptom of psychiatric dysfunction rather than an

assertion of agency frames that rejection in decidedly disempowering terms.

Gender Transgression, Sexual Agency and Female Empowerment in Popular Representations of Adolescent Girls in the 1960s

Susan Douglas argues that it is not until the 1960s that mainstream popular culture texts in the United States began to offer representations of sexually active teenage girls as something other than delinquents or neurotics. As she notes, there were a number of films released during this decade that portrayed sexual relationships among teenagers as a normative part of courtship and romance, and that did not condemn or pathologize girls' sexual desires. These include *A Summer Place* (Delmar Daves, 1959), *Where the Boys Are* (Henry Levin, 1960), *West Side Story* (Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise, 1961), *Splendor in the Grass* (Elia Kazan, 1961), and *Love With the Proper Stranger* (Robert Mulligan, 1963), all of which Douglas reads as reflective of a shift in sexual mores, as well as cultural attitudes towards adolescent girls' sexuality, brought about by the emergent Women's Liberation Movement and the Sexual Revolution. Douglas maintains that because these films center around "young female characters [who] had sexual desires that they acted on without being killed or otherwise banished by the end of the story," they presented audiences in the 1960s with a more progressive view of both adolescent femininity and adolescent female desire than popular representations of girls in earlier decades (*Where the Girls Are* 74).

However, while it is true that these films do not condemn teenage girls for engaging in sexual activity before marriage, this does not mean that they portray the experiences of their protagonists in a positive light, nor does it mean that they constitute a radical departure from earlier depictions of adolescent girls or earlier cultural constructions of normative girlhood. The

girls in these films may be sexually active, but they still conform to hegemonic models of adolescent femininity in terms of their appearances, their interests, and their aspirations, all of which contribute to the allowances made within the films for the loss of their virginity before their wedding nights, as do their heterosexuality and the fact that they only enter into monogamous sexual relationships with a single boy whom they love, whom they fully intend to marry, and whom they all end up either wed or betrothed to by the closing credits. Furthermore, even the girls who act on their sexual desires out of love and not out of rebellion (or a challenge to hegemonic sexual mores) still suffer emotional angst in these films as a result of their decision to have sex, and while they may not be required to be "killed or otherwise banished," in almost every case they are still punished for that decision in one way or another.

Both Molly in *A Summer Place* and Angie in *Love With a Proper Stranger* end up pregnant and faced with the social stigma of conceiving children out of wedlock, while Angie is forced to negotiate the further trauma of trying to procure an abortion (still illegal and highly dangerous at the time that the film was released) before the boy she is involved with talks her out of it. Melanie, the only one of the four central characters in *Where the Boys Are* to become sexually active, is dumped by the boy she loses her virginity to immediately after sleeping with him, and is later raped by one of his friends who assumes that the fact that she has had previous sexual experience makes her sexually available to him. Along these same lines, Anita in *West Side Story*, girlfriend to Maria's brother and a character who is portrayed as much more overtly sexual in terms of her appearance and behavior than Maria is, is knocked to the ground and sexually menaced by Tony's compatriots, suggesting through this implied representation of gang rape that the film still supported the popular belief that sexually active girls were likely to find themselves in trouble, even if it no longer subscribed to their discursive positioning as troubled

girls.

Finally, in *Splendor in the Grass*, Deanie finds herself caught between her sexual attraction to Bud and the repressive social codes that forbid her from acting on that attraction, and while the film does depart somewhat from earlier cinematic explorations of adolescent female sexuality by presenting sexual repression, rather than sexual capitulation, in a negative manner, the fact that Deanie is driven insane as a result of denying her attraction to Bud means that girls' sexual desire is still pathologized in the film; even if it is thwarted desire rather than actualized desire that causes Deanie's breakdown, sexual desire still leads to madness for her. In this light, while Douglas may be correct that these films gave girls of the 1960s social permission to embrace their sexuality (as long as it was heterosexually oriented) and to act on their desires, the fact that sex is a harrowing experience for all of their protagonists makes it equally possible to read these films as cautionary tales warning girls of the dangers attendant to entering into sexual relationships. Ultimately, then, while both social mores and popular culture representations did shift in the 1960s in ways that made it possible for good girls to have sex and still retain their good girl status, this did not necessarily mean that they shifted enough for mainstream popular culture texts to depict sex as good for girls.

At the same time, it is worth noting here that the representation of premarital adolescent sexual relationships in the films discussed above is less reflective of contemporary social approval for those relationships than it is of the intense competition between U.S. film studios and television networks to capture and retain audiences during the 1960s. Driven by financial loses brought about by a drop in movie attendance, the studios had entirely scrapped the production code by 1965, turning to more explicit depictions of violent and/or sexual content in a bid to woo patrons back into theatres, and it was arguably this desire to boost box-office returns

that prompted the frank depictions of adolescent female sexuality in the films discussed above rather than changing cultural values. Indeed, while the "liberated" attitudes towards sex articulated by the female characters within these films may have been borrowed from the Sexual Revolution and the Women's Liberation Movement, most of U.S. society did not embrace the new sexual morality touted by the Sexual Revolution, nor did it celebrate Second Wave feminism's New Woman, and the majority of mainstream popular culture texts from this period continued to depict adolescent girls in decidedly orthodox terms that reinforced, rather than challenged, patriarchal models of girlhood. Thus, while the movies may have given audiences *A Summer Place*, *Westside Story* and *Love With a Proper Stranger*, television gave them *Gidget* and *The Patty Duke Show*, both of which were just as influential in terms of cultural constructions of girlhood during 1960s, but to much more conservative ends.

Both *The Patty Duke Show* and *Gidget* aired on ABC, the former from 1963-1966 and the latter from 1965-1966. They are both important in terms of the history of pop culture representations of girlhood in the United States because they were the first television series to have teenage girls as the central character, but also because in 1965 they aired back-to-back on the same network on the same night, suggesting the degree to which adolescent girls had become a big enough audience demographic for media producers by that time that they could influence programming decisions (at least where ABC executives were concerned), while stories about adolescent girls were popular enough with general audiences that programming could be structured around them. In spite of their relatively short runs, the depiction of the protagonists of both of these shows also had a wide-ranging impact on cultural understandings of girlhood. Nash describes Gidget as the "reigning exemplar of the twentieth-century teenage girl" (195), while both Gidget and Patty Lane, the protagonist of *The Patty Duke show*, embody the figure of

the "perky, cute and slightly tomboyish teenage girl" that Douglas argues came to dominate

popular representations of adolescent femininity during the 1960s (*Where the Girls Are* 108).

      The Patty Duke Show follows the exploits of Patty and her look-alike cousin Cathy (both

played by Duke). The plots for the majority of the episodes are organized around the

enactment—and the inevitable failure—of Patty's madcap schemes, from increasing the

circulation of the school newspaper by instituting a gossip column ("Chip Off the Old Block") to

posing as an astrologist to raise money for her mother's birthday present ("Horoscope"). As

Nash points out, the series thus recalls the bobby soxer narratives from the 1930s and 1940s in

terms of Patty's portrayal as a silly girl who is full of good intentions, but entirely lacking in

practicality or competency (169). At the same time, there is also a heavy narrative focus in *The

Patty Duke Show* on the culture clash between prim, reserved, European Cathy, and outgoing,

exuberant, American Patty, who favors blue jeans, chewing gum and rock n' roll. Significantly,

because Patty is more liberal in her attitude and assertive in her behaviors than Cathy is, this

contrast subtly serves to promote the idea that American girls enjoyed more freedoms in the

1960s than either their contemporary foreign counterparts or U.S. girls in earlier eras (a theme

explored explicitly in episodes like "Patty and the Peace Corps," in which Patty considers

becoming a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa, and "Cathy, the Rebel," in which Cathy protests the

"male dinosaur" mentality towards women's rights expressed in a newspaper editorial). As such,

the series both reflects the cultural effects of the Women's Liberation Movement, which had

begun commanding national attention in the U.S. media during the time that *The Patty Duke

Show* was on the air, and seeks to contain those effects by co-opting the goals and principles

popularly associated with Second Wave feminism, portraying feminist values as frivolous and

impractical through their association with the show's teenage heroine, who, though she did not

explicitly embrace feminist politics, appeared to benefit from them.

A similar ideological strategy is enacted by the television adaptation of *Gidget*. Like the film of the same name (Paul Wendkos 1959), and its sequels *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* (Paul Wendkos 1961) and *Gidget Goes to Rome* (Paul Wendkos 1963), the television program was based on a popular series of novels by Frederick Kohner, in which the title character was based, in turn, upon Kohner's daughter Kathy, who in the 1950s really did take up the male-dominated sport of surfing as a teenager, and who subsequently became one of the first young women to gain recognition within surfing circles. In the television series, Gidget is a fifteen year old girl who is being raised by her widowed father, a college professor who dotes on her, and who responds to both her participation in surfer culture and her screwball antics (most of which revolve around romance) with bemused indulgence, much to the chagrin of her older, married sister, whose attempts to turn Gidget into a "proper" young lady constitute one of the show's recurring comedic plotlines. Like Patty on *The Patty Duke Show*, Gidget's portrayal as a tomboy in the series is linked to a transgression of traditional adolescent female gender roles in ways that code girls' assertiveness as a form of gender transgression, while that transgression is further linked to individual empowerment. Both are likewise obliquely tied to Second Wave feminism, which Gidget too is represented as being a product of in terms of her attitude and behaviors, even if neither the series nor the character of Gidget herself supports feminist politics.

However, as with Patty, both Gidget's deviation from hegemonic femininity and the empowerment that she derives from it within the show's narrative are negligible at best. Although she is still portrayed as a surfer in the television series, she is rarely shown surfing, and when her participation in the sport is addressed, it is ways that seem centered more on landing a boyfriend than perfecting or demonstrating her skills in the water. For example, the episode

"The War Between Men, Women and Gidget" opens with a scene in which Gidget is shown in close-up, intently riding a wave, while in her voice-over she states that "surfing is a sport which demands devotion, skill, patience . . . " This seems to present Gidget as a serious athlete who has not only put a lot of effort into honing her skills, but is also versed enough in the sport to understand the philosophy behind it. That impression is shattered, however, when the camera pulls back to reveal Brett, Gidget's love-interest in the episode, balanced behind her on the surfboard, while she continues ". . . and if at all possible, a boy," before turning to flirt with him, and thus causing them to wipe out. In this way, whatever resistance to gender norms Gidget's infiltration of this male subculture might carry in the series is neutralized by the fact that she is not presented as mastering this subculture, nor is she presented as being perceived by the male members of her peer group as an equal or a rival in terms of surfing. Instead, like the other girls in the clique she hangs out with on the beach, she is primarily depicted as an object of romance by/for the male surfers, while the series itself portrays her as an object of amusement rather than a model of female empowerment.

At the same time, while Gidget, like Patty Lane, is portrayed as independent and proactive, like Patty she is also portrayed as incompetent, and all of her undertakings either end in disaster or blow up in her face. "The War Between Men, Women and Gidget" is illustrative within this context as well, as the plot of the episode revolves around Gidget's attempts to mediate a dispute between two rival surfing clubs by convincing the female members to band together and refuse to go any dates with the male members until they declare a truce, only to have her plan backfire when the boys dump Gidget and the other girls and begin dating girls from another school instead. Unlike the protagonist of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, which the episode obviously references, Gidget's foray into collective action not only fails to accomplish

its stated goals, but it makes the situation it was intended to remedy worse instead of better.

Thus, at a time when women were organizing under the banner of Second Wave feminism to

campaign for various forms of social and political change, the episode represents girls' efforts at

collective action as absurd, in addition to ineffectual, in large part because it portrays members

of the female sex as lacking the discipline or the ability to carry out such action.

As such, just like Patty Lane in *The Patty Duke Show*, Gidget's spunkiness is offset in the

series by her ineptitude, and her assertiveness is blunted with zaniness and "cuteness" in ways

that allow her to transgress traditional adolescent female behaviors without threatening the

patriarchal status quo (Douglas, *Where the Girls Are* 108). Moreover, while, like *The Patty

Duke Show*, *Gidget* appears to gesture towards the Women's Liberation Movement in its

portrayal of its central character as a confident, assertive girl who takes charge and acts

independently, Gidget's representation as an "empowered" girl is primarily invoked for the

purposes of humor, since the fact that she is incapable of acting on her own in any capacity

without failing means that neither her personhood nor her claims to agency ever have to be taken

seriously. Ultimately, then, as with *The Patty Duke Show*, whatever feminist messages might be

read into *Gidget* are undercut by the fact that the show's depiction of Gidget as a silly girl weds

the rhetorical strategy utilized in discussions of the Girl of the Period in the nineteenth century to

the representational trope of the bobby soxer, associating foolish, impulsive Gidget with

feminist-identified discourse concerning gender transgression and women's empowerment in

ways that make feminism seem foolish by association.

The conceptualization of teenage girls as flaky and slightly ridiculous endorsed by *Gidget*

and *The Patty Duke Show* in the 1960s also extends into popular discourse surrounding the

Beatlemaniac, the "hair-tugging, screaming, tranced-out Beatles fan" who is another iconic

figure of girlhood during this era (Douglas, *Where the Girls Are* 114). In the United States, representations in the popular press of the Beatles' female fans as unruly mobs of sexually-crazed hysterics paralleled earlier depictions of the bobby soxer, with the Beatlemaniac's obsessive fandom practices taking on a slightly more disruptive edge, as well as more overt sexual overtones, since adolescent girls' "raging hormones" were invoked both to explain the band's unprecedented popularity and to assign blame for their decision to stop touring in 1966, which was ostensibly the result of the fact that they were being swamped by female fans in such large numbers whenever they took to the stage that they could no longer play their instruments (Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs 13). Feminist commentators like Douglas, Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs have retrospectively read Beatlemania as an exercise in sexual liberation for adolescent girls, in which, as Douglas argues, the fandom practices associated with the Beatlemaniac validated girls' expression of their (hetero)sexuality by empowering them to "actively [chase] these boys out in the streets, for all to see" (*Where the Girls Are* 120). Further, Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs also see Beatlemania as a precursor to the feminist and anti-war protests of the late sixties, a sort of initiation into counter-cultural practices (if not counter-hegemonic politics), that, because it encouraged girls to "abandon control . . . to scream, faint, [and] dash about in mobs" was, "in form if not in conscious intent" also a demonstration against "sexual repressiveness" (11). However, it is important to keep in mind that regardless of how present-day observers interpret the fandom practices of Beatlemaniacs, or what meanings these girls themselves invested their fandom practices with at the time, social commentators in the 1960s viewed them with a mixture of condescension, distaste and contempt, and since their construction of the Beatlemaniac as a testament to the excessive, hysteric nature of teenage girls was the one that circulated most widely within hegemonic U.S. culture during this period, this is

how the Beatlemaniac was understood by that culture.

In this way, while the Women's Liberation Movement and the Sexual Revolution may have provided girls coming of age in the 1960s with alternative ways of understanding and enacting their genders and their sexualities, representations of adolescent girls in popular discourse and popular culture texts served to reinforce the view of teenage girls dominant in U.S. culture from the 1930s onwards as foolish, capricious, hysterical creatures who were entirely lacking in common sense or self-control. While films like those discussed at the beginning of this section drew on Second Wave feminist discourse to assert their protagonists' rights to sexual autonomy, they did not entirely endorse such autonomy for adolescent girls, nor did they otherwise embrace or promote feminist values within their narratives. Conversely, the characters of Patty Lane and Gidget as portrayed on television and the figure of the Beatlemaniac as portrayed in the popular press were subtly deployed to undermine the practices and the goals of the Second Wave by drawing on feminist discourse to present audiences with independent, assertive girls who defied adolescent female norms, but who, in doing so, were depicted as laughable rather than as empowered. Thus, while deviation from gender and heterosexual norms is linked to female empowerment in discourses surrounding girls in earlier decades in order to depict them as social problems, as well as problems for patriarchy, in the 1960s gender transgression is linked to female empowerment in discourses surrounding girls in order to depict them as silly, and therefore as entirely *harmless* to both the social and the patriarchal orders. The result is that while both discursive strategies work to discredit feminist politics by associating feminism with the foolishness of female youth, the former depicts feminist empowerment as a danger to girls, while the latter depicts it as a joke precisely because it presents girls as incapable of exercising power of any kind.

Final Girls and Women's Libbers: Popular Representations of Adolescent Girls in the 1970s

In the 1970s, teenage girls receded to the margins of popular culture representations once again, as the emergence of a widespread counter-culture briefly promised/threatened to transform U.S. society, and the adult-centered Women's Liberation, Gay Rights, Anti-Vietnam War, and Black Power movements came to occupy the primary focus of cultural attention—and became the primary touchstones for cultural anxieties—within the United States. As Nash notes, because "college-aged people dominated the discursive position of youth in popular consciousness throughout the years of the counterculture (*sic*)," the teenage girl was gradually "displaced as the lightening rod for popular desires and fears by her older sisters, college activists and hippies," in both popular rhetoric and popular culture texts from the period (18). There were still a number of culturally-prominent media texts that revolved around adolescent female protagonists in the 1970s, however, and that helped to shape cultural constructions of girlhood during that decade.

The figure of the daddy's girl lived on in this era in a string of films that focused on the developing relationships between surrogate fathers and winsome, daddy-less girls, including *Paper Moon* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1973), which follows the antics of a con man and an orphaned girl during the Depression, *The Goodbye Girl* (Herbert Ross, 1977), in which an aspiring actor finds himself sharing an apartment with a single mother, whom he woos with the help of her ten year old daughter, and *Pretty Baby* (Louis Malle, 1978), a deeply problematic film set in the Storyville section of New Orleans in 1917, in which a twelve year old girl seduces a middle-aged photographer (who initially takes a paternal interest in her), and, like Nabokov's Lolita, wreaks havoc upon his life and his peace of mind. While all of the girls in these films are pre-adolescent, they embody a precociousness that aligns them with Gidget and Patty Lane (who were themselves portrayed as daddy's girls), as well as with the teenaged heroines of the 1970s

slasher film, the one pop culture form in which adolescent girls consistently remained at the center of the narrative throughout the decade, even as they were relegated to supporting roles in almost all of the other types of films and television programs in which they appeared. Indeed, while, on the surface, the female victim-turned-monster-slayer of the slasher film, the figure Carol Clover terms the Final Girl, may not resemble either the daddy's girls of the films mentioned above or the cute, perky protagonists of the 1960s teen-girl sitcoms discussed in the previous section, she is nonetheless the discursive progeny of Gidget and Patty Lane every bit as much as the girls featured in *Paper Moon*, *The Goodbye Girl* and *Pretty Baby* are. Not only does the Final Girl share their characterization as plucky, assertive, extroverts who stand up for themselves whenever their personhood is challenged, but she also similarly functions as both a barometer for the influence of Second Wave feminism upon U.S. popular culture and an inscription point for cultural anxieties surrounding shifting conceptions of female gender roles in the wake of the Women's Liberation Movement.

The Final Girl is at the center of a number of popular and influential horror films from the 1970s and 1980s, including *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), *Friday the Thirteenth* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984). As Clover argues, the narrative pattern initiated by these films, in which adolescent female characters assume the role of hero rather than being relegated to the role of victim, and in which young women who are terrorized by psychopathic predators successfully fight off their would-be attackers, constitutes a significant variation on U.S. horror film conventions. However, they also signal a significant shift in representations of teenage girls in U.S. popular culture, in that the Final Girl exhibits competence, strength of character and force of will in ways rarely seen in texts featuring adolescent girls from earlier eras, and in ways that arguably position her as a figure to be

admired rather than despised, laughed at or dismissed. It is in this sense that the Final Girl

becomes a precursor to the tough girl and the girl avenger, two central figures within

contemporary girl power texts, both of whom fight back against victimization in ways that code

them as empowered, and both of whom are portrayed in a positive light for their ability to defend

themselves and others against those who would prey upon them because they are teenage girls.

Significantly, in the case of the Final Girl, if part of the invitation to audiences of the

slasher film to hold her in esteem stems from her depiction as empowered, it is crucial to

acknowledge that her empowerment is achieved through her transgression of adolescent female

gender norms, as the Final Girl is often portrayed as being not "feminine in the ways of her

friends" (Clover 40). However, as Clover points out, it is not just deviation from hegemonic

femininity that allows the Final Girl to assume the role of hero in the slasher film, but rather that

in place of conforming to traditional models of girlhood she embodies character traits and enacts

behaviors that are conventionally coded as masculine within Western culture (48). In this way,

these films can be read on one level as gesturing towards the calls for women's social and

political empowerment articulated by feminist activists and scholars during the seventies and

eighties, which were often rooted in claims about the disempowering effects of complying with

traditional female gender roles.

At the same time, though, because the representation of teenage girls as empowered in

these films also affirms a decidedly patriarchal-inflected version of empowerment, in which

women's empowerment can only come at the expense of men's disempowerment, and in which

the only way for girls/women to gain access to power is for them to adopt behaviors and attitudes

culturally-coded as masculine, it would be a mistake to read these films as reflective of

mainstream U.S. culture's support for feminist projects for female empowerment, just as it would

be a mistake to read representations of sexually active girls in the 1960s as reflective of widespread support for the Sexual Revolution. If anything, because girls' empowerment in these films takes the form of masculinized girls violently killing emasculated men, they can just as easily be read as reflections of cultural anxieties surrounding women's access to greater social and political power in the 1970s as a result of legislative changes effected by the Women's Liberation Movement. In the end then, while the Final Girl may constitute a more empowered representation of adolescent girls than earlier pop culture archetypes, her representation still links female empowerment to a transgression of hegemonic femininity in ways that invoke patriarchal anxieties surrounding feminist challenges to gender norms, and thus that position adolescent girls who depart from normative enactments of girlhood as sources of apprehension rather than objects of approbation.

Adolescent girls' relationship to feminism, as well as their desire for individual or social empowerment, were both depicted in similarly ambivalent terms on U.S. television during the 1970s, where it was not uncommon for series that included teen girl characters to touch on issues popularly identified with the Second Wave, mostly—following the example of *The Patty Duke Show* and *Gidget*—in order to ridicule feminist politics through girls' support for them. It is worth noting within this context that there were a handful of prominent narrative TV programs in the 1970s that featured adult female protagonists who were portrayed as feminists (although the version of feminism that they supported tended to be based less on actual Second Wave principles and practices than on media distortions of the Second Wave), and in which those characters were represented positively, even if feminism itself often was not.[6] While, *Maude*, which aired on CBS from 1972-1978, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, which aired on CBS from 1970-1977, featured the two most prominent feminist-identified TV characters during this

decade, in the character of Laurie Partridge, *The Partridge Family* also gave U.S. television viewers one of the first feminist-identified teen girl protagonists. In spite of the fact that the show featured an ensemble cast in which Laurie only assumed the narrative focus for selected episodes, it nonetheless becomes important within the history of pop culture representations of girls. This is partly because, along with the character of Marcia Brady on *The Brady Bunch*, *The Partridge Family* provided U.S. culture with one of the most iconic figures of adolescent girlhood in the 1970s, but also because Laurie's portrayal as a feminist simultaneously promotes and undercuts girls' empowerment through participation in Second Wave activist endeavors in ways that demonstrate mainstream U.S. culture's continuing anxiety concerning female empowerment, as well as its continuing ambivalence about the social status and the cultural value of teenage girls.

  The Partridge Family, which aired on ABC from 1970-1974, follows the exploits of a family singing group comprised of a widowed mother and her five children. From 1970-1973 the show was paired on Friday nights with *The Brady Bunch*, which aired on ABC from 1969-1974, and which was centered around the experiences of a widowed father of three boys who marries a single mother of three girls. Both series were primarily targeted to teen and pre-teen viewers, and, as a result, the narrative focus of both shows tends to be on their youthful characters. Of these characters, Laurie and Marcia are both the oldest girls in their respective families, although not the oldest siblings, as both have an older brother (Keith on *The Partridge Family* and Greg on *The Brady Bunch*), who sometimes function as their allies and sometimes as their principal antagonists. Both girls were teenagers for the majority of the time that each show was on the air, and both are portrayed in markedly similar ways that reflect hegemonic constructions of girlhood during the 1970s.

Unlike their predecessors Gidget and Patty, there is nothing even remotely tomboyish about Laurie and Marcia. Both girls perfectly embody hegemonic ideals of white, middle-class adolescent femininity—and adolescent female heterosexual desirability—from their flawless skin and their slender figures to their long, impeccably-styled hair to their penchant for miniskirts and frosted lipstick. Both characters also engage in traditionally "female" activities and exhibit character traits conventionally coded as female within U.S. culture. For instance, within their respective families, both girls often find themselves providing nurturance, care or guidance to their younger siblings in their roles as eldest daughter—significantly, in a way that the eldest sons on these shows do not—and while Laurie does not share Marcia's passion for cooking and sewing, an inordinate number of the storylines in which both girls are featured center around their experiences with dating and their desire for heterosexual romance.

The one area in which Laurie does differ from Marcia is in her commitment to feminist politics, which is represented as a conscious alliance on her part, and one that is sustained throughout all four seasons of *The Partridge Family*. While Marcia becomes a coincidental feminist for a single episode during *The Brady Bunch*'s second season, in which she reverses her position on women's rights after discovering that she does not really want access to the same opportunities that her brothers have, Laurie is not only consistently depicted as fighting for equal treatment with her brothers, but she also repeatedly forces them to acknowledge her agency and to respect her autonomy by proving herself whenever her capability or her intelligence is challenged.[7] This positive portrayal of both adolescent girls and girls who identify as feminists is unusual enough among U.S. television series that it makes the gender politics of *The Partridge Family* appear downright subversive. However, while *The Partridge Family* may provide viewers with an adolescent female character who is confident, capable and assertive and who

stands up for her feminist principles, whatever progressive messages audiences might find in this representation is tempered by the fact that the series routinely positions Laurie's commitment to feminist causes as a source of humor in way that make both girls and feminists look silly. In this way, the show replicates the discursive strategy enacted by *Gidget* and *The Patty Duke Show*, in which feminist politics are made to seem foolish through their association with the youthful follies of teenage girls. At the same time, it also makes it possible for Laurie to voice support for the Second Wave within the narrative of *The Partridge Family* while the show itself does not. Indeed, while Laurie and Marcia may be represented differently between *The Partridge Family* and *The Brady Bunch* when it comes to their positions on women's rights, the two shows themselves take a markedly similar position on the issue, in that they both represent adolescent female empowerment as a joke rather than a social goal worth striving for.

Thus, in "The Liberation of Marcia Brady," Marcia joins Greg's Frontier Scouts troop in an attempt to prove that girls and boys are capable of achieving the same goals after her brothers tease her for asserting support for the Women's Liberation Movement. She manages to pass the grueling initiation, but her infiltration of the ranks of the Frontier Scouts is presented in an entirely humorous manner, and the episode doesn't so much endorse girls' equality as it represents girls' participation in masculine-coded activities as comedic, suggesting that while girls may indeed be capable of doing the same things as boys, situations in which they demonstrate that capability are laughable rather than laudable. This is underscored by the fact that the episode ends with Marcia renouncing her desire to participate in the group—not because she is not able to do so, but rather because she realizes that she prefers staying home and reading fashion magazines to taking part in the activities that the Frontier Scouts engage in. In this way, although the episode does appear to affirm Marcia's equality with her brothers, it undercuts the

feminist terms in which her assertion of equality is framed, first because the notion of girls'

equality with boys is presented as silly, and second because the desire for recognition of that

equality is associated with the fickle nature and the capricious whims of teenage girls—who, the

episode seems to suggest, don't really want equal rights anyway no matter what they claim.

Along these same lines, Laurie's engagement in feminist activism on *The Partridge

Family* is also presented as a source of humor because it is repeatedly invoked as proof of her

coding as a "radical crackpot," a label her brother Danny explicitly bestows upon her in the

episode "My Son, the Feminist" to describe her support for feminist politics. This coding is

perhaps most obvious in the episode "Queen for a Minute," in which Laurie decides to run for

homecoming queen so that she can have a platform from which to make a statement about the

sexist treatment of women in U.S. society. The fact that Laurie gets to make this statement at the

end of the episode would seem to indicate that the show endorses her critique of women's

subordinate status within patriarchal culture, and yet the validity of Laurie's assertion that

women and men should have equal access to the same social opportunities is undercut by Keith's

appropriation of this argument to convince the judges to let a male classmate compete against

Laurie for the title of homecoming queen—a scheme that Keith orchestrates not out of serious

political conviction, but rather as a practical joke intended to poke fun at Laurie for her

"extremist" beliefs. Not only is Laurie's decision to participate in the contest as a form of

feminist activism completely overshadowed within the narrative by Keith's treatment of the

homecoming queen selection ritual as a meaningless ceremony to be exploited for comedic ends,

but because the episode presents the spectacle of a boy donning the regalia of homecoming

queen as a joke meant to evoke the laughter of the audience and not as a critical statement about

gender fluidity that actually supports the idea of a male homecoming queen, Laurie's argument

about the oppressive nature of hegemonic gender roles is subsumed by Keith's mockery of that

argument, and audiences are left with the message that compulsory gender conformity may be

oppressive, but subverting normative gender roles is a humorous act rather than a political one.

In this way, while both of these episodes of *The Brady Bunch* and *The Partridge Family*

offer audiences representations of empowered adolescent girls whose empowerment is connected

in some way to their involvement in Second Wave feminist activism, these representations are

ultimately deployed to undercut feminist politics, much in the same way that the representations

of empowered girls in the slasher films discussed above are deployed to uphold patriarchal

values. In both cases, while the texts gesture to debates around feminist issues circulating within

U.S. culture at the time of their release, more often than not they do so in order to express

cultural anxieties surrounding feminist challenges to traditional gender roles rather than to

advocate for girls' access to greater social and political power. At the same time, because both

series present empowered girls as objects of humor rather than as role models or ideals, they

appropriate feminist discourse in order to render that discourse ridiculous, while simultaneously

confirming cultural constructions of adolescent girls as silly. Thus, while the character of Laurie

Partridge in particular may signal a shift in representations of adolescent girls in U.S. popular

culture in the 1970s, her representation does not signal a concomitant shift in cultural

understandings of girls or cultural attitudes towards girlhood.

This is also the case—although in a slightly different way—in terms of the cycle of

young adult novels published in the United States during the 1970s that explicitly engage with

feminist themes, and in which feminist discourse also intersects with pop culture representations

of female adolescence. Amy Bowles-Reyer identifies Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's

Me, Margaret* (1970) and *Forever* (1975), Norma Klein's *It's Not What You Expect* (1973),

Bette Greene's *Summer of My German Soldier* (1973) and *Morning Is a Long Time Coming* (1978), Rosa Guy's *Ruby* (1976), and Richard Peck's *Are You in the House Alone?* (1976) as the key texts within this cycle. All of these novels are coming of age narratives that focus on girls' sexual awakenings, and while none of their protagonists are represented as feminist-identified girls, nor do their stories involve girls participating in feminist activism, as Bowles-Reyer points out, they do provide readers with a Second Wave perspective on adolescent female desire, girls' relationships to their bodies, and girls' control over their reproductive choices, as well as feminist examinations of social issues such as abortion rights (*It's Not What You Expect*), heterosexism (*Ruby*), and sexual assault (*Are You in the House Alone?*). As such, Bowles-Reyer suggests that they all promote the "possibility of a new sexual identity for adolescent [girls]," as well as "[empower] girls by validating that they can and should have sexual feelings and providing them with a language to express their sexuality" (22).

The significance of such a discursive endeavor, not to mention its social impact, cannot be overstated. At a time when the cultural double standard that encourages women to be seen (and to see themselves) as sexual objects but punishes them for expressing or acting on their sexual desires was being challenged by Second Wave feminists, and when women's reproductive rights were first legally recognized in the United States—if only to a very limited degree—these novels did extend the scope of such projects to include adolescent girls, and they did indeed provide readers with an alternative framework for understanding girls' sexuality outside of patriarchal norms. However, whatever positive effects these novels may have had in this respect, it is important to recognize that it is *only* hegemonic constructions of girls' sexuality that they offer an alternative to. How these novels understand the identity category girl and the ways in which their protagonists enact their girlhood still rigidly conform to orthodox constructions of

adolescent femininity, and while they may offer readers an alternative framework for evaluating and expressing adolescent female sexuality, they do not offer an alternative framework for conceiving of or performing adolescent female identity.

At the same time, while all of these novels frame girls' coming of age in terms of their first sexual experiences, they don't represent girls' attainment of adult social status or their claiming of adult subjectivity in any other way. To the extent that the passage from childhood to adulthood also conventionally marks the attainment of personhood in Western discourse, this means that these novels don't really deviate from hegemonic models that measure women's identity in terms of their romantic and/or familial attachments. Unlike the protagonist of Katherine Paterson's *Jacob Have I Loved* (1980), which was published at around the same time, the girls in these novels do not embark upon careers, pursue college degrees, take up positions of social leadership, or assume places within the public sphere as part of their coming of age process; they merely enter into sexual relationships. As a result, while their representations of their protagonists may differ from earlier female bildungsroman in terms of the degree of sexual agency that they exercise, the novels themselves still repeat—and reaffirm—the narrative pattern whereby girls' journey to selfhood is entirely constituted by their first experiences with romantic love and/or sexual desire. Moreover, while they may offer readers celebratory representations of sexually empowered girls, because their protagonists neither seek nor do they engage in any other forms of social or individual empowerment, girls' empowerment is effectively limited within their narratives solely to their choice to engage in sexual relationships.

Rosa Guy's *Ruby* deserves additional consideration within this context, because while it doesn't challenge this pattern, it does alter the terms in which narratives of girls' coming of age through romance are most often represented within hegemonic U.S. culture. *Ruby* takes place in

Harlem in the 1970s and centers around an African-American protagonist and her family. While the portrayal of its title character as African-American differentiates it from the other novels cited above, all of which revolve around white characters, the focus on African-American characters alone does not make *Ruby* unusual among young adult novels, as there are quite a few featuring girls of color, although until recently such novels were less likely to be included on standardized middle school and high school reading lists, and therefore circulated less widely than the other books in this cycle of 1970s feminist-inflected young adult fiction. What does make the novel stand out from these other books, and what makes it a significant text in the history of popular culture representations of girls in the United States, is that along with Rita May Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* (1973) and Sandra Scoppettone's *Happy Endings Are All Alike* (1978), both of which were also published during the 1970s, it is one of the first in a small number novels about teenage girls that include a lesbian protagonist and that provide readers with representations of same-sex desire.

Unfortunately, while the novel does give representation to lesbian girls, it does not represent the experience of being a lesbian girl in an entirely positive light. Ruby's romantic relationship with her high school classmate Daphne is positioned within the narrative as a source of empowerment for her. It provides her with the love and companionship that she craves and allows her to experience and act on her sexual desires for the first time, thus providing validation for lesbian readers who have few opportunities to see their sexual identities acknowledged in mainstream pop culture texts. At the same time, Daphne also introduces Ruby to feminism and Black Nationalism, and she encourages Ruby to be more assertive and to stand up to her overbearing father. Ultimately, though, while her relationship with Daphne may be empowering for Ruby, it does not bring her happiness, and the novel ends with Ruby unsuccessfully

attempting suicide after Daphne leaves her. In this way, although *Ruby* is a very different narrative from the episode of *The Brady Bunch* discussed above, both texts are united in their message that stepping outside of normative enactments of hegemonic girlhood may be empowering, but it requires sacrifice and struggle, and is in no way rewarding or satisfying if it is achieved.

Thus, while popular depictions of adolescent girls in the 1970s include a large number of texts that emphasize portrayals of adolescent female empowerment, empowered girls are still not represented in a positive light. Girls who deviate from adolescent female norms and/or girls who embrace feminism may not be portrayed as juvenile delinquents or social problems as they had been in earlier decades, but they are still portrayed as sites for either anxiety, ridicule or pity. Even in feminist-influenced texts, where being a girl is represented in somewhat more affirming terms, how girlhood is conceived of and how it is enacted still reflects (and ultimately reinforces) hegemonic constructions of adolescent female identity. Ultimately, then, while popular narratives about teenage girls in the 1970s introduced a new set of representational tropes for depicting empowered girls, they did not institute a concomitant reevaluation of the ways in which girls' empowerment is viewed within dominant U.S. culture or the value placed upon it.

Tough Girls, Outsiders and Wannabes: Representations of Adolescent Girls in the 1980s

In the 1980s there were a number of popular media texts that featured either pre-adolescent or adolescent girls as their protagonists, although, for the most part, in U.S. popular culture during the 1980s representations of liberated girls took a backseat to representations of quirky girls, whose spunk and assertiveness were invoked to code them more as adorable than as empowered. On television *Punky Brewster*, which aired on NBC from 1984-1986 and in first-

run syndication from 1986-1988, centered around a seven year old girl with a distinctive (and distinctly tomboyish) fashion sense who is abandoned by her mother and subsequently taken in and raised by a curmudgeonly bachelor. Along with *Blossom*, which aired on NBC from 1991-1995, and which featured another endearing protagonist with a peculiar name, an unconventional wardrobe and an absentee mother (this one being raised by her single dad), the show provides a representational link between the cute, perky protagonists of *Gidget* and *The Patty Duke Show* in the 1960s and the confident, free-spirited protagonists of the more recent tween-centric girl power texts *Lizzie Maguire*, *That's So Raven* and *Hannah Montana*.

While both *Punky Brewster* and *Blossom* focus on pre-adolescent girls (although Blossom hit adolescence during the show's later seasons), by far the most prominent representation of teen girls on TV during this period was the series *The Facts of Life*, which aired on NBC from 1979-1988. Set in a boarding school in Peekskill, NY, the show follows a group of girls through the trials and tribulations of their adolescent years. After the first season, it focuses exclusively on four characters, Blair, Jo, Natalie and Tootie, chronicling their journeys through high school, college and the beginnings of their careers. There were several series with ensemble casts set in high schools during the 1980s, such as *Fame* (which aired from 1982-1984 on NBC and from 1984-1987 in syndication, and which was based on the popular 1980 film of the same name) and *Head of the Class* (which aired on ABC from 1986-1991), as well as several series that featured adolescent female characters in supporting roles, such as *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984-1992), *Family Ties* (NBC, 1982-1989), *Gimmie a Break!* (NBC, 1981-1987), and *Roseanne* (ABC, 1988-1997). However, *The Facts of Life* is the only one in which teenage girls were at the center of the narrative, and in which girls' coming of age in the 1980s is the focal point of the entire series.

Significantly, where the 1970s sitcoms discussed in the previous section incorporate feminist issues into the episodes that feature their teen girl characters and explore their engagement (however fleeting) with Second Wave politics, *The Facts of Life* largely ignores the Second Wave. The series depicts each of its four central characters according to a particular pop culture teen girl archetype: Blair is the wealthy, spoiled daddy's girl, Jo is the tomboy, Natalie is the bookworm, and Tootie (who is African-American and is the only girl of color in the series) is the wacky eccentric. None of them are portrayed as feminists, nor do any of them ever explicitly embrace feminist ideology. They all take it for granted that they will be able to pursue whatever paths they choose in their adult lives without meeting social or institutional resistance, and in this way the series does appear to gesture indirectly towards Second Wave objectives. However, the focus of the majority of the episodes is on the girls' experiences with dating, sex and (later) marriage, all of which are depicted in very traditional terms that recall teen girl portrayals in the bobby soxer films discussed above. Thus, *The Facts of Life* simultaneously recognizes the effects of the Second Wave on cultural conceptions of girlhood and relegates those effects to the background by emphasizing culturally orthodox depictions of adolescent girls as boy-crazy romantics whose principle desire and goal is heterosexual union.

This is true even of Jo, who may enact her girlhood in unconventional ways, but whose deviation from gender norms is offset by her orthodox enactment of adolescent female heterosexuality and her desire for traditional heterosexual relationships culminating in marriage and motherhood—both of which are invoked on a thematic level to suggest that in spite of their surface differences Jo is just like Blair, Natalie and Tootie on the inside, and, in this respect, every bit as much a "normal" girl as they are. It is also worth noting within this context that Jo's tomboy coding draws on the discursive links between deviations from hegemonic femininity and

juvenile delinquency established in the earlier pop culture representations discussed in the previous sections to depict her as emotionally troubled, as it is rooted in her difficult childhood and expressed through her rebellion against authority figures and the petty crimes attributed to her before her arrival at the boarding school. It is also pointedly divorced from the political projects of the Second Wave, as Jo's tomboy identity is positioned within the series as a reflection of her personality rather than as a conscious challenge to gender norms.

This is the case even in episodes that explicitly engage with Second Wave discourse, such as "A Woman's Place," in which Jo struggles with her boyfriend's resentment after she is promoted to a supervisory position at the motorcycle repair shop where they are both employed. In spite of the fact that Jo is portrayed as consciously fighting to combat sexist attitudes in this episode, feminism is conspicuously absent from the narrative, and deviating from normative enactments of girlhood—even if it is not done under the banner of feminism—is presented as a source of conflict for Jo rather than a source of empowerment, as it ends up costing her both her job and her relationship with her boyfriend. Ultimately, then, while in the character of Jo *The Facts of Life* does provide viewers with a confident, assertive teen girl protagonist who embraces an alternative performance of adolescent femininity to hegemonic girlhood, that portrayal emphasizes the costs of deviating from gender norms rather than its rewards, since, as with Marcia in the episode of *The Brady Bunch* discussed in the previous section, gender transgression is represented as the source of a lot of hassle for Jo, but rarely as being rewarding or worthwhile.

It should be noted within this context, however, that *The Facts of Life* is significant for another reason in terms of the history of pop culture representations of girls, and that reason is worth mentioning at least briefly here because it challenges hegemonic constructions of girlhood

in another way that moves beyond just gender identification and presentation. *The Facts of Life* is also one of very few popular U.S. media texts to feature a recurring female character with a disability. Blair's cousin Geri, who appeared in three episodes over the course of the series' nine seasons, was depicted as having cerebral palsy.[8] Geri is in her twenties, and therefore technically not a teenage girl, however her portrayal in the series is groundbreaking not merely because it gives representation to young women with disabilities, but also because it does not present disability as a tragedy or an impediment to a full and satisfying life. While the series does stick to a "girls with disabilities are just like able-bodied girls" message that reinforces the cultural hegemony of the able body, it at least manages to avoid representation of the disabled body as damaged or inferior. In this respect, while *The Facts of Life* may not have offered audiences radical or subversive representations of adolescent femininity, it did offer them a fairly radical representation of bodily difference that challenged cultural attitudes concerning physical norms by presenting them with a disabled character who was empowered, and whose portrayal extended recognition to disabled viewers who rarely see themselves represented in mainstream media texts at all, nevermind represented in positive terms.

At the same time that *The Facts of Life* brought adolescent girls back into a central place within television representations in the 1980s, the renewed popularity of the teen film in the United States during this decade also brought them back to a central place within cinematic representations. Teen films saw an increase in production during the 1980s, as blockbusters like the *Star Wars* trilogy drew middle-class teenagers with large amounts of disposable income into theatres, and Hollywood studios began targeting the youth market as a reliable source of revenue. While many of the teen films from this period revolve around ensemble casts, there are a few that specifically focus on adolescent female characters and that take the identities and

experiences of teenage girls as their central subject matter. Among this latter category *Pretty in Pink* (Howard Deutch, 1986), *Some Kind of Wonderful* (Howard Deutch, 1987) and *The Legend of Billie Jean* (Matthew Robbins, 1985) are all noteworthy within the context of this study because they introduce teen girl archetypes who become central figures in a large number of contemporary girl power texts.

The characters of Andie in *Pretty in Pink* and Watts in *Some Kind of Wonderful* anticipate the incarnation of the girl power heroine I discuss in chapter four as the "outsider girl."[9] Both are marginalized within the social microcosms of their respective high schools— Andie because of her socio-economic status and her unconventional fashion sense and Watts because of her tomboy gender presentation. Neither one really deviates all that much from hegemonic constructions of girlhood within U.S. culture, but within the worlds of the films each one does stand out from the other girls around them, and to the extent that they are represented as rejecting the dominant models of girlhood enacted by their female classmates through their manner of dress, their choice of leisure activities, and their refusal to imitate or to pander to the popular kids, they do represent a departure from earlier pop culture representations of girls who don't fit in among their peers, in that both embrace their nonconformity, seeing it as a mark of empowerment rather than a mark of shame.

At the same time, while both girls are ostracized and harassed for being different, both actively fight back against their persecutors, asserting their individuality and standing up for themselves whenever their personhood is challenged. Thus, while, like Jo on *The Facts of Life*, Andie and Watts encounter conflict for their deviation from girlhood norms, in both *Pretty and Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful* that conflict is coded as a rite of passage that is represented positively because it allows them to cultivate the strength to refuse to back down or to

compromise their sense of self, even when confronted with hostility and rejection. In this way, both films signal a decisive shift in representations of adolescent girls in U.S. popular culture, in that for the first time resisting dominant models of girlhood rather than conforming to them is affirmed. It is in this respect that these film can be read as laying the groundwork for contemporary media representations of girl power, in which being different (if not necessarily a different kind of girl) is similarly celebrated as a form of adolescent female empowerment.

The Legend of Billie Jean also stands out from previous teen films, as well as other teen films from this period, for the portrayal of its protagonist as an emotionally tough and assertive girl who transgresses adolescent female norms and gains a measure of empowerment through that transgression, but the film is also noteworthy because it takes adolescent female empowerment as its central narrative concern. In the film, seventeen year old Billie Jean lives in a small Texas town where she and her younger brother are picked on for being poor. After her brother is savagely beaten and his motorcycle is stolen and damaged by a group of local boys, and after the police fail to take any action against the perpetrators, Billie Jean retaliates by presenting the wealthy father of the boys' ringleader with a bill for the motorcycle's repair. He refuses to pay, and when Billie Jean challenges him, he tries to rape her in an effort to show her "her place" within the town's social hierarchy. This results in him accidentally being shot by Billie Jean's brother, who intervenes to protect her. Billie Jean and her brother then go on the run from the police along with two of their friends, becoming media sensations when—inspired by a film on Joan of Arc—she cuts off her hair and makes a videotaped statement to the press decrying their unfair treatment and demanding justice for herself and her brother, as well as for all kids who are discriminated against or taken advantage of because of their ages and their socio-economic statuses. This turns her into a folk hero among the female teenagers in her home

town, many of whom cut their hair in imitation of hers as a show of solidarity, and who form an underground network to aid her in evading the police by providing her with shelter and transportation.

Although the film was both a critical and a commercial failure, it has acquired something of a cult following in the years since its initial release. It is interesting within the context of this study because, like *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful*, the film ties girls' empowerment to an inner toughness cultivated through fighting back against adversity, and, like both of these other films, *The Legend of Billie Jean* represents this toughness in a positive light. However, *The Legend of Billie Jean* takes this representational project one step further by invoking Billie Jean's toughness in order to insert her into the narrative roles of outlaw and hero, two archetypes generally reserved for male characters within U.S. popular culture texts. Moreover, unlike the figure of the final girl in the slasher film, who similarly assumes a traditionally male narrative role, Billie Jean is not required to forfeit her femininity in order to assume these roles. In fact, the film is also somewhat unusual among pop culture representations of empowered girls up to this point in that while Billie Jean does assume character traits and behaviors culturally-coded as masculine, she is celebrated within the diegetic world of the film specifically for being a *girl* who fights back against those who insist that she is not worthy of equality or respect because of her feminine gender identification. Scenes like the one in which she and her friend Putter commemorate Putter's first period, for example, foreground Billie Jean's girlhood rather than erasing it or requiring that her femininity be renounced as part of her journey towards empowerment. In this way, the film also becomes significant within the history of pop culture representations of girls in that it departs from earlier texts that equate female empowerment with masculinization.

At the same time, in her role as a champion for social justice, Billie Jean not only sets out to right a wrong perpetrated against herself and her brother, but also comes to the aid of other characters over the course of the film who are being similarly mistreated (Putter, who is abused by her mother, a boy in one of the towns they pass through who is being beaten by his father). Thus, she is not just transformed from victim to hero, but she assumes a particular model of heroism that is also almost exclusively the domain of male characters within U.S. popular culture, that of the defender of the persecuted and the oppressed. It is in this portrayal that she prefigures the girl power archetype of the girl avenger, who fights for justice for those who have been wronged, and who defies hegemonic representations of adolescent femininity not necessarily through displays of gender nonconformity, but rather through the transgression of masculine-coded narrative roles. Thus, while *The Legend of Billie Jean*, like *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful*, may not provide viewers with a protagonist who radically departs from hegemonic constructions of adolescent female identity within U.S. culture, it does expand the ways of being a girl available to its protagonist, and it does provide a new set of representational conventions for pop culture depictions of empowered girls.

If popular media representations of adolescent girls in the United States in the 1980s included an increasing number of depictions of tough, rebellious and empowered girls, though, it should be noted that discussions of adolescent femininity in the popular press and in popular discourse during this period were still dominated by depictions of teenage girls as either social problems or social jokes. For much of the decade the figures of the Valley Girl and the Madonna wannabe shaped cultural understandings of girlhood, reinforcing the discursive construction of teenage girls as flighty, shallow, vain and materialistic, and the omnipresence of these figures within the U.S. media underscored (however unintentionally) the rhetorical positioning of

empowered girls as the exception rather than the norm for U.S. girlhood.

The figure of the Valley Girl was ostensibly based on the modes of appearance, social practices, and speech patterns indicative of teenage girls in California's San Fernando Valley region, although the extent to which "Valley Girl" as an identity category had proliferated the practices and the enactments of identity adopted by actual girls before it was reported on within the mass media is debatable. Michael Demarest's 1982 profile on Valley Girls in *Time Magazine* is generally credited with bringing the Valley Girl into the national spotlight, codifying her representation as a girl "from a fairly well-to-do family . . . between the ages of 13 and 17" whose main concerns were "shopping, popularity, pigging out on junk food and piling on cosmetics" ("How Toe-dully Max Is Their Valley"). Shortly thereafter, the Valley Girl stereotype came to encompass all teenage girls within U.S. popular discourse regardless of their geographical location or even whether or not they adopted the Valley Girl identity, thanks in part to the circulation of this discursive figure through the Frank Zappa song from which the term was coined, Mimi Pond's popular 1982 Book *The Valley Girl's Guide to Life*, and representations of Valley Girl characters in television programs like *Square Pegs*, which aired on CBS from 1982-1983, and Martha Coolidge's 1983 film *Valley Girl*. In the process, the figure of the Valley Girl also reasserted the view of adolescent girls in mainstream U.S. culture as absurd and contemptible that structured earlier representations of the bobby soxer and the Beatlemaniac.

The same is true of the figure of the Madonna wannabe, who, also like the bobby soxer, reinforced hegemonic views of teenage girls as impressionable, trend-obsessed groupies incapable of individuality or independent thought. The Madonna wannabe emerged out of fandom practices surrounding pop star Madonna in the early stages of her career, with teen girl

fans reportedly copying her distinctive style of dress and adopting her brash, assertive stage persona in their everyday interactions. Significantly, where Madonna herself is often discussed as a subversive figure during this period, credited with challenging hegemonic sexual mores, as well as rejecting dominant cultural models of the good girl, the female fans who mimicked her dress and behavior were not credited with the same dissident intent or effect. Instead, as the term "wannabe" implies, these girls were largely depicted as poseurs who were mindlessly complying with the latest pop culture trend out of a herd-mentality that was entirely focused on fitting in rather than standing out. Accordingly, a May 1987 story on Madonna in *Time Magazine* makes note of all the "[t]welve-year-old girls, headphones blocking out the voices of reason . . . running around wearing T shirts labeled VIRGIN," but patronizingly assures readers that these

> young blossoms whose actual ages run from a low of about eight to a high of
>
> perhaps 25, [who] are saving up their baby-sitting money to buy cross-shaped
>
> earrings and fluorescent rubber bracelets like Madonna's, white lace tights that
>
> they will cut off at the ankles and black tube skirts that, out of view of their
>
> parents, they will roll down several turns at the waist to expose their middles

could just as easily be out "stealing hubcaps," so therefore their emulation of their musical idol is not cause for alarm, though the author's tone makes it clear that it is obviously cause for amusement ("Madonna Rocks the Land"). In this way, while fictional film portrayals of adolescent girls in the 1980s like those discussed above were moving towards recognizing and celebrating girls' agency and their personhood, depictions of the Valley Girl and the Madonna wannabe in the popular press denied girls' agency and stripped them of their personhood by representing them as either morons or jokes, much as girls had been represented in the bobby soxer era, as well as in the figure of the Beatlemaniac and in popular texts like *Gidget, The Patty*

Duke Show, The Brady Bunch, and *The Partridge Family*.

On the opposite end of the spectrum of discursive constructions of teenage girls in the 1980s is the specter of the welfare queen, who first emerged as a byproduct—and an invention—of conservative political rhetoric surrounding welfare reform legislation under the Reagan administration, and who was later resurrected in the mid-1990s in neo-conservative rhetoric surrounding welfare reform under the Clinton administration. This rhetoric notoriously depicted welfare recipients as greedy, lazy, irresponsible young women of color who took advantage of public assistance programs to live lives of luxury at the expense of taxpayers, "bilking the system" out of huge sums of money while refusing to work to contribute towards their own subsistence. In this way, the figure of the welfare queen also served as a lightning rod for the demonization of the poor, single mothers, and women of color, invoking both class-based and racial stereotypes and drawing on class and racial prejudice to portray welfare recipients as social problems—but also threats to U.S. society—at a time when feminist activists had been targeting institutionalized forms of oppression and inequality that disproportionately affected just these groups.

Within the context of this study, the figure of the welfare queen also becomes significant because she was overwhelmingly represented in both political rhetoric and in the popular press as a teenage girl. An October 1986 story in the *New York Times* on "breaking the welfare cycle," for example, maintains that "teenage pregnancy and parenthood" are a major reason why a large number of welfare recipients apply for, and then remain dependent upon, public assistance (Bernstein A35). To drive this point home, the story goes on to cite "evidence of long-term dependency on welfare by a disproportionately large number of female-headed families in which the mother became a parent while a teenager" (Bernstein A35). In this way, the story replicates a

discursive move common in the political debates surrounding welfare reform at the time, ignoring the barriers to education, child care and career development opportunities that poor, teenage and single mothers are forced to negotiate, and instead blaming them for their dependence upon public assistance in ways that link being a welfare recipient to poor choices attributed to youthful folly or irresponsibility. As a result, the figure of the welfare queen provides another example of the ways in which popular discourse about teenage girls in the twentieth century repeatedly links their engagement in illicit forms of heterosexual activity to position them as problem girls, as well as social problems.

Ultimately, then, while representations of adolescent girls in the 1980s may have departed from earlier pop culture representations in some respects, girls who deviated from gender and/or heterosexual norms were still represented as both troubled and troubling in popular discourse and popular culture texts from this period. This is true even in the case of *The Facts of Life* and films like *Pretty in Pink, Some Kind of Wonderful*, and *The Legend of Billie Jean*, which represent gender transgression more positively, but still associate it with being a problem girl in ways that undercut whatever empowerment their heroines derive from acting outside of girlhood norms. Conversely, in the figure of the welfare queen, transgression of heterosexual norms in the form of teen pregnancy is once again invoked to position transgressive girls as social problems, both because of the "problems" they ostensibly pose to social services agencies and taxpayers through their reliance on public assistance programs and because of the problems they pose to patriarchal culture through their defiance of the hegemonic values that determine girlhood norms.

It is in this sense that popular representations of the welfare queen anticipate—and to a certain extent intersect with—girl problem discourse in the 1990s, which, as discussed in the

introductory chapter, is also organized around the conception of adolescent girls as social problems. However, while popular discourse surrounding the welfare queen depicts her as a poor girl of color, girl problem discourse depicts the girl at the center of the girl problem as white and middle-class. Moreover, while girl problem discourse is aimed at saving girls who are positioned as the victims of social problems, the discourse surrounding the welfare queen is aimed at policing and punishing girls who are positioned as the causes of social problems. Thus, while the welfare queen may prefigure the problem girl at the center of girl problem rhetoric, she also illustrates the manner in which race, class, sexuality and ability all inflect cultural constructions of girlhood in ways that determine which girls are included and which girls are excluded from particular models of girlhood. This is crucial given the small number of girls of color, lesbian girls and disabled girls who are discussed in this history of representations of teenage girls in U.S. popular culture—not because of a deliberate decision to only focus on representations of white, heterosexual, able-bodied girls, but rather because of the small number of girls from "marginalized" identity categories who are given representation in mainstream pop culture texts. Because of the critical positioning and popular reception of girl power as a counter-hegemonic discourse, it is also important because it has implications for how the girls at the center of girl power discourse are conceived of and represented, as well as the ways in which girl power influenced popular media representations of teenage girls in the 1990s.

Problem Girls and Girl Problems: Popular Representations of Adolescent Girls in the 1990s

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the discourse of girl power emerged in the 1990s as a response to girl problem discourse, but also in some ways as an outgrowth of it. Together, these two frameworks for understanding what it is and what it means to be a teenage

girl in the United States at the turn of the millennium have provided the primary lenses through which adolescent femininity has been conceived of in U.S. culture and represented in popular film, television, novels and music featuring teen girls throughout the 1990s and well into the present. From the period from roughly 1992-1997, however, it was the problem girl at the center of girl problem rhetoric who dominated public discourse about girls, as well as mainstream media representations of girlhood. While the problem girl was certainly not the only teen girl archetype present within U.S. popular culture during this period, the widespread circulation of girl problem rhetoric through coverage in the press, government-initiated intervention programs, academic studies, and self-help books meant that versions of the problem girl colored virtually *all* media representations of adolescent femininity to one extent or another. Indeed, it is evident in everything from special episodes of teen-themed television series like *Beverly Hills 90210* (Fox, 1990-2000) and *Dawson's Creek* (The WB, 1998-2003), in which female characters dealt with girl problem issues such as sexual assault, eating disorders, drug or alcohol addictions, and suicide attempts, to articles in popular girls' magazines like *Sassy* and *Seventeen* that counseled girls on how to cope with the traumas of female adolescence in the United States at the end of the twentieth century.

Although girl problem discourse was unanimous in its depiction of adolescence as a hellish rite of passage for girls in the United States marked by psychological despair, sexual and physical violence, peer pressure, self-destructive behaviors, and extreme alienation, the exact nature of the girl "problem" differed depending on which source one sought out on the subject. In *Reviving Ophelia*, Pipher attributes the emotional troubles and physical dangers she associates with female adolescence in the U.S. in the late twentieth century to the subordinate status of girls in patriarchal culture, whereas in *Queen Bees and Wannabes* Weisman attributes them to an

innate cattiness intrinsic to girls' essential nature that causes them to turn on one another in their pre-teen years. Significantly, while almost all girl problem literature sees girls as victims of particular social issues—educational inequalities, unrealistic beauty and body ideals, the sexual double standard, girls cultural objectification, etc.—their very analysis of those issues also positions girls as problems for U.S. society, as they require the formulation of strategies for intercession and reform to help girls negotiate their teen years. In the case of Pipher's book in particular, though, girls are also depicted as problems for the adults who try to come to their aid. In fact, in a large amount of girl problem literature girls are routinely criticized for intransigence, false consciousness, or (perhaps worst of all) ingratitude, and taken to task for resisting efforts at intervention that ultimately seem more organized around saving adolescent girls from themselves than "saving the selves of adolescent girls" (to borrow the subtitle of Pipher's book).

Reviving Ophelia is the most glaring example of this paradoxical advocacy for girls that doesn't always seem particularly respectful towards them or that views them with marked condescension. This is exemplified by the understanding of adolescent femininity that structures the book, which is best summed up in the following passage:

A friend once told me that the best way to understand teenagers was to think of them as constantly on LSD. It was good advice. People on acid are intense, changeable, internal, often cryptic or uncommunicative and, of course, dealing with a different reality. That's all true for adolescent girls. (57)

Putting aside the ways in which this passage reinforces deeply entrenched cultural stereotypes about adolescence rather than deconstructing them, it also situates girls' purported tendency to turn "moody, demanding and distant" in their teenage years within girls themselves rather than situating it as a symptom of the turmoil these girls supposedly face as a result of being girls in a

"girl poisoning culture" (57). As a result, while the problems girls face in adolescence is ostensibly the subject of Pipher's book, most of its focus is on remedying the problems that girls supposedly cause for their mothers, who are made to feel by their behavior "that they can do no right in the eyes of their daughters," and their fathers, who experience "banishment from their daughters' lives" (23). In the process, the book also makes it seem as if their parents, rather than girls themselves, are the primary casualties of the social and cultural conditions that constitute the girl problem. In fairness to Phipher, *Reviving Ophelia* is definitely not the only girl problem book in which occasional exasperation towards problem girls is expressed. Orenstein's *Schoolgirls* and Weisman's *Queen Bees and Wannabees* also exhibit a mixture of ambivalence, condescension and censure in their discussions of their research subjects. However, in depicting girls as both troubled and troublemakers, all of these books assert a view of female teens that doubly strips them of their personhood and denies them any exercise of agency, first by insisting that adolescent girls can only ever be victims in U.S. society, and second by positioning them as objects for institutional intervention in which they not only have no role in their empowerment, but also constitute perhaps the biggest impediment towards achieving that goal.

This discursive construction of the problem girl as at once emotionally troubled and a troublemaker, as well as the view advocated by girl problem discourse more generally that adolescence is a time of extreme crisis for girls in the U.S., are both reflected in the large number of popular culture texts in the 1990s and 2000s that took the girl problem as their central subject matter. Novels like Patricia McCormick's *Cut* (2002), documentaries like *Thin* (Lauren Greenfield, 2006), fictional films like *Kids* (Larry Clark, 1995), *Mad Love* (Antonia Bird, 1995) and *Crazy/Beautiful* (John Stockwell, 2001), and even reality television series like the WE network's *High School Confidential* (2008-present) all propagate representations of vulnerable

and damaged teenage girls who struggle with bullying, fractured families, unstable home environments, low self esteem, negative body image, abusive relationships, unplanned pregnancies, sexual assault, sexually transmitted diseases, and/or clinical depression, often resulting in eating disorders, cutting, drug addiction, alcoholism, suicide attempts, or emotional breakdowns leading to institutionalization. Significantly, while these texts echo girl problem discourse in terms of their depiction of female adolescence as a period of unrelieved peril, misery and suffering, they rarely make any connections between the emotional, psychological and social problems teenage girls ostensibly face in the United States and the cultural conditions that contribute to those problems. Instead, in these texts being a teenage girl in and of itself is represented as the apparent cause of the girl problem, and anguish, violence, victimization and self-destructive behavior are portrayed as an inevitable part of female adolescence.

Catherine Hardwicke's 2003 film *Thirteen* becomes particularly significant in this respect, both because it reinforces this idea that girlhood is always and only filled with problems for girls, and because in doing so it presents viewers with a representation of girlhood in the U.S. in the early twenty-first century in which the girl problem is unavoidable. *Thirteen* appears to draw directly from *Reviving Ophelia* in terms of the problems it depicts girls as facing during their adolescence, as well as the ways in which it presents the experience of those problems as universal to all girls. This is underscored by the film's title and the documentary shooting style it employs, both of which create the impression that while the narrative focuses on a specific thirteen year old girl, it could just as easily be the story of any girl entering her teen years at the time of its release. *Thirteen*'s protagonist, Tracy, is a happy, outgoing girl who is close with her mother and gets good grades in school until she turns thirteen. At that point, her life begins a downward spiral of depression, alienation and increasingly self-destructive behavior that

includes bulimia, cutting, shoplifting, drug abuse and engagement in unprotected sex. The climax of the film occurs when Tracy's mother stages an intervention, but the film ends without any resolution having been reached, and it leaves Tracy's fate up in the air. In this way, *Thirteen* not only reinforces the idea prevalent in girl problem discourse that adolescence is a form of hell for teenage girls in which they lose their self-esteem, their self-confidence and their sense of self, but it represents this as the normative course of girlhood, in which the girl problem becomes a constitutive part of female adolescence and not a set of social or cultural circumstances that some girls encounter during adolescence. Moreover, because Tracy's transformation into a problem girl is not only represented as inevitable, but there is also no recourse from or solution to it within the film, *Thirteen* reiterates the pattern followed by all of the pop culture texts listed above that examine the girl problem, in which teenage girls are represented as troubled, and in which becoming a problem girl at the outset of adolescence is represented as unavoidable.

Although it is far less fatalistic in its treatment of the girl problem, the figure of the problem girl is also central to the television series *My So-Called Life*, which aired on ABC from 1994-1995, and which also presented the girl problem as an inevitable aspect of female adolescence—if not quite so debilitating an aspect. *My So-Called Life* follows the experiences of fifteen year old Angela, a brainy, reserved girl with crimson hair and a penchant for granny dresses and doc martins, who, despite her hip wardrobe, is socially awkward and insecure. Over the course of the series, Angela struggles to find her sense of self, all the while trying to simultaneously cope with her father's infidelity, the possibility that her parents might divorce, a best friend who has a substance abuse problem, rumors concerning her sexual activity circulating around her school, and a crush on a boy she is too shy to talk to, nevermind ask out on a date. While the forms in which the girl problem manifests in *My So-Called Life* may not be as extreme

as in *Thirteen*, the series nonetheless supports a similar view that it is inevitable that adolescence will be filled with problems for teenage girls, and that to one extent or another all girls become problem girls upon reaching adolescence. Thus, while Angela does not suffer to nearly the degree that Tracy does, and while the series takes a much more hopeful view that Angela will escape the girl problem once her teen years are behind her, *My So-Called Life* still reinforces the dominant view of adolescent girls promoted by girl problem discourse, in which they are depicted on a spectrum from unsure of themselves to emotionally tormented to entirely victimized, but in any case decidedly disempowered.

This emphasis on girls' disempowerment in pop culture representations of problem girls is somewhat ironic given that the purported goal of girl problem discourse was to find ways of helping girls to achieve greater individual empowerment, if not also greater social empowerment. However, while public debates about problem girls and girl problem literature both grappled with various strategies for ending girls' victimization, pop culture representations of problem girls rarely allowed them to transcend their victim status, and it was not until girl power discourse entered the cultural mainstream in the late 1990s that representations of empowered girls returned to a central place within U.S. popular culture. Representations of girl power will be examined in detail in the next three chapters. However, before turning to the ways in which adolescent femininity and adolescent female empowerment are represented in girl power texts, it is important to acknowledge that, as this history of pop culture representations of girlhood in the twentieth century illustrates, questions of the social power girls do or should have access to have been intertwined with discourses surrounding girlhood in U.S. culture almost from the first moment that the subject position girl emerged as a distinct identity category.

From the nineteenth century onwards, discussions of girls' empowerment in popular

discourse and representations of empowered girls in popular culture texts have consistently equated girls' transgression of hegemonic gender roles with both their social and their individual empowerment. While adolescent female norms have varied at different points in U.S. history, both girls' deviation from those norms and the empowerment that they might potentially derive from it have also consistently been tied—either positively or negatively—to feminist campaigns for women's rights. At the same time, girls who enact their girlhood outside of hegemonic models have been depicted throughout the twentieth century as problem girls, as well as social problems, in ways that simultaneously reflect patriarchal anxieties surrounding changes to traditional female gender roles and seek to reaffirm girls subordinate—and devalued—status within patriarchal culture. In the end, then, the focus on adolescent female empowerment central to girl power discourse and representations of girl power in popular culture texts from the late 1990s onwards do not signal in and of themselves a radical departure from earlier cultural conceptions of what it is or what it means to be a teenage girl in the U.S. Instead, the question of their relative subversion or reiteration of hegemonic constructions of girlhood rests not on whether or not they depict adolescent girls as empowered, but rather how they depict empowered girls and what values they confer upon both empowered girls and girls' empowerment. It is these question that the next chapters will address.

CHAPTER III

TOUGH GIRLS AS EMPOWERED GIRLS:
ADOLESCENT FEMALE EMPOWERMENT AND DEVIATIONS FROM HEGEMONIC
FEMININITY IN GIRL POWER TEXTS

"Tough chicks are in" a September 1999 discussion of television trends in the *National Review* informed readers, citing in support of this claim a crop of recent scripted series such as USA's *La Femme Nikita*, the syndicated *Xena: Warrior Princess* and the WB's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, all of which featured female protagonists who "are not afraid of a good brawl," and who, encroaching upon male-coded social roles and traditionally male-only social territories, routinely "beat the guys at their own games: sports, computers, coarseness, and . . . killing" (Stuttaford 68). The representational archetype Sherrie Inness dubs the "tough girl" has existed in various guises throughout much of twentieth century U.S. popular culture, from the gangster's molls of 1930s pulp novels, to the femmes fatale of films noir, to sci-fi icons like the characters of Ellen Ripley in Ridley's Scott's 1979 *Alien* (and its three sequels) and Sarah Connor in James Cameron's 1991 *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. However, in the late 1990s and the early 2000s the tough girl was in evidence in a large number of popular media texts, where her physical strength, her fearlessness, her assertive demeanor and her appropriation of masculine gender traits intersected with girl power discourse in ways that rendered this particular incarnation of the tough girl both the embodiment of girl power within the popular imagination and the poster girl for girl power within the mass media.

The association of the figure of the turn-of-the-millennium tough girl with girl power discourse is rooted to a large extent in reviews of particular films and television series in popular newspapers and magazines that equate the representation of the female protagonists in these texts with female empowerment girl power style. For example, in a December 2001 overview of U.S.

television programs, Sindey Bristow, the female protagonist of ABC's spy series *Alias*, is described by *New York Times* television critic Julie Salamon as "[having] girl power" (37). An October 1998 article in *Entertainment Weekly* credits ABC's *Sabrina The Teenage Witch* and The WB's *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with giving "new meaning to girl power" in the wake of the Spice Girls (Chang). Similarly, a September 2005 profile of actress Jessica Alba in the *Los Angeles Daily News* refers to her as a "girl power role model," citing, in part, her portrayal of the character Max on the Fox television series *Dark Angel* (Strauss U4).

This positioning of the tough girl in popular media texts as a reflection of the girl power ethos is further cemented by critical analyses of those texts on the part of media and cultural studies scholars that likewise connect representations of the tough girl in U.S. popular culture during this period to girl power discourse (whether positively or negatively). Among such evaluations, Rebecca C. Hains labels animated series like Cartoon Network's *The Powerpuff Girls* and the Disney Channel's *Kim Possible* "girl power action-adventure cartoons" in her essay "'Pretty Smart': Subversive Intelligence in Girl Power Cartoons" (66). In "Commodified Agents and Empowered Girls: Producing and Consuming Feminism," Ellen Riordan describes the title character of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as "a girl power feminist icon for many girls and women" (292), while in her book *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan*, Lorna Jowett devotes an entire chapter to analyzing the series' four central female characters within the context of girl power discourse.

Such assessments, both in media and cultural studies scholarship and in the popular press, routinely attribute to girl power texts the potential to empower female viewers by providing them with (ostensibly) strong, independent role models who "don't have to be rescued" but instead "do the rescuing," and who, rather than ending the narrative merely "kissing the boy," also end it by

"saving him" from physical danger (Frey C01). Along these lines, A. Susan Owen argues that

Buffy the Vampire Slayer empowers female viewers by offering them "transgressive possibilities

for reimagining gendered relations" (25), while Donna L. Potts notes in her audience reception

study of *The Powerpuff Girls* that among her respondents "the reason most often cited for

watching *The Powerpuff Girls* was that the positive female role models were 'empowering to

little girls'" (9). Implicit in these conclusions is the idea that the audiences of girl power texts

benefit from watching, reading or listening to those texts on an additional level beyond the

presumed pleasure derived from consuming popular media in which young women deviate from

hegemonic social conventions governing gendered behavior.

In this way, readings of girl power heroines as at once empowered and empowering role

models draw on the discursive strands discussed in the previous chapter that equate

girls'/women's transgression of hegemonic gender roles with female empowerment, as well as

equating both female empowerment and female gender transgression with U.S. feminism.

However, they also institute a paradigm in which real-life girls among their audiences gain

empowerment from representations of female gender transgression, not by reenacting that

transgression, but rather simply by viewing depictions of it. The problematic connections made

in commentary around girl power texts between representations of empowered girls and the

empowerment of real-life girls will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five. For now, it is

simply worth noting that within this paradigm *being* a tough girl is a prerequisite for the

empowerment of adolescent female protagonists within fictional girl power texts, while *viewing*

narratives of tough girls becomes the only prerequisite for the empowerment of their female

audiences.

The discursive connections within U.S. culture between feminism, gender transgression,

and female empowerment may also explain why virtually all discussion of girl power texts featuring tough girl protagonists, whether in the popular press or in academic journals, engages in debates concerning the feminist credentials of those texts, in the process confirming an unacknowledged assumption that all popular media depicting girls/women who deviate from hegemonic models of femininity is created out of a desire to either support or undermine feminism.[1] Significantly, while the feminism of these texts has been asserted in reviews, critical analyses and postings on Internet fan sites, the creators of a large number of tough girl texts popularly linked to girl power discourse have been quick to deny any feminist affiliation, as well as to disavow any intention of supporting or promoting girl power discourse through their work. In reference to the genesis of *The Powerpuff Girls*, series creator Craig McCracken has been quoted as insisting "I didn't do it as an answer because there's not enough programming for girls out there," thereby distancing himself from the political goals frequently assigned to mass media girl power texts (Flaherty). Similarly, while David Nevis, Vice President of Programming at Fox Television, described the protagonist of *Dark Angel* as "a female action hero that is smart and empowered" in an October 2000 interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, series co-creator James Cameron is quoted in the same article describing the show in much more gender-neutral terms, as one that "every kid coming of age, from Ancient Greece to the Middle Ages to the '60s to now" can identify with because its central theme is the feeling that "the world that they're inheriting from their parents is just this f---ed-up (*sic*), crazy place" and not female empowerment (Snierson).

Even in contemporary tough girl texts that overtly assert feminist identification and claim a feminist intent in their production, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which creator and executive producer Joss Whedon maintains took as its central theme "the joy of female power:

having it, using it, sharing it" (qtd. in Miller, 35), there is a marked avoidance of verbal references to feminism within the texts themselves, as well as a reluctance to couch the tough girl personas of their protagonists in explicitly feminist terms.[2] Concurrently, if girl power is directly invoked at all in such texts, it is almost exclusively in ironic or derogatory ways, as in the case of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode "Something Blue," in which the character Spike sarcastically dismisses the show's tough girl heroine with the line "Oh, not with the girl power bit" when she threatens him. This is not to suggest that these interview comments necessarily reflect the actual intention behind the creation or production of the texts in question, nor to dismiss the possibility that the claims to feminist affiliation or the denial of feminist affiliation on the part of the individuals quoted above might be rooted in marketing concerns as much as (or instead of) political conviction. It is also not to suggest that viewers cannot read feminist messages in these texts—or derive feminist empowerment from them—unless they are consciously created with a feminist intent. Rather, it is to point out that both the empowerment of the characters within these texts and the ability to empower their audiences conferred upon those characters by creators or reviewers rests solely on their deviation from hegemonic female gender norms, as do the feminist messages attributed to these texts on the part of viewers, scholars and commentators.

Thus, what makes the turn-of-the-millennium tough girl a girl power icon—as well as a feminist icon—within critical analysis surrounding girl power texts is her perceived gender transgression, enacted within these texts through the protagonists' adoption of a tough girl persona, and along with it the performance of masculine gender traits that that persona implies. In this way, the "power" at the center of girl power discourse, as well as the empowerment promised to girls through it, becomes largely contingent upon the adoption of gender markers

that are culturally-coded as male through the equivalencies instituted within the dominant gender order between masculinity and the male sex. Indeed, the entire idea that toughness in girls constitutes gender transgression rests on the fact that toughness is a male-coded character trait within U.S. culture, and while the fact that girls are portrayed as both physically and emotionally tough in girl power texts may challenge essentialist notions that toughness is or can only ever be a male virtue, these texts still associate toughness with masculinity, and masculinity with boys/men, so that girls' toughness is presented as in tension with the more traditionally feminine-coded behaviors and desires that their protagonists exhibit, and toughness in girls is still represented as aberrant (even if not negatively so).

This chapter examines representations of adolescent femininity and adolescent female empowerment in girl power texts featuring tough girl protagonists in order to trace the discursive connections within those texts between deviations from hegemonic femininity and girls' empowerment. It argues that by making girls' empowerment reliant upon their appropriation and enactment of masculine gender markers, girl power texts featuring tough girl protagonists simultaneously challenge and reaffirm binary understandings of gender, as well as the causal relationships between sex and gender, that structure dominant discourses of sexual difference within U.S. culture. These texts present audiences with narratives in which masculine-coded gender traits manifest in bodies anatomically designated female, and in which female bodies are able to exhibit behaviors, mannerisms, and desires that are conventionally associated with *both* femininity and masculinity, rather than exclusively one gender identification or the other. In this way, much as Inness argues of her adult progenitors across U.S. popular culture, the tough girl in girl power texts undermines hegemonic understandings of gender as both natural and limited to two mutually exclusive categories by drawing attention to "the artificiality of femininity as the

'natural' state of women," as well as the ways in which gender is "a carefully crafted social construct that requires effort to maintain and perpetuate" (*Tough Girls* 21).

At the same time, however, while these protagonists may bridge the gender binary, they do not collapse it. Their dual gender identification is still presented as a *dual* identification, one in which their behaviors and character traits are still neatly divided between those that are coded as masculine and those that are coded as feminine, and in which the "masculine" and "feminine" aspects of their personalities can still be neatly differentiated from one another along rigidly conventional lines. In most girl power texts featuring tough girl protagonists, these "masculine" and "feminine" attributes also do not integrate easily within the same psyche, leading to unhappiness in some cases, and madness in others. In this way, these texts draw on the cultural discourses discussed in the previous chapter that equate gender transgression with psychological pathology, containing the empowerment available to the protagonists in these texts through acts of gender transgression by representing them as troubled girls in addition to (or instead of) empowered girls.

Ultimately, then, girl power texts featuring tough girl protagonists do not provide an alternative to hegemonic understandings of gender, they simply provide a variation on those understandings in which empowerment for girls is conceived of as cultivating the ability to compete with the boys on what our culture considers to be boys' terrain, while at the same time holding on to enough of their femininity that they are still recognizable as girls in hegemonic terms. The result, as this chapter will demonstrate, is that while these texts might be read as endorsing girls' empowerment through (highly qualified) acts of gender transgression, that empowerment is circumscribed by the fact that it is conceived of strictly in terms of girls' performing masculinity in order to gain access to male privilege in a society in which women

still occupy a subordinate position to men, and not in terms of a collapsing of the gender binary that allows for new understandings of gender and a concomitant reimagining of gendered power relations along more equitable lines. This latter point is crucial to the analysis that follows, because it points to the ways in which the determining criteria for girl power texts' ideological orientation is not whether or not they depict girls as powerful, but rather the ways in which girls' exercise of power is conceived of and enacted within those texts, as well as the ends towards which that power is deployed. On an industry level, the refusal on the part of a large number of mass media girl power texts to either admit feminist affiliation or to limit their political alignment to either feminism, postfeminism or anti-feminism can be read as an attempt to appeal to viewers across the political spectrum in order to maximize ratings or box office returns. However, on an ideological level, it can also be read as an indicator of the ways in which feminist discourse is often appropriated, misrepresented or commodified in mass media girl power texts order to sell those texts to audiences sympathetic to feminist goals, but not necessarily to further those goals or to "sell" the general public on their value.

As the references to *Alias*, *La Femme Nikita* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* in the newspaper and magazine articles quoted above suggest, there have been a large number of tough girl media texts featuring adult female protagonists released in the U.S. in the last twenty years that have been linked to girl power discourse, including, in addition to those already mentioned, the TNT television series *Witchblade*, the WB television series *Birds of Prey* (based on the DC Comics series), and the films *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000), and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, 2001), the last of which is based on the popular *Tomb Raider* video games. However, given the emphasis on adolescent female empowerment within both girl power discourse and popular commentary

surrounding that discourse, as well as the role girl power discourse attributes to the mass media in facilitating girls' empowerment, this chapter takes as its focus only those tough girl texts that feature adolescent female protagonists and were/are marketed primarily to adolescent female audiences. While it is certainly not the case that these texts are only (or even primarily) viewed or enjoyed by teenage girls, they have most often been discussed in academic analysis, popular reviews and discussion board threads on Internet fan sites in terms of the potential effects of their representations of adolescent female characters on adolescent female viewers. Thus, while this chapter is guided by the claims established in commentary surrounding girl power texts that those texts primarily address the teenage girls among their audience members, it is necessary to acknowledge here that pre-teen girls, adolescent boys, and adults of both sexes also regularly view these texts, and also derive pleasure—and quite possibly a sense of empowerment—from viewing them.

At the same time, it is also necessary to reiterate here that, as stated in the introduction, although this study is concerned with examining the ways in which representations of girl power in the mass media affect cultural understandings of girlhood, the focus of this chapter (and the study itself) is on processes of representation rather than interpretation. Thus, while this chapter and the two that follow seek to interrogate claims made on the part of commentators or creators of girl power texts that those texts both encourage adolescent female empowerment through their narratives and facilitate adolescent female empowerment through the experience of viewing them, the focus of this analysis is on the readings of these texts encouraged by the texts themselves, and not the meanings that audiences actually take away from them. That meaning is invested in these texts through the interpretive tactics their audiences employ to read them is not in dispute, nor is the fact that audiences can and do read the same text in disparate and

contradictory ways. This chapter is therefore not making any argument for how viewers respond to or make use of the figure of the tough girl in mass media girl power texts, only the specific ideological uses this figure is deployed in service of whenever it is invoked in those texts. The analysis that follows is also not meant to suggest that the representations of the tough girl in girl power texts influence real-life girls to think or to act in particular ways, only that these representations normalize a particular way of thinking about girlhood within U.S. culture, as well as establish certain expectations for how we as a culture believe empowered girls will look, act or be. Ultimately, then, this chapter argues that how adolescent female empowerment is represented through the figure of the tough girl in girl power texts and what these texts tell us as a culture about girls and their places in U.S. society matter—not because they serve as blueprints for the actual empowerment of their adolescent female viewers, but rather because they help to delineate the terms through which we as a culture conceive of adolescent female empowerment, as well as how we understand what it is and what it means to be an empowered teenage girl.

The Tough Girl and Girl Power

While both Sherrie Inness and Yvonne Tasker argue that representations of the tough girl have become increasingly common in late twentieth and early twenty-first century U.S. popular culture, the figure of the tough girl has antecedents in much earlier media and literary texts, as well as folklore and religious stories dating back to the ancient world and originating out of a variety of national contexts, from the Hindu goddess Druga to the warrior queens of Celtic legend. Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy link the representational trope of the tough girl to the narrative tradition of the just warrior, in which they situate Joan of Arc as the most prominent female example (1). Alternately, Rhonda Wilcox sees her as a contemporary version of classical

mythological figures like Juno or Athena who defied conventional female gender roles of the time, and are able to hold their own among and against powerful men (ix). Unlike these progenitors, the millennial tough girl is not always a warrior or a supernatural being. Very often she is portrayed as an ordinary person who, through a combination of toughness and determination, performs heroic deeds, although it is worth noting that until the late 1990s the tough "girl" was almost exclusively portrayed in popular media in the U.S. as an adult woman.[3]

The millennial tough girl, whether adult or adolescent, is both physically and emotionally strong, possessing the discipline and the stamina to ignore pain and/or to push her body to the limits of physical endurance, as well as the mental control to distance herself from her emotions and to act for the greater good regardless of the personal cost. As Inness notes of the adult tough girl, "these women possess great powers of physical endurance, sometimes even superhuman powers . . . [They] have the stamina to endure when physically weaker women might fail" and have the capacity to experience "tremendous physical and emotional suffering and still emerge the victor" (*Tough Girls* 13). Both the contemporary tough girl's strength and her physical prowess are signified through her athletic physique, as well as her coordination and agility, which often manifest in dexterity at gymnastics or martial arts. Some recent incarnations of the adult tough girl like Sarah Connor in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, the eponymous heroine of the 2005 film *Elektra* (directed by Rob Bowman and adapted from the Marvel Comics series), or the character of Starbuck in the Sci Fi Channel television series *Battlestar Galactica* (a reimagining of the 1978-1979 ABC series, in which the character was a man), are depicted engaging in rigorous training regimes to cultivate muscled bodies. In the process, they demonstrate what Tasker identifies as the representational trope through which "some of the qualities associated with masculinity are written over the muscular female body" in popular

media texts featuring tough girls through hegemonic cultural associations of physical strength

with developed musculature, and both with the male body (*Spectacular Bodies* 149). Tasker

terms this inscription of male-coded physical traits onto female bodies "musculinity," which she

suggests is invoked in contemporary tough girl texts to "[point] to the instability of [the] gender

system" (*Working Girls* 69) by presenting audiences with scenarios in which cultural "signifiers

of strength are not limited to male characters" or to male bodies (*Spectacular Bodies* 149).

However, a muscular physique is not the only signifier of the protagonist's toughness in

tough girl texts. Indeed, as Inness notes, for female characters in such texts, "there is much more

involved [to being tough], including self-presentation, attire, setting, and attitude" (*Tough Girls*

12). Thus, while contemporary tough girls are depicted as accomplished fighters, often

demonstrating a proficiency with weapons ranging from swords to rocket launchers, as well as

various forms of hand-to-had combat, these fighting skills are not the only ways in which tough

girls are able to defend themselves or others. There is an emphasis in the majority of

contemporary tough girl texts on talking back as a weapon, with the tough girl's ability to engage

in verbal sparring and/or to crack jokes in the face of danger (and at the expense of antagonists)

serving as both a signifier of her emotional toughness and the embodiment of the "tough"

attitude that Inness references. Additionally, as Inness suggests, the bodily presentation and

manner of dress adopted by the adult tough girl of the turn-of-the-millennium can also function

as signifiers of toughness, particularly when they gesture towards masculinity. This is the case

with characters like Ripley in *Alien 3* (David Fincher, 1992) and the title character of both the

film version of *Tank Girl* (Rachel Talalay, 1995) and the British comic on which it is based, both

of whom manifest their toughness through the adoption of clothing and hairstyles conventionally

coded as male—shaved heads, combat boots, tank tops paired with military-issue fatigues.

At the same time, though, modes of appearance are equally deployed in some tough girl texts as signifiers of heterosexual desirability, as evidenced by the representation of characters like Selene in the *Underworld* films (Len Wiseman, 2003 and 2006), Aeryn Sun in the Sci Fi Channel television series *Farscape*, Helene Kyle in *Birds of Prey*, and Nikita in both the television version of *La Femme Nikita* and the 1990 film upon which it is based, all of whom adopt the bodily stylizations associated with pin-up girls—long hair, prominently displayed cleavage, a penchant for high heeled boots, leather catsuits and/or fetish wear. This overt sexualization of the tough girl does not so much cancel out her toughness as make it less threatening to patriarchal culture by eroticizing it in an explicitly heterosexual context. However, it does send contradictory messages about how toughness is embodied by women and what it means when toughness is performed by a female body, at the very least qualifying women's toughness by deploying it for the purposes of erotic contemplation, titillation, or gratification rather than only as an assertion of agency or a display of power. It is worth noting here that, as Tasker and Richard Dyer both argue, muscular male bodies are also often eroticized in U.S. popular culture. However, in the case of cinematic and televisual representations of tough guys, their toughness is often invoked to counter this sexualization, while in the case of tough girls, it is their toughness itself that is sexualized.

Regardless of whether her appearance is masculinized or sexualized, though, in most tough girl narratives the adult tough girl also operates in a primarily male sphere in which she is required to successfully take on traditionally male employment and/or traditionally male social roles. The female protagonists in the film *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991) and the Fox television series *The X-Files*, for example, are both FBI agents who work alongside mostly male colleagues to whom they are continually required to prove both their competence

and their toughness. Likewise, the character of Jordan in *G.I. Jane* (Ridley Scott, 1997) is a lone female Navy SEALS recruit battling the sexism and the abuse of the men in her platoon, while Ellen in *The Quick and the Dead* (Sam Raimi, 1995) is a female gunslinger competing in a shooting competition during which she is simultaneously mocked and sexually menaced by her male opponents. In each of these texts, the marginalization of the tough girl by her male cohort confers upon her the status of underdog that Dawn Heinecken suggests is a key feature of contemporary tough girl narratives, in which the protagonist's gender provides a twist on the trope of the outcast hero central to popular myths of American individualism (24).

   The Quick and the Dead also points to another characteristic of contemporary tough girl texts: their insertion of female characters into narrative roles and/or narrative genres traditionally considered the domain of men in U.S. popular culture. In fact, the majority of recent mass media tough girl texts featuring both adult and adolescent protagonists fall into the categories of action, science fiction, fantasy, horror or super hero stories, in all of which female characters have traditionally been relegated to the roles of either damsel in distress or less competent sidekick rather than protagonist. Inness, Tasker, and Early and Kennedy all read the proliferation of tough girl texts in U.S. mass media from the 1980s through the present as a reflection of the "greater variety of gender roles [that] are open to women" in U.S. society (Inness, *Tough Girls* 5), as well as evidence of mainstream culture's "efforts to come to terms with feminism and its demands that popular culture depict women as commanding and heroic" (Early and Kennedy 4). They also argue that both of these readings, in turn, reflect changing cultural attitudes about women in the wake of Second and Third Wave feminism. This critical location of the figure of the tough girl within the context of feminist political projects rests to a certain extent upon the ways in which tough girls are portrayed in these texts succeeding in

traditionally male occupations (both societal and those that fall within the sphere of paid labor).

Following this logic, the infiltration of fictional female characters into narrative genres

traditionally coded as male might similarly be read as "a response of some kind to feminism,

emerging from a changing political context in which images of gendered identity have been

increasingly called into question" (Tasker , *Spectacular Bodies* 15), thereby further cementing

the tough girl's positioning within discourses that link female gender transgression, female

empowerment, and U.S. feminism.

However, that these texts might function as either reactions to or reflections of changing

cultural conceptions of female gender roles does not necessarily mean that they also reflect a

feminist perspective, nevermind that they support feminist politics. This is a crucial distinction

in terms of both adult and adolescent tough girl narratives because the performance of masculine

gender and/or narrative roles has increasingly come to function as a representational shorthand

within U.S. popular culture for female empowerment, as well as female characters' ostensible

support for women's rights (no matter how vaguely or contradictorily that support is articulated).

At the same time, it is worth noting within this context that adolescent tough girl protagonists

began appearing en masse in U.S. popular culture in the late 1990s, with their appearance

coinciding almost exactly with the advent of girl power discourse, and regardless of whether or

not the media texts in which they appear were intentionally conceived of as declarations of girl

power, the majority of them are inflected by girl power rhetoric. Perhaps as a result, while tough

girl texts featuring adolescent protagonists follow this same representational pattern in which

transgressing male social or narrative spaces is invoked as a signifier of female empowerment,

those that have come to be identified with girl power discourse represent the forms that female

empowerment through gender transgression take, as well as the benefits and the costs of that

empowerment, in slightly different terms than their adult counterparts.

Adolescent tough girls in girl power texts exhibit most of the characteristics outlined above, although in some cases those characteristics take on different meanings when embodied by teenage girls. While they display physical and emotional strength in much the same terms that adult tough girls do, images of adolescent girls fighting off bodily harm and talking back to those who would either subordinate or brutalize them arguably carry a different resonance when considered against the correspondence between the release of the texts in which they appear and the widespread circulation of girl problem discourse, with its emphasis on girls' victimization in the forms of physical violence, sexual exploitation, and gender-based social discrimination. This is largely because within that discourse girls are portrayed as disempowered to a greater degree than adult women, even though adult women live under many of the same conditions of oppression. At the same time, though, because adolescent girls are often subjugated or abused within hegemonic U.S. culture on account of both their gender and their youth, gender and age *both* become major factors in portrayals of female empowerment in adolescent tough girl texts, in which protagonists are frequently depicted cultivating toughness in response to being dismissed as inconsequential precisely because they are both teenagers and biologically female, and in which toughness becomes an instrument for countering this dual denial of agency.

Similarly, while adolescent tough girls in girl power texts also operate in traditionally male spheres, the consequences of this form of gender transgression are slightly different for them than for their adult counterparts. Where tough girl narratives featuring adult protagonists emphasize the ostracism those protagonists face for deviating from female gender norms, tough girl narratives featuring adolescent protagonists tend to follow narrative paths in which those protagonists are eventually incorporated back into the social proper, where they are celebrated

for their toughness rather than rejected for it. This does not mean that teen tough girls in girl

power texts aren't also isolated and excluded for their enactment of male gender roles, but scenes

like those in the episode "Not Pictured" from the UPN series *Veronica Mars*, in which Veronica

receives a standing ovation from her classmates at her high school graduation as a show of

gratitude for the aid that her sleuthing skills has provided to them, or the episode "The Prom"

from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in which Buffy is recognized with a special award at her senior

prom for repeatedly risking her life to protect her classmates from monsters and demons, do not

occur in tough girl texts featuring adult protagonists, where the most those protagonists can hope

for from their peers is to be left alone.

This may be in part why the majority of adolescent tough girls do not embody the lone

hero model that most of their adult counterparts conform to. Indeed, there is a strong emphasis

in girl power texts featuring adolescent tough girls on peer groups and coalitional action, so that

where adult tough girls are cast in the traditional mold of the social outcast who protects the

community she can never be a part of, adolescent tough girls operate from within a close-knit

network of friends and allies who provide them with nurturance and support, as well as tactical

assistance. In many ways, this echoes the emphasis placed within popular girl power rhetoric on

the importance of female friendships for girls, as exemplified by the excerpt from the Spice

Girls' book *Girl Power!* quoted in the introduction, in which they assert that girl power is "when

you stick with your mates and they stick with you" (6). However, it also echoes Second Wave

models of sisterhood as both a feminist principle and a strategy for feminist activism. Moreover,

because in girl power texts, the tough girl protagonist's group of helpers tends to be comprised of

both girls and boys who equally respect her authority and accept her leadership, these texts can

also be read within the scope of Third Wave models of inclusivity, which emphasize the roles of

men as necessary partners in feminist work for gender equity, as well as acknowledge that men can also be (and are) feminists.

At the same time, it is worth noting here that both Inness and Heinecken read displays of hegemonic femininity on the part of adult protagonists in tough girl texts as a narrative strategy through which the degree of power those protagonists are able to exercise can be contained, since "in a society where . . . femininity [is] not associate[d] with toughness," the embodiment of character traits or behaviors conventionally coded as feminine can be invoked to cancel out their toughness, and along with it the empowerment that that toughness grants them (Inness, *Tough Girls* 43; see also Heinecken 38). In this sense, while tough girl texts featuring adult protagonists may "offer an articulation of gender and sexuality that foregrounds a combination of conventionally masculine and feminine elements" (Tasker, *Working Girls* 68), that very combination is represented ambivalently, with women's adoption of masculine-coded traits presented as a vehicle for empowerment, while their adoption of feminine-coded traits is presented more often than not as a hindrance to empowerment. This is not the case in most tough girl texts featuring teenage protagonists, where toughness is often signified through displays of masculine-coded dress or behavior, but in which their feminine gender identification is situated as the source of their power, and in which their embodiment of feminine-coded character traits therefore enhances rather than detracts from the power that they exercise. Girl power texts featuring tough girl protagonists routinely juxtapose scenes in which those protagonists engage in physical combat with scenes in which they engage in more stereotypically "feminine" pursuits such as shopping or indulging in manicures. In the case of girl power texts, however, these behaviors are presented as falling along a continuum of the behaviors "natural" to their protagonists rather than being presented as contradictory. To be sure, such portrayals skirt

the edges of gender essentialism by reaffirming hegemonic cultural divisions between "masculine" and "feminine" activities, but for the most part they also appear to acknowledge gender as a performance of culturally determined criteria rather than the manifestation of a biologically determined essence. They also appear to consciously play with their protagonists' dual performance of masculinity and femininity in ways that seem intended much more as a subversive gesture than a gesture of conciliation—as is the case in adult tough girl texts where displays of conventionally "feminine" behavior function most often as methods of containment.

While there has been a great deal of scholarly analysis of representations of tough girls in U.S. popular culture in recent years, the majority has focused almost exclusively on texts featuring adult protagonists, with occasional analyses of teen girl characters like those in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *The Professional* (Luc Besson, 1994) mixed in with discussions of their adult counterparts in ways that extend to them the same terms of analysis, and attribute to them the same representational practices and narrative patterns. Such analyses fail to consider the different cultural meanings inscribed onto the adolescent tough girl, reinforcing the assumption encouraged by the popular designation of texts featuring adult tough girls as girl power texts that girl power applies equally to both girls and women and addresses them in the same way. As the discussion of the tough girl archetype of the warrior girl that follows and the discussion of the girl avenger and the outsider girl in the next chapter suggest, however, girl power rhetoric resonates differently and has a different meaning when attached to teenage characters. This is largely because although adult women may also occupy a subordinate place in both U.S. society and U.S. culture, their status as adults gives them access to a greater degree of agency than girls, who, because they lack both personal and legal independence, are subject to additional levels of institutional policing and control. Thus, while tough girl texts featuring adult protagonists are

also concerned with examining female empowerment, that empowerment is conceived of in different terms than in those texts featuring adolescent tough girls, which offer narratives of female power and agency in which neither gender nor age stand as barriers to empowerment, but also in which neither adolescence nor femininity have to be disavowed, transcended or overcome (as femininity at least must be in texts featuring adult tough girls) before empowerment can be achieved.

The Warrior Girl as Girl Power Heroine

Given that the female warrior is the most obvious manifestation of the tough girl archetype, it is perhaps not surprising that the first mass media texts to be associated with girl power discourse in U.S. popular culture should be *The Powerpuff Girls* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, both of which feature protagonists who are female warrior figures. Because the protagonists of *The Powerpuff Girls* are pre-school aged they fall outside of the scope of this study. However, it is worth noting here that they share with the teenage protagonists in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dark Angel* and *Kim Possible* many of the same traits in which the female warrior has been represented in girl power texts featuring adolescent warrior girls, including a deviation from female gender norms that takes the form of physical strength and combat skills, a recognized and accepted presence in the public sphere that stems from their actions in protecting their communities from acts of violence and destruction, the invocation of their assumption of traditionally male-coded narrative roles as a marker of empowerment, and the situating of their power in their ontological status as girls (signified in *The Powerpuff Girls* through the identification of "ingredient X" as the source of the girls' power—a moniker that can be read as a generic designation for a secret chemical compound, but can also be read as an allusion to the

XX chromosomes through which female bodies are designated as female in medical terms). While the narratives of warrior girl texts tend to vary in terms of their premises and their narrative content, each providing a slight variation on the girl power version of the female warrior figure, on a representational level they all associate female empowerment with acts of gender transgression, and the empowerment of their protagonists uniformly manifests in terms of male-coded behaviors and character traits even as their gender identification and bodily presentation are coded as feminine.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer aired on The WB from 1997-2001 and UPN from 2001-2003. While never a ratings success, it received a great deal of praise from television critics, who routinely include it on lists of the best television series of all time,[4] as well as generating an enormous amount of feminist, media studies and cultural studies scholarship, including at least five anthologies released by university presses and an online, refereed academic journal (slayageonline.com) devoted entirely to "Buffy studies." The series also boasts a dedicated fan following that is rivaled perhaps only by that of *Star Trek*. While, much like *Star Trek*, the show's fan base spans virtually all demographic groups, as discussed in the introductory chapter it was its popularity with female viewers in the 18-24 year old age bracket that made it attractive to advertisers, influencing not only The WB's decision to target the bulk of their programming to young women, but also their decision to keep *Buffy* on the air in spite of the fact that it never placed higher than 120th in the Nielsen rankings. Its draw to advertisers targeting the young female market was also reportedly a deciding factor in UPN's agreement to pick up the series after a financial dispute between its producers and The WB led to The WB declining to renew *Buffy* past its original five-season contract. The series has had a cultural impact far beyond its limited viewership, decisively shifting the ways in which adolescent girls are represented across

U.S. popular culture and directly influencing the production of a crop of series like *Dark Angel* and *Kim Possible* that center around warrior girl figures. Indeed, it is perhaps not an understatement to assert that (for good or for ill) most of the smart, independent, tough-talking girls on U.S. television in the present moment owe a representational debt to *Buffy* and its articulation of girl power.

The television version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is loosely based on the 1992 film of the same name and has continued on in the form of a serialized set of graphic novels (authored by the show's creator and released through Dark Horse comics) that began publication in 2007 and that pick up the narrative of the television series shortly after its final episode. As it is the TV version of *Buffy* that has been most closely associated with girl power discourse and that has had the most widespread circulation, it is only the television series that will be discussed here. The series is set in the fictional town of Sunnydale, California, a mystical hot-spot that is located over a portal to the underworld. Its title character is the most recent in an exclusively female line of vampire slayers, humans gifted with supernatural powers who are charged with protecting humankind from various preternatural threats. When the series begins Buffy is sixteen years old and has only recently been called to assume the role of Slayer upon the death of the previous girl to hold the position, one which carries with it the responsibility of battling an almost continuous succession of monsters and demons in order to safeguard the human population of her town. She is aided in this endeavor by a small group of friends and allies who are privy to her secret identity as the Slayer, as well as her mentor/trainer, Giles, who also functions as a surrogate father to her. The show's narrative follows Buffy through high school, college, and into her early twenties as she balances the demands of her duties as the Slayer against her desire to live as a "normal girl," attending school, joining the cheerleading squad, and hanging out with her

friends.

 In depicting a teenage girl with a passion for clothes and pizza as a skilled monster hunter in the tradition of *Dracula*'s Van Helsing, the series very obviously inverts the narrative conventions of the horror genre such that the character most likely to be imperiled or killed in traditional horror stories is the one who acts as hero. In this way it also draws to a certain extent on the representational trope of the final girl in the slasher film, although with a very important twist: where the final girl is depicted as an accidental hero who fights monsters out of necessity and vanquishes them more out of luck than skill, Buffy intentionally fights monsters, and she tracks down and kills them with a precision and accuracy that she trains hard to cultivate. It is in her portrayal as level-headed, intelligent and authoritative that Buffy stands out from earlier mass media representations of teenage girls, most notably the protagonists of the television series *Gidget* and *The Patty Duke Show* and the bobby soxer films discussed in the last chapter, in which female teens are represented as flighty, impractical and inept. In contrast, because Buffy is represented as more accomplished and more skilled than the enemies she faces, but also the other monster hunters she comes in contact with over the course of the series, she is not easily dismissed as a "silly girl." It is this representation as an experienced warrior who must be taken seriously by opponents and allies alike, and who is regarded within the diegetic world of the series as a force to be reckoned with, that position Buffy as an incarnation of girl power.

 At the same time, it is worth noting within this context that in both her name and her depiction as petite, blonde, and given to bursts of sarcastic slang, Buffy not only recalls the archetypal California girl at the center of the film versions of *Gidget*, but also the discursive figure of the Valley Girl, who likewise has roots in popular representations of California teens. Indeed, much in the same way that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* inverts depictions of teenage girls

as victims in horror narratives, it also inverts depictions of the Valley Girl as frivolous, vapid, and shallow, reclaiming what amounts to a virulently misogynist stereotype of adolescent femininity by transforming the Valley Girl into the embodiment of courage, dedication and honor. To this end, the series repeatedly plays on the level of both narrative and image with the disparity between the cultural expectations engendered by Buffy's physical appearance and the intelligence and physical prowess that she demonstrates. For example, the episode "Prophesy Girl" includes a low-angle forward tracking shot that ends in a medium close-up of Buffy poised for battle with a cross-bow at the ready while dressed for the spring dance in a gauzy, white formal gown. In the same episode Giles's girlfriend Jenny gives voice to the contradiction embodied by Buffy in terms of dominant constructions of adolescent femininity when, upon learning of Buffy's secret identity, she marvels, "what really gets me . . . [is] the part where Buffy's the Vampire Slayer. She's so little." It is in upsetting cultural associations of femininity with weakness that the series also mobilizes girl power discourse by insisting that blonde, female and little do not equal dumb, inconsequential or powerless.

This is also true of the character Max in the television series *Dark Angel*, who likewise finds herself continually discounted by allies and enemies alike who underestimate her power because she is female, petite and conventionally attractive. *Dark Angel* aired on Fox from 2000-2002. It was not as critically acclaimed as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, although it did attract a wider audience (placing 70th in the Nielsen rankings its first season and 114th in its second after the network moved it to the notorious Friday 9:00 p.m. "death slot" in a failed attempt to boost Friday night viewership), and it too has garnered something of a cult following. The series' writers and producers never explicitly situated it as a girl power text in public remarks or interview comments, but *Dark Angel* does explicitly invoke girl power discourse within its

narrative, as, for example, in the pilot episode when a male character expresses disbelief at Max's physical strength and she responds by quipping, "Girls kick ass, it says so on the t-shirt."

As with Buffy, the identification of Max in popular reviews of the series as an embodiment of girl power stems in large part from her portrayal as a warrior girl, although it is also partly due to James Cameron's role as co-creator of the series. While Cameron did not take any part in the production of *Dark Angel* outside of the development of its concept, the co-authoring of its pilot, and the directing of its finale, his association with the series lent it a certain girl power cache through his previous credits as writer and director of the films *Aliens* (1986), and *Terminator 2*, as well as writer for Katherine Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995), all of which feature female warrior figures who have achieved the (contested) status of mass media feminist icons in the U.S., and who, though not themselves girl power heroines, are certainly their pop culture progenitors. At the same time, the fact that the series occupied the Tuesday 9:00 p.m. timeslot during its first season, airing opposite the *Buffy* spin-off series *Angel* on The WB, suggests its targeting to audiences of girl power texts, if not its own explicit positioning of itself as a girl power narrative.

Dark Angel is set in Seattle in 2019 and offers a dystopic vision of the future marked by civil unrest, scarcity of resources and brutal martial law, the results of a terrorist detonation of an electromagnetic pulse that destroys the United State's computer-dependent infrastructure and economy. Its protagonist, Max, is a nineteen year old bike messenger who, like Buffy, is hiding a secret identity, although, unlike Buffy, Max is also hiding from the government. Max is an X-5 series Transgenic, a genetic hybrid developed as part of a covert military program dubbed Project Manticore, the purpose of which was to create biologically enhanced soldiers by combining human and animal DNA. Conceived through in vitro fertilization and born to

surrogate mothers whom they were separated from at birth, the X-5s were raised in a secret facility in Wyoming where they were forced from a very young age to take part in combat training and psychological conditioning meant to turn them into skilled, emotionless killers. Max was among a small group of X-5s who escaped when they were nine years old, after which time, as revealed through the series' frequent flashbacks to her childhood, she lived on her own, mostly on the streets. When the series begins, Max is trying to locate the other escapees, whom she refers to as her "brothers and sisters," while simultaneously evading recapture by the military operatives searching for her. In the pilot episode she meets Logan Cale, a cyberjournalist who exposes government abuses and corruption under the pseudonym Eyes Only. She agrees to help Logan in his investigations in exchange for his assistance in tracking down her fellow X-5s, and the series follows her work with Logan to protect, rescue or otherwise provide aid to exploited Seattle residents, as well as her developing romantic relationship with him as he helps her to look for her "siblings."

Dark Angel is heavily influenced by cyberpunk fiction in terms of its setting, its narrative premise, and its visual aesthetic, which recalls cyberpunk anime like *The Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995) and *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1998), and live-action cyberpunk films like *Strange Days* and *Johnny Mnemonic* (Robert Longo, 1995, from a screenplay by novelist William Gibson, who is often credited with originating the cyberpunk genre, and who also wrote the short story on which the film is based). It also recalls popular manga such as *Battle Angel Alita*, a Japanese cyberpunk narrative about a female cyborg bounty hunter. Although not a cyborg herself, Max's ontological status as a genetic hybrid aligns her in many ways with the protagonists of recent popular cyborg texts like the *Terminator* films, *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), and *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987), though it is worth noting that there is a

decisive gendered split in the representation of the figure of the cyborg in these films, in which male cyborgs are all programmed for combat and/or violence, while female cyborgs like Zhora and Pris in *Blade Runner* are programmed for seduction.[5] In this sense, while anime and manga are full of female cyborg warriors, Max represents a girl power twist on U.S. cyborg narratives, in that her characterization as a technologically-created supersoldier inserts her into a narrative tradition previously centered exclusively around male characters. At the same time, her love of her motorcycle, her expertise at mechanics, and her preference for spending her leisure time playing pool and drinking beer with her co-workers all situate her within the representational tradition of the working class action hero at the center of films like *First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982), *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, 1987), and *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988), which likewise have conventionally featured male protagonists, and in which the skills and interests Max exhibits have conventionally served as both class and (masculine) gender markers.

Within this context, it is worth noting that although Max and Buffy share many similarities in terms of their representation as warrior girls, their toughness manifests in slightly different ways in each series, which is perhaps attributable to their divergent ethnic and class codings. While both girls demonstrate their toughness through their fighting skills, Buffy, who is white and middle class, manifests her toughness primarily in terms of her coolness under pressure and her taunting of her opponents in the form of sarcastic wisecracks in the heat of battle. Buffy's engagement in physical combat is also most often undertaken as a defensive measure, either as a response to the threat of personal harm or an effort to protect innocent bystanders from being preyed upon by monsters. In contrast, Max, who is working class, and whose appearance and last name (Guevara) suggest Latina ethnicity although her ethnicity is never explicitly addressed within the series, manifests her toughness primarily in terms of her

tendency towards in-your-face verbal confrontations and her willingness to see physical force as an expedient solution rather than as a last resort. Unlike Buffy, Max's engagement in physical combat is also most often presented as an offensive measure, even when it is undertaken to rescue others in peril.

In this way, Max's representation follows a dominant pattern within tough girl texts in U.S. popular culture more generally, in which working class girls/women are represented as assuming the tough girl role with more ease than their middle class counterparts because of hegemonic cultural attitudes (rooted in the nineteenth century cult of true womanhood) that position working class girls/women as less feminine because of their engagement in blue color forms of labor. Thus, while wealthy heroines like Elektra and middle class heroines like Buffy need to train extensively to cultivate their toughness, working class heroines like Billie Jean in *The Legend of Billie Jean* acquire their toughness without any apparent effort, as if it simply comes naturally to them. Similarly, Max's more aggressive brand of toughness also carries ethnic connotations when taken in conjunction with her implied coding as Latina, in that it recalls U.S. cultural stereotypes of the "fiery Latina" popularized through films like *Maid in Manhattan* (Wayne Wang, 2002) and *Vicky Christina Barcelona* (Woody Allen, 2008) or television series like *Desperate Housewives* and *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, all of which portray Latina girls and women as "hot-tempered" and emotionally tempestuous, quick to jealousy and anger, but also quick to expressions of sexual passion (Molinary 139-140).

Conversely, while, as Rebecca C. Hains argues, the representation of the majority of girl power heroines in the U.S. mass media as white and middle class suggests that "girl power is only available to those who belong to a privileged race and class" (68), the brand of toughness that those protagonists embody is also marked by cultural assumptions concerning the

intersections of ethnicity, class and gender. White, middle class girl power heroines may indeed "kick ass," but as Elyce Rae Helford points out in regard to the characterization of Buffy, no matter how much they transgress normative female gender roles, they are unable to entirely escape adherence to white, middle class codes of femininity that stress niceness and accommodation. On a representational level, this ensures, in turn, that their toughness is almost always represented in ways that confirm cultural constructions of white girls/women as "proper ladies" by mandating that their toughness manifest "primarily in the form of biting sarcasm or humor" that seeks to diffuse the more directly aggressive forms of confrontation that they engage in rather than to underscore them (23).[6]

If Max's toughness is coded along class and ethnic lines in *Dark Angel*, however, her ability to excel at skills culturally designated as male and to operate with ease in the male-designated spaces of covert military ops and Seattle's criminal underworld are overtly attributed within the narrative to her ability to successfully complete the military training that she was forced to take part in as a child, as well as her ability to survive the horrific physical and emotional abuses she was subjected to as part of this training. Each episode alternates between scenes of Max in the present, calmly dispatching soldiers, mercenaries and thugs who are twice her size and bodyweight, or else defiantly standing up to authority figures from her boss to powerful businessmen to gang leaders who try to take advantage of her, and scenes of Max in the past developing the skills that allow her to engage in these behaviors. Significantly, the connotations of gender transgression inscribed onto female embodiments of male-coded gender traits in the series is underscored by the ways in which Max is visually stripped of her femininity in the flashback scenes that deal with her experiences as part of Project Manticore. In these scenes, both the female and male X-5s all appear similarly dressed in fatigues or grey sweat suits

and all of their heads are shaved, robbing them of cultural markers like hair length and sex-specific wardrobes that are routinely used to signify gender identification in U.S. society. At the same time, the fact that they are prepubescent means that they similarly lack the visible sex characteristics that Western culture uses to mark gender on the level of the body.

While the intent may have been to portray the X-5s as gender neutral, or at least growing up in an environment in which they had no concept of sexual difference, the effect is just the opposite. The clothing and appearances of the X-5s may be uniform, but they are also those traditionally associated with masculinity in U.S. culture, as are the activities that the X-5s engage in. As a result, the X-5s are not stripped of gender so much as they all perform masculinity, a performance that seems more "natural" from the boys than the girls, so that ultimately it is only the biologically female X-5s who are depicted as stripped of their genders. In some ways this makes the contrasts between Max in the past and the present even more pronounced, as her masculine gender presentation in the flashback sequences stands out in sharp contrast to her decidedly feminine gender presentation in the sequences that take place in the diegetic present, signified through her long, curly hair, her use of dark eyeliner and red lipstick, and her costuming in tight leather pants and form-fitting tops that accentuate her hips and breasts. In fact, though the adult Max routinely performs tasks culturally-coded as masculine, she is not depicted performing masculinity, a distinction that allows her to embody the paradoxical combination of conventionally masculine and feminine attributes that Tasker ascribes to the figure of the tough girl, but which also makes this gender bending more acceptable within mainstream culture because it suggest that however Max (or Buffy, for that matter) may behave, she is still a "correctly" gendered girl at heart.

Girl Power as Coalitional Power in Warrior Girl Texts

For all that girl power is rooted in female dispalys of masculine-coded behaviors in both *Dark Angel* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, however, this is not the only source of the power that their protagonists wield. As previously mentioned, both girls are part of tightly-knit friendship networks, from which they receive both emotional and material support (as well tactical support in Buffy's case), and in both series these friendships are directly linked to the power that Max and Buffy exercise. The need for Max to keep her identity a secret precludes her friends Kendra, Original Cindy, Sketchy and Herbal, from assisting her in either the search for her fellow X-5s or the vigilante work she undertakes as part of her agreement with Logan. However, they are depicted as assisting her in a variety of other ways, from functioning as her surrogate family, to giving her dating advice when she becomes romantically involved with Logan, to covering for her at work so that she doesn't lose her job—or blow her cover—when her covert activities begin to interfere with her employment at the messenger service. In this way, while the series' narrative is still structured around the lone hero model prevalent in much of U.S. popular culture (even if it does switch the gendered dynamics such that Logan assumes the role of sidekick to Max's hero), *Dark Angel* also deviates from that model both by placing Max at the center of a community in which she has deep emotional ties and by situating her acceptance within that community—rather than her rejection from it—as one of the sources from which she draws power.

Likewise, there is also an emphasis in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* on community as a source of power. Beyond that, though, there is an additional emphasis on coalitional models of power sharing, with Buffy's "Scooby gang" (comprised of Willow, a self-described "computer nerd" and a powerful witch, Anya, a two thousand year old former vengeance demon who

punished infidelity on behalf of scorned women before becoming human, Oz, a werewolf, Cordelia and Xander, the two "normals" in the group, and Angel and Spike, Buffy's two [consecutive] vampire boyfriends) playing key roles in saving the world over the course of the series, sometimes alongside Buffy and sometimes in place of her. The series' endorsement of coalitional power as a manifestation of girl power becomes most obvious in its final season, in which Buffy gathers all the potential vampire slayers from around the world to work together to prevent the apocalypse. While the first episodes of the series sets up a mythology in which there is only ever one Slayer at a time, and that Slayer lives and fights in isolation, Buffy rejects this model of heroism by insisting on sharing both the burdens and the privileges of power—first by surrounding herself with friends who fight alongside her, and, in the series finale, by having Willow perform a spell that activates all of the potential Slayers, so that from that point forward the power that she exercises is shared by them all rather than wielded by her alone.

This narrative stress on coalitional exercises of power over individual exercises of power has been read by several scholars as indicative of an explicitly female approach to power relations. Jessica Prata Miller, for example, suggests that Buffy's sense of responsibility to her community, together with her commitment to community-oriented power sharing, both recall Carol Gilligan's ethics of care, a gendered model of ethical responses to moral dilemmas which posits that women are predisposed to a "care perspective" that foregrounds consideration of interpersonal relationships, responsibility to others, and emotional concerns, while men are predisposed to a "justice perspective" that foregrounds individuality, abstract principles and a dispassionate, rational response to ethical questions.[7] Along these same lines, Dawn Heinecken argues that the series "reflects a distinctive attitude regarding the proper way to handle power, which . . . stresses responsibility and care for others," and which she reads as a manifestation of

"women's power" that is unique from the ways in which men's power is understood and represented within U.S. culture (125). While both Miller and Heinecken distance their arguments from gender essentialism by insisting that the model of power embraced by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is feminist rather than intrinsically feminine, they nonetheless confuse the feminine and the feminist in their mappings of power dynamics within series (and in U.S. popular culture more generally) such that in their schema feminist models of power are implicitly and exclusively embodied by female characters. Not only do such arguments reinforce cultural equivalences between the terms "woman" and "feminist" and "man" and "patriarchy," but in doing so they deny the ways in which women can (and do) support patriarchy and men can (and do) support feminism within the fictional spaces of popular culture texts (not to mention the real-world spaces of U.S. society). On the level of popular culture representations, they also deny the possibility that feminist models of power could ever be embraced outside of female-centered narratives, nevermind by both female and male characters.

However unintentional, this essentializing of feminist ideology, in turn, reinforces cultural stereotypes that insist that feminism is only concerned with and only benefits women, rather than society at large, as well as the patriarchal model of gendered power relations that insists that women and men can only ever be pitted against one another in struggles over power. More to the point, it also ignores the ways in which this is not the case in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* itself, which, like *Dark Angel*, offers viewers a fictional world in which women and men work cooperatively towards common goals with power sharing on both sides. This is one way in which both shows arguably gesture towards U.S. feminism(s). While neither of their central characters ever explicitly identifies as a feminist, and feminist principles are never overtly articulated or supported within either text (outside of Willow's assertion in the *Buffy* episode

"Halloween" that she prefers having the right to vote—and the autonomy that goes with it—over being relegated to the domestic sphere), their emphasis on a model of gendered power relations that is non-hierarchical and that stresses mutual equality, support and respect echoes the Third Wave tenet that feminism encompasses "each and every politically conscious woman or man who works for equality" (Baumgardner and Richards 54). It also promotes the Third Wave view that feminism is actualized by "women and men organiz[ing] and rally[ing]" together to fight discrimination in all its forms (Baumgardner and Richards 54). By tying the power exercised by Buffy and Max to this model of power sharing, both series thus link girl power to the political goals of the Third Wave, at least in terms of their shared emphasis on coalitional action and the involvement of both women and men in projects for social justice.

Girl Power, Personhood and the Public Sphere

That both Max and Buffy are unquestionably acknowledged by those they work alongside of as protectors of their respective communities also gives them a presence in the public sphere that few adolescent female characters in U.S. popular culture texts outside of Nancy Drew have ever achieved. They both may have to operate in secret, but whereas Nancy is valuable to her community because she is able to expose petty crimes, Max and Buffy are represented as essential to their communities because the safety and survival of those communities rests entirely on their shoulders. It is this central—and uncontested—place in public life that aligns Buffy and Max with the protagonist of *Kim Possible*, who also embodies girl power through her ability to exercise power within the public sphere. Indeed, where Buffy and Max operate largely outside of the knowledge of public officials or law enforcement agencies, Kim's efforts to fight crime are not only sanctioned within the public sphere in *Kim*

Possible, but she is also often called on for assistance by city leaders or heads of state, who routinely (and without reservation) rely on her to come to their aid.

  Kim Possible aired on the Disney Channel from 2002-2007. Until the unprecedented success of *Hannah Montana*, it was the cable network's longest running series (airing for four seasons over a five year period), and the first original animated series to be entirely developed and produced in-house (Coleman 33).   While, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dark Angel*, the program features a tough, independent, capable teenage girl who saves the world on a regular basis, *Kim Possible* is targeted to a much younger audience. In fact, along with *Lizzie McGuire*, it was one of the first series launched by the network in an attempt to expand viewership to encompass tweens, a demographic comprised of girls ages eight to thirteen who have become an increasingly important market for both retailers and media producers in recent years, and who up until the premiers of these two series had proven "elusive to younger-skewing Disney" (Finnigan 16). Not only was *Kim Possible* popular enough with Disney Channel audiences that the network brought it back for an unscheduled fourth season after a write-in campaign undertaken by its fans following its cancellation in 2005 (Woodman 30), but it also succeeded in helping to draw tween viewers to the network in large enough numbers that tween-targeted programming has now become a cornerstone for the Disney Channel, with series like *That's So Raven* and *Hannah Montana* generating significant revenues for the network in the forms of both advertising and product tie-ins. *Kim Possible* also proved popular with critics, receiving two Daytime Emmy nominations for best animated series, as well as receiving praise for its depiction of a "very ambitious, very skilled, very smart" heroine who is full of "confidence and . . . sincerity" (Shattuck 59).

  The show's narrative follows the adventures of its title character, a sixteen year old

freelance crime fighter who contracts her services through a Web site run by her friend Wade, a

ten year old computer genius who provides her with operational support in the form of

information gathering, as well as occasionally providing her with technology in the tradition of Q

in the *James Bond* film franchise. Kim is also aided on her missions by her sidekick Ron, her

best friend and high school classmate, who eventually becomes her boyfriend. The series mixes

elements of the action, spy and superhero genres, in which Kim defies narrative convention by

assuming the role of hero rather than love-interest or damsel in distress. Unlike in *Buffy the*

Vampire Slayer or *Dark Angel*, though, her assumption of this role is largely taken for granted

within the narrative, where, in contrast to Buffy and Max, Kim's competency is almost never

challenged or dismissed because she is a teenage girl. However, the series does provide critical

commentary on the gendered (and sexist) division of narrative roles in these genres through the

character of Shego, the sidekick to Kim's primary nemesis, Dr. Drakken. While Drakken is

depicted as bumbling and incompetent, Shego is depicted as intelligent and accomplished, and

yet her talents and contributions are continually discounted by both Drakken and the other

villains they occasionally team up with, who uniformly refuse to acknowledge that she is the

brains behind their operation. Most episodes in which she appears include scenes in which

Drakken either takes credit for plans she has executed or in which Drakken is credited with being

a criminal mastermind while she is assumed to be nothing more than his lackey, and all of these

episodes feature Shego engaging in angry protests in which she explicitly identifies her status as

a woman as the reason that she is not credited for her work or taken seriously as a villain.

Kim's representation as a warrior girl within the series is very similar to that of Buffy and

Max, and the show's girl power message rests to a large extent on the fact that she is consistently

portrayed as capable and fully autonomous, defying cultural assumptions about what girls are—

and are not—able to achieve, as signified by her name, which is a play on the qualifier

"impossible." She too is skilled in the use of weapons and in physical combat, and she too

displays courage and level-headiness in crisis situations. Also like Buffy and Max, her power is

attributed as much to her intelligence, her strength of character and her ingenuity as it is to her

ability to fight, which allows her to outsmart her opponents as often as she uses force to

incapacitate them. Unlike Buffy and Max however, Kim does not possess supernatural powers

or enhanced DNA, although the series does make much of the fact that her parents are a rocket

scientist and a brain surgeon, suggesting that "superior" genes may play a role in her superhero

status (an implication that takes on unsettling overtones when taken in conjunction with her

portrayal as white and upper-middle class). However, in the absence of super strength or

mystical abilities, it is largely her intelligence that Kim relies on to successfully complete her

missions, and it is in this sense that she stands out most clearly from earlier pop culture

representations of teenage girls, providing viewers with a female protagonist who is "neither

playing dumb nor hiding [her] intelligence," and who does not "succumb to the cultural

pressures to do so" (Haines 77).

If Kim's confidence and intelligence are signifiers of her power, however, its most

obvious manifestation in *Kim Possible* is the ways in which she stands up for herself verbally as

well as physically, engaging in witty banter with her opponents in a show of fearlessness as

Buffy and Max do, but also standing up to those like her classmate, Bonnie (the series'

stereotypical mean girl), who try to put her down or make her feel bad about herself for her

deviations from adolescent female norms. In this way, in *Kim Possible*, as in *Buffy the Vampire

Slayer* and *Dark Angel*, talking back is deployed as a weapon in ways that tie it to girl power, not

so much because it functions as a display of dominance or force, but rather because it functions

as an assertion of personhood.   Ilana Nash suggests in regard to the *Nancy Drew Mysteries* that

part of the reason why they appeal to young female readers is that they provide them with

fantasies of unlimited agency and uncontested subjectivity, both of which they themselves are

"frequently denied . . . in their own lives" because of girls' subordinate social and cultural status

(29-30). In girl power texts, such assertions of personhood are additionally positioned as a

strategy for empowerment, in that they don't just demonstrate girls' agency; they also affirm the

rights of girls to demand that their agency be recognized and respected.

While instances of talking back as an assertion of agency abound in all three texts, one of

the most obvious (and arguably one of the most affirmative) occurs in the *Buffy the Vampire*

Slayer episode "Checkpoint," in which the Watcher's Council, the governing body that is

charged with oversight of the Slayer, arrives in Sunnydale with information about an urgent

threat, which they refuse to disclose to Buffy until she submits to an evaluation of her battle

skills. The evaluation is meant, in part, as retribution for Buffy declaring independence from the

Council and cutting off contact with them after they forced her to take part in a dangerous test of

her abilities without her knowledge or consent, and in this episode they try once again to exert

dominance over her by using the information they are withholding to manipulate her into

submitting to their control. Buffy refuses to be cowed by them, however, and in the scene in

which she faces them down at the end of the episode, she gives a speech in which she declares,

> There isn't going to be a review . . . No interrogation. No questions you know I
>
> can't answer. No hoops, no jumps, and no interruptions. See, I've had a lot of
>
> people talking at me in the last few days; everyone lining up to tell me just how
>
> unimportant I am. And I finally figured out why: power. I have it. They don't.
>
> This bothers them . . . You guys didn't come all the way from England to

determine if I was good enough to be let back in. You came to beg me to let *you*

back in, to give your jobs, your lives, some semblance of meaning. [At this point

she is interrupted by an angry exclamation from one of the Council members,

whom she silences by throwing the sword she has been holding to land in the wall

by his head.] You're Watchers. Without a Slayer, you're pretty much just

watching *Masterpiece Theatre* . . . So here's how it's going to work. You're

going to tell me everything you know. Then you're going to go away. You'll

contact me if and when you have any further information . . . I will continue my

work with the help of my friends . . .You can all take your time thinking about

that, but I want an answer right now from Quentin [the head of the Council]

because I think he's understanding me.

After a much chastened Quentin unequivocally agrees to these terms, Buffy's friends,

who have been watching silently during this exchange, burst into applause that seems to serve

thematically as an enthusiastic endorsement of her refusal of subordination, tying her exercise of

power in this scene explicitly to girl power discourse by framing it in terms of a young woman

insisting that her autonomy be acknowledged. Similar scenes occur in the *Dark Angel* episode

"Art Attack," in which Max responds to an implied insult from Logan's patronizing uncle by

chastising him for "talking out of [his] ass," and the *Kim Possible* episode "Number One," in

which Kim, irritated by the constant put-downs of Agent Will Do, who regards her as a less-

capable amateur, replies to his condescending "are you ready to assist me in my investigation"

with a firm, "Assist you, no. Work with you as an equal, yeah." In each case, the protagonists in

these series resist attempts to put them "in their places" by talking back to (and against) those

who would diminish their personhood. Thus, in all three series, verbal assertions of agency are

tied to the empowerment of their protagonists in ways that situate the girl power that they exercise not just in their ability to operate in the public sphere, but also, perhaps more importantly, in their ability to demand that their subjectivity be acknowledged and respected within the public sphere.

The Limits of Girl Power: Suffering, Punishment and Containment in Warrior Girl Texts

For every episode of these series in which girl's agency is affirmed and their power celebrated, however, there are also episodes in which their agency is undercut and their empowerment qualified, mostly because they are all forced to sacrifice and/or suffer in various ways in exchange for the power that they wield. As such, the benefits those protagonists gain through their status as warrior girls is overshadowed in the texts by the personal costs exacted from them in the course of fulfilling their obligations as protectors of their communities. At the same time, on an extradiegetic level, the pleasures viewers might derive from watching confident, assertive, independent girls assume the narrative roles of heroes is likewise tempered by the fact that they are also made to watch those same girls endure emotional pain for embodying the very confidence, assertiveness and independence that allow them to take up the hero role in the first place. This is most explicitly illustrated in all three series by the repeated expressions of longing to be freed from the demands and the responsibilities attendant to their powers expressed by Buffy, Max and Kim, together with their grief over their thwarted desires to lead "normal" lives. As if to underscore the sacrifices all three are required to make in order to exercise power, there are numerous episodes where their duty to save the world interferes with their ability to enjoy activities or rites of passage associated with the pleasures of girlhood—captaining the cheerleading squad in the *Kim Possible* episode "Number One," attending the

Spring formal in the *Buffy* episode "Prophesy Girl," and having a romantic dinner with one's

boyfriend in the *Dark Angel* episode "Out" (to cite just three of many examples).

As a result, while warrior girls in girl power texts achieve empowerment by taking on

masculine-coded behaviors, this frequently necessitates them forfeiting their participation in

feminine-coded behaviors that they take pleasure in, in effect framing empowerment within these

texts far more often in terms of what girls lose through acts of gender transgression than what

they gain. At the same time, for all their bridging of gender roles, the gender binary remains

more or less intact, since neither Buffy, Max nor Kim are able to fully integrate their

"masculine" and "feminine" activities, and instead must constantly struggle to find a balance

between their performances of masculine and feminine tasks. Kim is able to find this balance

most easily in *Kim Possible*, perhaps because its younger audience necessitates that the series

steer away from the darker content that *Buffy* and *Dark Angel* explore. Indeed, while Kim

occasionally struggles with missing out on the fun of high school, the costs of heroism and the

stakes of gender transgression are both much higher for Buffy and Max, who are required to risk

their lives, and not just participation in conventional teenage experiences (although they sacrifice

that too), in exchange for the power they exercise.

The same genetic manipulation that gives Max her enhanced physical abilities also leaves

her with a serotonin imbalance that results in debilitating seizures, and while her mixture of

human and feline DNA give her a boosted immune system and an accelerated rate of healing that

make her more difficult to kill, the scientific experiments she was subjected to also raise the

possibility that her lifespan may have been intentionally shortened, which leaves her to confront

the prospect that she may die fairly young and without any warning. This is also true for Buffy,

whose calling as the Slayer puts her in constant mortal danger. Buffy is haunted by the fact that

almost all of the previous Slayers have died before reaching adulthood, and Buffy herself is actually killed in battle twice over the course of the series, although the first time she is revived by CPR and the second time she is brought back from the grave through magic. Even so, she still faces the possibility that she will not escape death again, and for the entire series she is filled with both anguish and resentment at all that she has lost and all that she will never have because she is the Slayer.

Thus, for both Buffy and Max, the pleasures and the rewards of being powerful girls are outweighed by the costs of power, which are measured not only in the risk of death, but also the fact that they must give up so much of their lives to the protection of their communities while they are still living. To the extent that Buffy's and Max's representation as empowered girls resonates (however obliquely) with feminist campaigns for female empowerment, the fact that their empowerment comes at such a hefty price in both series seems to gesture towards what Susan Faludi identifies as one of the central contentions of the anti-feminist backlash: that feminist liberation comes at a tremendous personal cost, which, far from improving the lives of women, causes them misery and suffering (x). It is significant that in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, Faludi notes the frequency with which the "cost" of feminism is framed in both political rhetoric and popular culture texts in terms of women sacrificing marriage and family, since in both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dark Angel* the biggest personal sacrifices Buffy and Max make in their roles as warrior girls involve their renunciation of incorporation into conventional heterosexual romantic relationships.

This sacrifice of love for duty takes two different forms in both texts. On the one hand, both Buffy and Max are forced to end relationships with men they love when their pursuit of those relationships endangers the men in question. In the second season of *Dark Angel*, Max is

forced to break up with Logan after she is temporarily recaptured by the military and implanted with a gene-specific virus that will kill them both if they have even the slightest physical contact with one another. Similarly, in the second season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy is forced to kill Angel after her love for him lifts the curse that restored his soul, causing him to turn evil and to try to bring about the end of the world.[8] (In this way, Buffy is also forced to sacrifice the man she loves in order to safeguard the community she is sworn to protect.) Although Angel is mysteriously resurrected in season three with his soul once again intact, he and Buffy cannot resume their relationship, and, in fact, must remain apart in order to ensure that the curse stays in place. Thus, in both texts, Buffy and Max are forced to sacrifice romantic relationships because the wellbeing of their romantic partners is threatened in one way or another by their involvement with them.

On the other hand, however, both Buffy and Max also find their relationships with men they love threatened at different points within these respective series because those men are threatened by their status as warrior girls. Long before Max and Logan are prevented from being together because of the virus, the possibility of them making their relationship work is called into question through Logan's insecurity with Max's superior fighting skills, an insecurity that is exacerbated when the gunshot wound that Logan sustains in the pilot episode leaves him paralyzed from the waist down. Logan continually struggles over the course of the series not only with the fact that Max does not need him to protect her from physical harm, but also with his own inability to accept Max's protection of him. This is illustrated in the episode "Haven," for example, when Max beats up three men who knock Logan out of his wheelchair after he confronts them for making unwanted sexual advances towards her at a bar, and in which Logan's response to this turn of events is to get angry with Max for stepping in to defend him. Similarly,

Buffy's relationship with Riley, her only human boyfriend in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, is complicated by his competitiveness and his need to constantly prove that he is as tough as she is, which leads him to eventually take dangerous mystical measures to boost his strength to her level. Riley ultimately dumps Buffy because he cannot accept the fact that she is a more skilled warrior than he is, and their break-up in the episode "Into the Woods" includes an exchange in which he berates her for not needing him enough, while simultaneously implying that she is psychologically damaged because she is both physically and emotionally self-reliant.

It is worth noting within this context that, as Tasker points out, there is a long narrative tradition in U.S. popular culture that requires male heroes to sacrifice heterosexual romantic relationships for duty. This is particularly true in the case of superhero texts, where protagonists are often either forced to forego love because of the potential danger it may cause to whomever they become involved with, or else forced to endure unbearable grief when their romantic partners are killed by their enemies. In *Spectacular Bodies*, Tasker questions why the emotional suffering of female characters in tough girl texts is automatically read by many feminist critics as evidence of the patriarchal orientation of those texts, arguing that it is not always the case that the suffering of male heroes is always and only "a testament to [their], and consequently patriarchy's, invincibility," while the suffering of female heroes is always and only proof of "[their] passivity and . . . ultimate failure" (139). However, while Tasker's point is well taken, the suffering of the hero is nonetheless often deployed for different ideological ends in popular texts depending on the gender of that hero. The fact remains that while the suffering of male heroes is frequently invoked in U.S. popular culture as proof of their stoicism, and thus as a guarantor of their hegemonic masculinity, the suffering of female heroes is frequently invoked as punishment for their transgression of normative female gender roles. This is certainly the case in

terms of the failure of Max's relationship with Logan in *Dark Angel* and the failure of Buffy's relationship with Riley in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, as the gender transgression that imbues each of them with girl power also causes Logan and Riley to reject them as viable romantic partners.

At the same time, it is also worth noting here that the fact that both Logan and Riley find their masculinity threatened by Max and Buffy to the extent that it threatens the future of their romantic relationships—despite Logan's and Riley's representation as enlightened, sensitive New Men—might be read as a form of critical commentary on patriarchal anxieties surrounding female empowerment, were it not for the fact that in both *Dark Angel* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* it is Max and Buffy who are represented as the ones to blame when these relationships fail. This becomes one more way in which both Max and Buffy are punished for their deviations from hegemonic femininity in these texts. Max is advised by both Kendra and Cindy to act more conventionally "feminine" for Logan, while Buffy is faulted by her friends for not working harder to get Riley to stay with her, as well as for not chasing after him and begging him to come back when he leaves her. Even more disappointing, in both texts girl power takes on dimensions of an emasculating force, as both Logan's and Riley's diminished physical abilities in relation to Max and Buffy—the source of their romantic reservations—are thematically invested with connotations of castration.

This places both series squarely within misogynist narrative traditions in which powerful women can only be represented as castration threats, and in which those women must therefore be punished for the danger their power is assumed to pose to the patriarchal order. This becomes even more obvious in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in terms of the series' representation of Buffy's romantic relationship with Spike, in which his emasculation through that relationship is implied by his frequent accusations that her involvement with him is contingent upon him agreeing to

abide by "rules you make up as you go along" ("As You Were"). Spike renounces his villainous

ways after falling in love with Buffy, and there are explicit castration jokes voiced by other

characters within the narrative in response to his attempts at self-reform.   Spike himself

symbolically invokes castration in the episode "Beneath You" when he tells Buffy that his love

for her has made him weak, as well as in the episode "Seeing Red," in which he despairs that his

love for her leaves him unable to fully be either a monster or a man, and in which he attempts to

rape Buffy to assert control over their relationship, as well as to reassert his sense of self.

In what is perhaps the most horrifying narrative turn of the entire series, Buffy is made to

assume the blame for Spike's attempted rape of her, just as she is earlier forced to assume blame

for Riley dumping her, because in both cases the series presents her as failing them by not

putting their needs above all else (as "proper" women in patriarchal culture are expected to do).

Even worse, because Spike's emotional torment at hurting Buffy becomes a major focus in the

series in the episodes after the attempted rape, while Buffy never expresses regret at hurting

Spike by repeatedly voicing her disgust with herself over her sexual involvement with him in the

episodes leading up to it, it is Spike, and not Buffy, who the series ultimately represents as the

victim of the rape attempt. In this way, the series not only seems to endorse the discourses of

victim-blaming that survivors of sexual assault are frequently confronted with when their

assailants are men they have had previous sexual relationships with, but sexual assault becomes

one more way in which the series forces Buffy to suffer because of her empowerment—in this

instance by making the loss of power over her body the price she pays for the power that she

wields as the Slayer.

Girl Power as Pathology and the Pathologizing of Warrior Girls

At the same time, if requiring both sacrifice and suffering from Buffy and Max in exchange for their power functions on an ideological level in these texts to punish them for transgressing female gender norms, it also serves to pathologize their power by linking it to psychological damage, as in both texts wielding girl power is also represented as costing those who wield it their emotional stability and their peace of mind. While Buffy is haunted by the prospect of her death in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, death is the only thing that can release her from the burden of responsibility she carries as the Slayer, and as early as the fourth season there are narrative hints that Buffy may be unnecessarily risking herself in combat out of a desire to die. Spike explicitly raises this possibility in "Fool for Love" when he accuses Buffy of being "a little bit in love with [death]," and Buffy herself confirms it in "Once More With Feeling" when she confesses to wanting to die because she already feels dead inside. As the narrative of the series progresses, Buffy is also represented as being increasingly tormented by the things she has had to do to fulfill her obligations as the Slayer, and in "Conversations With Dead People," she worries that she has become like the monsters she is sworn to kill, while in "Dead Things" she is so overwhelmed by guilt that she breaks down sobbing and admits to a desire to be punished, insisting "It's wrong. Tell me that I'm wrong."

Max is also tormented by regret over the lives she has taken in *Dark Angel*, and, like Buffy, she too is represented as psychologically scarred by the things she has had to do to survive. Most of the flashbacks to her childhood in the series involve acts she was forced to commit as part of her training that she is haunted by as an adult, or else memories of fellow X-5s that she was not able to protect from harm. Not all of her guilt is limited to her past either. In the first season finale when she is finally able to reconnect with Tinga, one of her fellow

escapees, Tinga is recaptured by the military. Max is seriously wounded trying to rescue Tinga, and Zack, the X-5 sibling Max was closest to, sacrifices his own life to ensure that Max survives, leaving her with the burden of both his death and Tinga's imprisonment on her conscience. The extent of Max's psychological suffering over both her past and present deeds as a warrior girl is most explicitly illustrated in the episode "Pollo Loco," which ends with Max (who has never been to church before) entering a confessional and begging to be forgiven for all that she has done that she considers to be "unforgiveable."

Because in both texts Max's and Buffy's toughness is depicted at least in part as defense mechanisms they employ for coping with this emotional pain, both texts end up invoking the discursive links between gender transgression and psychological pathology in U.S. popular culture discussed in the previous chapter, thereby reinforcing hegemonic notions that toughness in women is ultimately a mark of psychic maladjustment and not a mark of empowerment. They are not the only tough girls in these texts to be represented as psychologically damaged either. Power comes at the cost of emotional suffering for all of the female characters in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and, in the case of both Willow and Faith, also leads directly to madness. [9]

Faith, who is introduced as a recurring character in season three, is one of the Slayers called after Buffy temporarily dies. She is positioned within the narrative as Buffy's darker double, lacking the pangs of conscience and the remorse that Buffy experiences at being forced to kill. Beyond that, though, Faith is also depicted as enjoying killing, deriving a pleasure from violence that is invested with sexual undertones, and which is the most prominent signifier of her coding as pathological. Thus, while Faith is represented as dangerous because of her power, eventually indulging in a killing spree that lands her in prison, her power is also represented as dangerous to Faith, robbing her of her sanity. After suffering a psychotic break, in the *Angel*

episode "Five by Five," she experiences an emotional breakdown during which she first tries to force Angel to kill her, and, when that doesn't work, pleads with him to take her life as punishment—although it is never clear if she is asking to be punished for abusing her power or for having it in the first place. Likewise, while Willow's magical abilities are initially represented positively in the series as a source of empowerment, giving her confidence and purpose, in the sixth season magic becomes an addiction for her, and she is transformed on a representational level from a powerful master of supernatural abilities to a weak-willed, emotionally unstable young woman who lacks the control or the ability to command her powers. This is underscored when her girlfriend, Tara, is accidentally killed and Willow literally goes mad with grief, unleashing the full force of her magic in an unsuccessful attempt to destroy the world, with the result that for the rest of the series she is afraid to use her full powers lest she lose her grip on her sanity again.

In this way, female gender transgression is linked to both female power and female psychological pathology in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dark Angel*, much as female gender transgression, female empowerment and female delinquency are often linked in popular discourse within U.S. culture. Significantly, as in popular depictions of the Victory Girl in the 1940s and the female juvenile delinquent in the 1950s, in both of these texts that pathology also manifests largely in terms of "deviant" sexual behavior when it comes to both Buffy and Max. Throughout season six of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy's unhappiness is positioned as the motivating factor behind her self-destructive relationship with Spike, while in "Conversations With Dead People" the physically and emotionally abusive nature of that relationship is explicitly invoked as proof of (her) psycho-sexual disorder. In fact, the entire episode "Conversations With Dead People" emphasizes Buffy's coding as psychologically damaged,

with the plot revolving around Buffy being analyzed by a vampire opponent who has studied psychology, and who eventually diagnoses her relationship with Spike as the result of her subconsciously seeking out punishment for the power that she wields. At the same time, even though neither Buffy nor Max engages in sexual practices that fall outside of heteronormative parameters, their sexual activities are invested with connotations of aberrance. That violence almost always functions as foreplay for Buffy and Spike hints at an S&M component to their sexual relationship, while Max is represented as preferring anonymous one-night stands to monogamous sexual relationships, in large part because she fears the emotional intimacy associated with the latter. In both cases, these series draw on psychological discourses that position these sexual behaviors or attitudes towards sex as indicators of abnormal sexual desires to reinforce the coding of Buffy and Max as psychologically damaged.

Within this context, it is also worth noting that both series equally invest Max and Buffy with otherworldly powers of seduction, which adds another layer of implied pathology to their sexual relationships, in that their sexuality is often portrayed as being out of their control. A spell causes Riley and Buffy to engage in compulsive sexual activity in ""Where the Wild Things Are," but references to his insatiable desire for her abound in season four of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Meanwhile, sex with Buffy also leads to Angel losing his soul and robs Spike of his self-control, suggesting that her sexuality is dangerous to the men she becomes involved with because they find her impossible to resist, even, as Angel states in the episode "Amends," when they know that they risk destroying their lives and their sanity to be with her. Since Buffy does not intentionally set out to cause either outcome, however, this also suggests that she is equally powerless when it comes to either resisting or acting on her sexual desires.

Likewise, Max's feline DNA causes her to experience an estrous cycle that periodically

leaves her "in heat," desperately craving sexual release and entirely unable to control her sexual impulses. This genetic modification lends her an enhanced sexual appeal similar to Buffy's, as demonstrated in the episode "Heat," in which the young man Max picks up in a bar to satisfy her desires ends up following her around and professing his love for her, much to her annoyance. Unfortunately for Max, both her boosted sex drive and the effect it has on the men around her bring her nothing but embarrassment and shame, as demonstrated in the episode "Meow," in which, wracked with guilt over having been unable to resist sexual temptation (and consequently having cheated on Logan), Max is shown weeping in the shower while symbolically trying to cleanse herself of her actions. In the case of both series, while depicting girls as slaves to their libidos is hardly empowering, the fact that neither girl is ever depicting taking pleasure in these sexual encounters also makes it impossible to argue that the shows depict them as sexually empowered. Instead, both the sexual practices they engage in and the emotional distress they experience as a result of their sexual relationships serve to further reinforce their coding as emotionally troubled.

Fetishizing the Warrior Girl, Sexualizing Girls' Power

It is also worth noting here that Inness argues that the sexual fetishization of the tough girl in popular culture texts functions ideologically to contain the power women are able to exercise in such texts by linking female power to female sexuality, thereby reproducing a patriarchal representational system in which women have traditionally only been able to exercise power through sex, and then only in negative ways. She suggests that regardless of whether female characters in these texts exercise power exclusively through seduction or merely use seduction as one of many tools to disarm opponents, they are made to "appear less tough and

capable than they might if they [had] depended on their brawn or brains" rather than their sex appeal to triumph over their adversaries (*Tough Girls* 43). To the extent that Buffy's and Max's depiction as sexually irresistible leads to both their narrative and their visual fetishization in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dark Angel*, it could be argued that this fetishization similarly serves to undercut their power, although in the case of these texts it does so in two ways: by sexually objectifying them for viewers, but also by serving as proof that they are emotionally disturbed because of their roles as warrior girls.

These contradictory messages about female empowerment are communicated on the visual level in both texts through the juxtaposition of images of the female body as a site of agency with images of the female body as a (subject-less) site for erotic contemplation. In her landmark essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey argues that there is a gendered split between the ways in which male and female characters are represented in films from the classical Hollywood period, with men depicted on the level of both narrative and image as subjective agents, "bearers of the look," and women depicted as passive objects, that which the look is directed at, but never that which directs the look or that from which the look originates. According to Mulvey, this visual representation of female characters as objects of another's look, and not as subjects in their own right, is achieved by the framing those characters through a viewing position she terms the "male gaze," which reaffirms the subordinate position of women within patriarchal culture by reproducing the patriarchal value system in which women are positioned as "signifier for the male other," and thus "bearer, not maker, of meaning" (15). John Berger traces this same representational trope through Western art from the Renaissance to the 1970s in *Ways of Seeing*, and he too ties it specifically to the hegemonic function of visual culture in reinforcing dominant values that shape the ways in which we see (in

both senses of the term) ourselves and the world around us—in this case the ways in which we understand the relative social positions and social functions of men and women in patriarchal culture.

Noting that object of the gaze is not the only one way in which women are portrayed in contemporary visual culture, Heinecken suggests that representations of the tough girl in action texts provide an alternative to the representational practices Mulvey and Berger discuss. She maintains that "although the position of woman-as-object remains in many action/adventure narratives, the film conventions of action movies allow greater freedom for the female action hero," making it possible for female characters to exercise narrative agency through their assumption of the role of protagonist, as well as visual agency through their ability to control the cinematic apparatus by serving as the relay point for subjective point-of-view shots (26). While Heinecken reads this simultaneous representation of tough girls as both subject and object of the gaze as evidence of the subversive potential of such representations to disrupt patriarchal values, I would like to suggest that depicting the tough girl as at once subjective agent and erotic object can promote contradictory ideologies without ever subverting either one. In the same way that images of the tough girl as subjective agent do not fully counter patriarchal understandings of sexual difference in *Kim Possible*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Dark Angel*, for example, images of the tough girl as erotic object do not wholly counter feminist projects for deconstructing sexual difference. Indeed, in these texts both types of representations of female characters limit the ability of those representations to be deployed for subversive ends by neither actively facilitating the subversion of hegemonic values nor entirely foreclosing its possibility. This is illustrated by the visual representations of Max, Buffy, and (to a lesser degree) Kim, in which girl power is simultaneously located in girls' subjective agency and their heterosexual

desirability, but in ways that can be read as simultaneously reinforcing and challenging patriarchal understandings of sexual difference.

While examples of both types of representations recur in all three texts, the discursive refusal to reconcile them is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the pilot episode of *Dark Angel*, in which the climactic rescue of a kidnapped girl Max has been assisting Logan to locate is bookended by sequences in which Max is consecutively represented as sex object and warrior-hero. That she can assume both roles in the same episode suggests that within the series they are not mutually exclusive, as they are imagined to be in patriarchal culture (and in some feminist discourse). Thus, as both Tasker and Inness suggest, there is indeed something radical about the representation of women who assume both masculine and feminine gender roles as if they were equally "natural" to them. Such representations in and of themselves however, are not necessarily enough to radically challenge the dominant gender order, as Max's representation in *Dark Angel* demonstrates. Because on a visual level Max is represented very differently when she is using physical strength to accomplish a mission objective than she is represented when she is using her heterosexual desirability to accomplish a mission objective, the female body is invested with different significations in each type of representation, and these significations reinforce patriarchal understandings of sexual difference far more than they offer alternatives to them—if for no other reason than because when Max is presented as sex object, she is still presented as an *object* for the viewer to take pleasure in looking at, and not as a subject to be admired for her sexual appeal.

In the first sequence under consideration here, Max infiltrates a party being held by the mob leader responsible for the girl's kidnapping in order to discover where she is being held. To do this, Max pretends to be one of the call girls hired to service the male guests at the party.

After knocking out one of the actual call girls and stealing her clothes, Max is shown walking out

of the bedroom where she has just changed into the stolen garments. As she exits, she is framed

in a low-angle shot that begins at her feet and slowly tilts upward, lingering over her body now

encased in a short, tight-fitting dress, before stopping to capture her heavily made-up face in a

close-up. As Max adjusts her posture and begins to walk down the hallway, the camera pulls

back to a medium shot that captures the swaying of her hips just above the bottom of the frame,

and begins tracking backwards to follow her progress as she moves towards the camera.   There

is then a cut to a series of shots of Max making her way downstairs and through the crowded

party, in which viewers watch Max being watched with desire by several of the men in the room.

Having attracted the attention of the mob boss, Max is summoned to a private meeting with him,

during which she is forced to bend over a pool table, resting on her stomach and forearms, while

a guard searches her for weapons. Once he is finished, he keeps his hand pressed on her back,

forcing her to remain in this submissive position for the rest of the scene, giving both his boss

and viewers an uninterrupted view of her cleavage as the scene alternates between shots of the

mob boss and shots of Max framed from his perspective.

In this sequence, Max displays physical strength in scaling the fence to gain access to the

property where the party is being held, as well as tactical skill in being able to avoid the guards

to enter the house undetected. She displays intelligence both in formulating the plan to infiltrate

the house and in outsmarting the mob boss by manipulating him into believing he has the upper

hand in their dealings. She also displays courage in appearing completely unfazed as the guard

sexually menaces her. And yet, of all the different types of power she evidences in this

sequence, what is foregrounded is her heterosexual desirability. Through costuming, framing

and camera movement, attention is drawn to Max's body as a site of erotic contemplation, but

not as a site of physical strength or as a site of subjective agency. In fact, the foregrounding of

her powers of seduction in this sequence appears to function at least in part to downplay the

other powers she demonstrates. In this way, while the visual representation of Max in this

sequence conforms very closely to Mulvey's model of woman-as-object, it also follows a pattern

Tasker discusses in terms of representational practices specific to tough girl texts, in which

sexualized "images of women seem to need to compensate for the figure of the active heroine by

emphasizing her sexuality, her availability within traditional feminine terms" (*Spectacular

Bodies* 19).

Interestingly, this is not the case in the second sequence, which involves Max's rescue of

the kidnapped girl, and in which her visual coding as "active heroine" is foregrounded rather

than diffused. In this sequence Max leads the Manticore retrieval team tracking her movements

to the warehouse where the girl is being held and tricks the retrieval team into storming the

warehouse and disarming the kidnappers by convincing them that she is the one imprisoned

inside. She then enters the warehouse dressed as one of the members of the retrieval tem,

rescues the girl, and escapes with her undetected. The sequence ends with a low-angle tracking

shot that mirrors the shot of Max walking towards the camera in her call girl disguise in the

earlier sequence. In this sequence, however, Max is dressed in SWAT gear that entirely covers

her body, leaving only her eyes visible, and she strides purposefully towards the camera holding

the sleeping girl in her arms. The absence of diegetic sound and the slow motion filming of this

shot are both traditional cinematic signifiers of heroic action, as is the posing of Max and the

rescued girl, and all of these elements are used similarly here to highlight Max's bravery and

competence.

What the differences between Max's representation in these two sequences suggest is

that, as in the case of most female characters in tough girl texts, her representation as subjective

agent may be qualified by her visual coding as sexual object, but her representation as sexual

object is equally qualified by her visual coding as subjective agent. The two don't necessarily

cancel each other out, but they do complicate readings of *Dark Angel* as a subversive text, since

they make it difficult to determine whether it is patriarchal values or feminist values that the text

is trying to subvert. Whether this serves to contain the power warrior girls are able to exercise in

much the same way as their progenitors in earlier pop culture texts is the stake in arguments

about the supposedly empowering effects of girl power texts on adolescent female viewers.

What all of the critical attention focused on this question has largely ignored, however, is that the

confused nature of their representations of girl power makes it possible for these texts to be

deployed simultaneously to *both* endorse and contain adolescent female empowerment using the

same visual and narrative elements.

     Dark Angel, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Kim Possible* all offer images and narrative

moments that celebrate girls exercising power, but they also offer images and narrative moments

in which empowerment—tied as it is in these texts to acts of gender transgression—is

represented negatively because of the costs it entails, whether in terms of social acceptance,

personal happiness or the ability to lead a satisfying life. At other moments, girls' empowerment

is either reduced to or erased by their heterosexual desirability in ways that downplay their

protagonists' gender transgression by emphasizing their (traditional) feminine gender

presentation, as well as hegemonic constructions of femininity. The result is that while all of

these texts may celebrate girls' empowerment through gender transgression, they absolutely do

not celebrate gender transgression itself, which only brings misery and suffering to their

protagonists. Ultimately, then, the attitudes of these texts towards girl power are as ambiguous

as their articulation of girl power, a condition that holds true for the girl avenger and outsider girl texts discussed in the next chapter as well, in which girls' empowerment is similarly achieved through acts of gender transgression, but in which both are also represented in decidedly ambivalent terms. Before moving on to a discussion of these other girl power variants on the figure of the tough girl, however, it is necessary to address the extremely conservative terms through which gender transgression is constituted in warrior girl texts, since if those texts communicate mixed messages about female gender transgression, they also represent gender transgression in highly qualified ways. This is crucial to the reading of these texts as "empowering" to viewers, because it is one of several ways in which the exercise of girl power is limited to very specific girls in mass media girl power texts. It is also significant to the positioning of gender transgression as a method of female empowerment in warrior girl texts, because it points to another way in which these texts actually circumscribe, rather than generate, possibilities for reimagining gender outside of the dominant gender order.

The Girls Who Wield Girl Power

As mentioned above, the female protagonists in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dark Angel* and *Kim Possible* all perform masculine-coded tasks, but they are not represented performing masculinity. In fact, they do not deviate very far from conventional enactments of femininity at all outside of their occasional engagement in traditionally male-coded behaviors. While their retention of feminine gender identification and presentation might allow for the possibility that the female body can perform both masculine and feminine gender roles (at least within the spaces of these three texts), it forecloses the possibility of female bodies exclusively performing masculine gender roles. Likewise, it also forecloses the possibility of female bodies performing

masculinity, as this is not a gender identification embodied by any protagonists in girl power texts of any kind to date. That a feminine-identified girl throwing a punch or wielding a sword is represented as constituting a radical act of gender transgression in girl power narratives featuring warrior girls occludes the more subversive acts of gender transgression that have been deployed by members of feminist, queer and transgender communities as conscious gestures of resistance to gender norms. It also makes it that much harder for gender norms to be challenged within dominant U.S. culture by representing behaviors that are already culturally-acceptable (if not usual) as if they were so far outside of the norm that thinking beyond those behaviors— nevermind legitimizing behaviors that deviate to a greater degree—becomes unimaginable. At the same time, that such minor infractions of hegemonic femininity are pathologized in these texts makes actual gender transgression appear to fall even further outside of what are considered to be legitimate expressions of gender within the cultural mainstream, thus rendering that transgression more, not less, aberrant.

The result is that far from offering audiences a more diverse representation of girls' gender identification, the protagonists in these texts all embody a very uniform model of femininity, in which girls' gender identification is still exclusively and recognizably feminine, and is still expressed according to hegemonic codes. Moreover, in these texts in which transgressing gender norms is represented as a strategy for female empowerment, transgender girls are never represented as girl power heroines—or indeed represented at all. Instead, their identities are erased in ways that limit the exercise of girl power exclusively to those girls whose gender identification corresponds to their biological sex according to hegemonic cultural standards. This is not the only limit placed on which girls have access to girl power in these texts either. Mass-media girl power narratives have been widely criticized for the fact that they are set

in worlds where the majority—if not the entirety—of the population is represented as white and middle-class. However, race and class are not the only axis of difference around which girl power is divided in these narratives. Indeed, if girl power is only granted to girls who are "correctly" gendered, it is also only granted to girls who comply with hegemonic beauty ideals, are able-bodied, and embody normative body types. Additionally, while girls of color and lesbian girls are both given representation in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dark Angel* and *Kim Possible*, it is only in minor roles, and at that only in ways that still marginalize girls who fall within these identity categories.

Buffy and Max are both played by actresses (Sarah Michelle Gellar and Jessica Alba respectively) who perfectly embody U.S. cultural ideals of female beauty and female heterosexual desirability. Even Kim, who is an animated character, exemplifies these ideals. They are not the only ones, however. All of the female characters on all three shows fall well within the parameters of what hegemonic culture considers to be conventionally attractive, and while this is certainly true of U.S. television series in general, in which characters always embody beauty standards unless specifically written as "unattractive," it does nothing to challenge beauty norms or the ways in which casting practices within the television industry reinforce beauty ideals, as well as support the cultural privileging of those who do (and are willing to) conform to them. It also does not allow for the possibility that girls who either don't fit or don't desire to comply with hegemonic standards of female attractiveness can exercise girl power.

Likewise, there is a very narrow range of body types and sizes represented on all three shows. Buffy, Max and Kim are all slender, with facial and body features that equally personify female bodily ideals in U.S. culture, as do all of the other female characters (even the extras) in

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, *Dark Angel* and *Kim Possible*. Fat girls, adolescent female little

people, and girls with other(ed) bodies types do not exist within the worlds of these texts—even

as negative cultural stereotypes—suggesting that they have no place within the realm of girl

power. Moreover, bodily norms are upheld in these texts even as disabled characters are given

representation. Disabled bodies are also positioned as Othered bodies within hegemonic U.S.

culture, while able bodies are privileged as more desirable bodies (in both senses of the term).

This signification of the disabled body as an inferior body, a body defined by limitations, carries

over into the representation of Logan in *Dark Angel*, who is one of only a handful of major

characters with a disability to ever appear in a U.S. television series. Paralysis is depicted as a

tragedy for Logan, who spends most of his time grieving for the "loss" of his ability to walk or

else trying to recover his ability to do so. In this way, hegemonic divisions between "normal"

and "abnormal" bodies remain firmly in place in the series, and Logan's portrayal as disabled

does more to affirm dominant cultural attitudes surrounding disability than to counter them.

It is worth noting within this context, that the character Felix, who appears in the *Kim

Possible* episode "Motor Ed," and who also uses a wheelchair for mobility, is represented in

more positive terms in that series, and in ways that appear specifically designed to challenge

hegemonic views of disability as a limitation. However, Felix is not a regular character in *Kim

Possible*, and while his representation as backup for Kim in this one episode may provide

viewers with an alternative way of conceiving of disability outside of hegemonic discourse, his

exclusion from the narrative proper means that disabled characters are still granted marginal

status within the show (and disability is thus still marginalized) no matter how positively Felix is

represented. This is furthered by the fact that the only time a disabled character appears in the

series it is in a "special" episode designed to educate non-disabled viewers on the realities of

disability.

Much in the same way that giving positive representation to Felix in *Kim Possible* does not necessarily challenge the marginalization of people with disabilities within dominant U.S. culture, giving representation to girls of color in *Kim Possible*, *Dark Angel* and B*uffy the Vampire Slayer* also fails to counter the "minority" status accorded to those girls within that same culture. A great deal has already been written about the troubling racial politics of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which, for all its intent to provide audiences with a "progressive" view of girlhood, alternates between an entire absence of racial difference among its major characters and the perpetuation of racial and ethnic stereotypes whenever characters of color do appear (mostly in minor roles). This becomes most evident in the portrayal of the vampire slayers other than Buffy who occasionally turn up in selected storylines, the majority of whom are represented as girls of color.

Kendra, the first Slayer called after Buffy's death at the end of season one, is the first additional Slayer represented within the show's narrative, but she is also the first girl of color to appear in the series in a featured role. In contrast to Buffy, she is portrayed as inflexible and insular in her thinking, rigidly adhering to the rules of the Watcher's Council, whereas Buffy thinks for herself and adapts her actions to each individual situation. Kendra thus functions on a thematic level as an unfavorable point of comparison to Buffy, emphasizing Buffy's status as the superior vampire slayer through her less sympathetic representation, but also through her coding as less competent, signified most clearly through the fact that while Buffy survives apparent death and lives to fight another day, Kendra is killed half way through season two when she proves unable to defend herself during a surprise attack. As Lynne Edwards notes, Kendra's function as Buffy's narrative Other takes on additional connotations given her depiction as

African-American, reinforcing hegemonic constructions of racial difference both through her function as the racial Other against whom Buffy's subjectivity is defined and through the ways in which her portrayal recalls the cultural stereotype of the tragic mulatta, "the 'ultimate' other (*sic*) who does not belong in either the black community from which she comes or the white society to which she aspires," and whose primary symbolic function in U.S. popular culture has been to affirm the privileged status of whiteness (88).

Unfortunately, Kendra's portrayal also sets up a representational pattern that carries through the rest of the series, in which the only time girls of color appear in featured roles it is either as demons who Buffy vanquishes or other vampire slayers who fail to measure up to Buffy in one way or another. Even more problematic, a large number of these portrayals reinforce negative racial and ethnic stereotypes, as, for example, the character of Chao-Ahn, one of the potential vampire slayers Buffy trains in season seven, who is depicted as Chinese, and whose inability to speak or comprehend English becomes a running joke throughout the season. Ultimately, then, while the decision to depict the majority of the other Slayers who appear in the series as girls of color may have been intended to extend girl power to girls of color within the diegetic world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it actually has the opposite effect, since girls of color are consistently represented as less empowered than white girls, and female characters of color are only written into the narrative to serve as negative points of contrast to the show's white protagonist.

Representations of characters of color in *Kim Possible* are equally problematic, as they too tend to reassert negative cultural stereotypes rather than challenge dominant constructions of racial difference. The villains Señior Senior Sr. and Señior Senior Jr., for example, are caricatures of Latino men, while Yori, a Japanese kung-fu expert who aids Kim and Ron in the

episodes "Exchange" and "Big Brother," embodies one-dimensional Western stereotypes of the "exotic" Asian girl whilst simultaneously being relegated to the role of Kim's less accomplished sidekick. Meanwhile, Kim's best friend Monique, who is African-American, does not even get to assume the sidekick role, but instead is reduced to an even more marginalized position within the series, appearing only sporadically to engage in "girl" bonding activities with Kim in single scenes that are no way central to the narratives of the episodes in which they occur. Worse, when Monique finally does get a chance to take a more active role in the narrative in season four, she does so, not by aiding Kim in fighting crime, but rather by designing Kim's superhero costume. In this way, in *Kim Possible*, girls of color are only represented as helpmeets to the white protagonist. They never get to exercise girl power in their own right, and—equally problematic—their relegation to minor roles within the series reinforces the marginalization of girls of color within U.S. society more generally by affirming their "minority" status.

Given the prevailing assumption in both the U.S. film and television industries that texts with white protagonists have universal appeal, while texts with protagonists of color only appeal to audiences from the specific demographic group that that protagonist represents, *Dark Angel* is somewhat unusual among U.S. television series—as well as mass media girl power texts—in that it features a girl of color in the central narrative role, although, as previously mentioned, Max's racial/ethnic difference is only ever hinted at within the text. This allows the series to simultaneously give (the appearance of) representation to racial/ethnic difference and erase that difference by precluding any examination of it within the narrative proper. Indeed, while the series boasts a remarkably diverse cast that encompasses multiple recurring characters from several racial and ethnic groups, issues of race/ethnicity are never explicitly addressed within the narrative, and the racial differences among its characters is presented more as an issue of

individual style or attitude than a marker of identity that carries political implications. In this way, *Dark Angel* enacts the representational strategy discussed by Sarah Banet-Weiser in the essay "What's Your Flava?: Race and Postfeminism in Media Culture," in which she argues that girl power texts, in positioning themselves as part of a post-race and post-feminist cultural moment, often reduce racial difference to "just a flava, a street style, an individual characteristic, and a commercial product" (202). This ultimately allows the series to depict racial difference while simultaneously denying that it has any meaning or consequence within U.S. society, thereby circumscribing whatever ideological effects the representation of racial difference as something other than a signifier of Otherness might carry by denying that racial identity has an ideological dimension to it.

This is also true of the representation of lesbian identity within the series. Both *Dark Angel* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* were among a wave of network television series in the U.S. at the turn of the millennium that featured recurring gay or lesbian characters, and both series received praise for their positive representations of lesbian identity and lesbian relationships. However, no matter how much either show appears to affirm same-sex desire, lesbian identity is still marginalized within these texts. Original Cindy, Max's best friend in *Dark Angel*, is as confident and assertive as Max, and although she does not possess any of the superpowers that Max does, she too models girl power within the series. Her representation as an empowered young woman extends to her sexuality, encompassing her comfort level both in talking about sex and expressing her desires, as well as the openness with which she asserts her identification as lesbian. At the same time, because she is surrounded by people within the diegetic world of the series who are nothing but accepting of her relationships with (and her desire for) other women, the series manages to avoid the pathologizing of same-sex desire and the portrayals of lesbian

girls as troubled and/or tragic that dominate mainstream popular culture texts.

No matter how much her empowerment is tied to her representation as "out and proud," though, lesbian identity is presented largely in terms of attitude within the text, and not in terms of actual sexual desires or practices. In this sense, it becomes just another "flava" of identity that, much like Cindy's depiction as African-American, explains away her toughness while simultaneously reducing both race and sexuality from categories of identity to expressions of individual style. Moreover, because Cindy articulates same-sex desire, but is only once over the course of the entire series depicted engaging in so much as a kiss on screen, her portrayal as a lesbian girl is mitigated by the fact that displays of her sexuality are kept largely hidden from audiences, a restriction that does not apply to the show's heterosexual protagonist or its other heterosexual characters. In this way, much as it does with depictions of racial/ethnic difference, *Dark Angel* manages to represent lesbian identity without actually giving it representation, effectively erasing that identity in ways that reinforce the marginalization of lesbian girls/women within U.S. culture rather than countering it.

This is also true of the depiction of Willow in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Willow engages in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships over the course of the series, a representation that might argue for readings of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as endorsing a more fluid conception of sexuality than that upheld by the majority of mainstream popular culture texts (at least where Willow's character is concerned). However, if the series departs from dominant views of sexuality as univocal and limited to only one side of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, it still reproduces the different—and oppositional—cultural values attached to heterosexual and homosexual desire within hegemonic U.S. culture. Whereas Willow's relationship with Oz is the subject of much conversation between Willow and her friends, she initially keeps her

relationship with Tara a secret, and even after it becomes public knowledge, she is still reticent

when it comes to talking about it. The same is true of her relationship with Kennedy, the woman

she becomes involved with after Tara's death. Indeed, Willow becomes the subject of frequent

teasing during season seven for the fact that she and Kennedy only engage in surreptitious

displays of affection. In this way, although the series does include love scenes between both

Willow and Tara and Willow and Kennedy, that she is depicted acting on her desire, and that

lesbian desire is given direct representation within the text, still doesn't mean that the series is

unqualified in its affirmation of that desire. Rather, Willow's frequent insistence that her

relationship with Tara is "private," as well as her attempts to conduct her relationships with both

Tara and Kennedy outside of public view, reinforce the marginal nature of same-sex

relationships in dominant U.S. culture by investing Willow's relationships with other women

with connotations of something that should be kept secret or hidden away.

Ultimately, then, while girl power texts featuring warrior girls purport to provide

audiences with new ways of thinking about and representing girlhood, in practice their depictions

of girls are structured by hegemonic understandings of adolescent femininity far more than they

provide alternative constructions of what it is or what it means to be a teenage girl. In portraying

adolescent girls as the protectors of their communities, warrior girl texts take representatives of

the two demographic groups believed to be the most vulnerable and powerless within U.S.

society—women and children—and represent them as the most powerful figures within their

diegetic worlds. However, the price that these characters pay for exercising power, and the

unhappiness that access to power brings them, communicate highly ambivalent messages about

adolescent female empowerment. At the same time, the representation of the protagonists in the

majority of these texts as white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, and feminine-identified

limits the exercise of girl power to only a small number of girls from culturally privileged identity categories, thereby suggesting that if these texts see the subversion of hegemonic femininity as a key strategy for empowering girls, they do not consider the subversion of hegemonic constructions of race/ethnicity, sexuality, class or bodily norms to be a part of this project.

Thus, while warrior girl texts may subvert hegemonic representations of adolescent girls in terms of how they express their gender—at least up to a point—these texts in no way subvert dominant cultural attitudes towards sexual difference, racial/ethnic difference, class difference or differences in body type, ability or sexual orientation. Indeed, the erasure of difference within these texts and their perpetuation of negative values inscribed onto marginalized identity categories fail to provide an alternative to a discursive system that Others girls based on their intersectional identities, and not just their gendered identities. It also suggests, though, that representing girls engaging in narrative roles that are different from past popular culture representations of female teens does not necessarily mean that warrior girl texts challenge dominant cultural attitudes towards girls, nor that new representational practices are in and of themselves subversive. This is also true of mass media texts featuring the other two girl power variants on the figure of the tough girl, the outsider girl and the girl avenger, which, as the next chapter will demonstrate, likewise represent girls differently, but not necessarily more positively, or in a way that radically departs from hegemonic understandings of adolescence, gender or power.

CHAPTER IV

GIRL AVENGERS AND OUTSIDER GIRLS:
EMPOWERMENT, RESISTANCE AND REFUSAL IN GIRL POWER TEXTS

One of the central arguments in Michel Foucault's writings on discourse-knowledge-power, and one of the more radical proposals to come out of his work in that area, is the idea that power is not only exercised through force. It follows, then, that resistance to power also need not only or necessarily take the form of armed conflict, although the term "resistance" tends to most readily conjure up acts of protest that seek to challenge existing distributions of power through displays of violence. Individual empowerment as it is imagined in U.S. popular culture also tends to involve shows of force, particularly in narratives in which that empowerment is tied to resistance to exploitation or oppression based on gender. In such narratives empowerment is most often conceived of in terms of women fighting back against their oppressors—sometimes through legal battles, but more often through retaliatory acts of aggression. In the wake of the Women's Liberation movement, there have been a number of films and television programs that either take female empowerment as one of their central narrative concerns or that feature characters depicted as empowered women, a large percentage of which represent female empowerment in terms of women taking up arms, from Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* (1983) to Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill, Vols. 1 and 2* (2003, 2004). This is, in fact, the primary way in which the figure of the tough girl has become synonymous with girl power in the mass media in recent years.

Violence is not the only manner in which girl power has found representation in popular culture texts, however, nor is girls' power only ever imagined in terms of acts of force in girl power narratives. This chapter examines two types of girl power texts, those featuring girl

avengers and those featuring outsider girls, in which girls' empowerment is situated in their resistance to victimization (girl avenger narratives) or their resistance to interpellation into girlhood norms (outsider girl narratives). In both types of texts, resistance takes the form of acts of refusal rather than acts of combat, as it does in warrior girl texts. Violence figures as a manifestation of girls' power in girl avenger stories to be sure, as these stories revolve around girls punishing those who have abused them or otherwise sought to strip them of their personhood. The difference is that in girl avenger narratives the emphasis is on empowerment through the refusal of victimization rather than empowerment through force, and violence figures in these narratives as the means though which that refusal is accomplished rather than as a means of empowerment in and of itself. This does not make the mobilization of violence as a strategy for female empowerment any less problematic in girl avenger narratives than in warrior girl narratives, but it does mean that the terms in which empowerment manifests shift slightly, with the result that girl power becomes the ability to fight back rather than merely the ability to fight.

Conversely, the fact that violence does not figure as a method of girls' empowerment in outsider girl narratives does not necessarily make their conceptualization of power or empowerment any more progressive. Protagonists in outsider girl narratives exercise girl power through their refusal to look or act like other girls. If their resistance to social, peer and/or parental pressure to fit in grants them empowerment, however, it also places them in an oppositional—and often quite contentious—relationship to those girls whose enactment of girlhood they resist conforming to. As a result, outsider girl narratives are rife with hostility and divisiveness between girls. Outsider girls are teased, bullied and shunned for not fitting in, but they also mock (and despise) girls who do fit in. This renders the exercise of girl power in outsider girl texts problematic in a different way, in that it makes girls' power contingent upon

their alienation from or their perceived superiority over other girls. Ultimately, then, while girl avenger and outsider girl texts shift the exercise of girl power from acts of force to acts of refusal, they stop short of refusing hegemonic understandings of power. The result, as this chapter will demonstrate, is that while these texts situate girls' empowerment in their rejection of either the victimization of girls within patriarchal society or the models of girlhood normalized within patriarchal culture, the texts themselves reinforce patriarchal values by reproducing an ideological schema in which power is conceived of solely in terms of dominance and hierarchy.

Girl Avengers

The girl avenger is another girl power variant on the discursive figure of the tough girl. Representationally, she shares many similarities with the warrior girl, including physical and emotional strength, skill in fighting, and a "tough" attitude through which she asserts personhood. While she does not assume masculine gender traits as the warrior girl does, the girl avenger nonetheless does present herself and behave in a manner that is decidedly "unladylike" by U.S. cultural standards, and thus that similarly falls outside of models of hegemonic femininity, albeit in different ways. At the same time, while the warrior girl takes up arms in order to protect her community, the girl avenger is motivated by revenge, and seeks to punish acts of violence either committed against herself or against others whose mistreatment she has witnessed. In this way, the girl avenger is linked to the narrative tradition of female revenge narratives such as *I Spit On Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1978), *The Burning Bed* (Robert Greenwald, 1984) and *Enough* (Michael Apted, 2002), in all of which adult women who have been made the victims of violence or abuse enact vengeance against their tormentors.

In many respects a uniquely post-Second Wave genre, female revenge narratives have

been read as both a product of and a reaction against the infiltration of feminist discourse into mainstream U.S. culture.   These stories of victimized women seeking violent retribution against men who have violated their bodies and sought to strip them of their personhood appear to gesture towards feminist critiques of violence against women and the social institutions through which such violence is either sanctioned or ignored. At the same time, however, they also invoke patriarchal fears of male victimization at the hands of sadistic women fuelled by quasi-feminist rage, a common anti-feminist stereotype that has pervaded U.S. popular culture texts in the last forty years. Female revenge narratives have also posed a particular challenge for feminist media scholars. Their stories of women moving from victimization to empowerment have been read by some feminist critics as evidence of their political alignment with feminist values (though not necessarily feminism itself). Carol Clover, for example, argues that rape-revenge films, for all their exploitative displays of sexual violence, in some cases provide "detailed and trenchant analysis of quotidian patriarchy" that, "in deference to . . . feminist discussion[s] of rape" portray it as "a social and political act" predicated upon "the power dynamic between men and women that makes rape happen in the first place" (144). As tempting as it might be to read female revenge narratives in this way, however, their potential as vehicles for advocating on behalf of feminist political goals is significantly undermined by the fact that they reinforce a patriarchal understanding of gendered power dynamics in which men and women can only ever be locked in struggles for dominance, and in which only one sex can hold power within U.S. society—and, at that, only at the expense of the disempowerment of the other.

This view of power dynamics, in which men (either individually or collectively) are represented as the sole cause of women's oppression—rather than the values and the institutional structures of patriarchal society—and in which women's empowerment is additionally predicated

upon men's disempowerment, also informs a large number of female avenger texts featuring

adolescent girls. While protagonists of female revenge narratives in U.S. popular culture have

traditionally been adult women, since the mid-1990s there have been a number of popular films

centered around quests for vengeance on the part of teenage girls who transform themselves into

vigilantes after surviving violent acts. Released against the backdrop of girl problem discourse

with its emphasis on the vulnerability of teenage girls to both physical and sexual violence,

empowerment for girls in these texts is explicitly positioned as the power to fight back against

victimization. However, these texts do not subvert the division of power along the axis of gender

and/or age in patriarchal society so much as they invert the terms through which girls are made

to assume the roles of victims while boys and men assume the roles of their victimizers. They

also do not critique the social values and institutions through which girls are relegated to

subordinate status in patriarchal culture, and thus become subject to both violence and

oppression in the first place; instead they simply seek to punish violence against girls while

taking it as a matter of course. As such, while girl avenger narratives may articulate girl power,

girl power as it is envisioned by these texts is less representative of feminist approaches to power

relations than it is simply a version of patriarchal models of power in drag, with adolescent girls

exercising power that is both conceived of and enacted in decidedly patriarchal terms.

The figure of the girl avenger appears in a few films that predate the infiltration of girl

power discourse into U.S. popular culture, including *The Legend of Billie Jean* and *The*

Professional. However, it is in three films released consecutively between 2005 and 2007, *Hard*

Candy (David Slade, 2005), *John Tucker Must Die* (Betty Thomas, 2006) and *Teeth* (Mitchell

Lichtenstein, 2007), that representations of the girl avenger intersect with representations of girl

power. Although these films all tell very different stories, fit into different genres, and have

significantly different tones, they are united in their depiction of tough girls fighting back against victimization, as well as their celebration of female empowerment through acts of retribution. All three draw on girl power discourse to position this empowerment as a manifestation of girl power, but in doing so all three also tie girl power specifically to adolescent girls exercising dominance over adolescent boys and/or adult men, so that girls' empowerment in these texts ultimately takes the dubious form of girls' transformation from victims into victimizers.

Hard Candy tells the story of Hayley Stark, a fourteen year old girl who has been communicating via instant messaging with a thirty-two year old photographer named Jeff. Hayley initially encounters Jeff in an Internet chat room, and in the opening scene of the film she agrees to meet him in person for a "date." Hayley is initially portrayed during this meeting as shy but enthusiastic, chatting excitedly to Jeff about music and her love of chocolate while seemingly unaware of the flirtatious undercurrents to their conversation. This codes her as naïve, and thus vulnerable to exploitation by Jeff, who, though affable and non-aggressive in his mannerisms, is explicitly portrayed as a sexual predator. For approximately the first third of the film, it appears as if *Hard Candy* is going to be a cautionary tale about a young girl who is taken advantage of by an adult man who uses the Internet to seek out victims to sexually abuse. In this way, it invokes cultural anxieties about pedophilia and the dangers of children's unsupervised Internet use that have dominated the U.S. news media in recent years, most notably through television programs like the *Dateline NBC* spin-off series *To Catch a Predator*, in which adult pedophiles are caught on camera soliciting sex from minors.

However, after Hayley accompanies Jeff back to his apartment there is an abrupt change in the direction of the plot, as well as a reversal in the power dynamic between them, such that the film instead becomes the story of a teenage girl terrorizing her would-be victimizer.

Explicitly turning the methods through which girls are routinely sexually exploited back on Jeff, Hayley refuses a drink that he has mixed for her, citing rape-prevention literature that advises girls not to accept drinks that they have not poured themselves because of the danger of being slipped a date rape drug. In an ironic twist, Hayley then proceeds to drug the drink she mixes for herself before offering it to Jeff, thereby rendering him unconscious when he ingests it. He wakes to find himself physically restrained, and to find Hayley standing over him, actualizing the hypothetical scenario of victimization she alludes to in refusing the drink he offers her, but with Jeff, rather than herself, as the unwitting victim. The rest of the film follows Hayley's efforts to get Jeff to admit to the rape and murder of another teenage girl who has recently gone missing, to which end she tortures him both physically and psychologically, at one point tricking him into thinking that she has castrated him. The film ends with Hayley forcing Jeff to commit suicide in exchange for her not turning him in to the authorities, although as her last act of torture she revokes this promise as he is dying.

As the film progresses, it becomes clear that Hayley has deliberately orchestrated her meeting with Jeff in order to exact punishment for the missing girl's death, and that she has put a lot of thought and effort into executing her plan to get him to confess to his crimes and to take his own life as retribution for them. However, the film intentionally leaves it unclear whether Hayley is seeking to avenge the girl's death because she knew her personally, or if instead she is simply seeking to exact vengeance because she has knowledge that Jeff preys upon young girls (it is established during the course of her interrogation of Jeff that the missing girl is not his first victim). At the same time, when Jeff finally confesses to raping the girl, he gives Hayley the name of an accomplice who he claims is responsible for her murder. Hayley responds by calmly informing Jeff that she has already killed his accomplice, and that it was the accomplice who

gave her Jeff's name before he died. In this way, the film also suggests that this is not the first time that Hayley has taken justice into her own hands in order to avenge the sexual exploitation of another.

While *Hard Candy* employs the narrative and visual conventions of the psychological thriller, in representing an unsuspecting man being imprisoned and tortured by a ruthless antagonist, the film also invokes generic elements of torture porn, a contemporary sub-genre of horror films exemplified by the *Saw* and *Hostel* franchises, in which psychopathic villains entrap and kill innocent victims after subjecting them to particularly sadistic forms of physical and psychological torment. While both men and women serve as victims in torture porn films, much as in traditional horror films the violence enacted against women is overtly sexualized in ways that symbolically invoke rape whilst simultaneously eroticizing violence against women, a representational trope that only rarely extends to the violence enacted against male victims. Because *Hard Candy* seems to deliberately reference the torture porn genre in its depiction of the actions Hayley takes to make Jeff suffer for his sexual violation of young girls, the film might be read as making an additional statement about the sexual exploitation of girls in U.S. culture above and beyond its narrative concern with girls' sexual abuse, in that the film appears to tie Hayley's empowerment specifically to her reversal of the depiction of female characters as victims of (sexualized) male violence in torture porn films. However, as in the case of *Hostel II*, the framing of female empowerment in terms of female characters assuming the roles of initiators, rather than victims, of violence is problematic at best, as advocating violence as a form of empowerment, particularly when empowerment is equated with domination and humiliation, can hardly be considered a subversive—or progressive—ideological stance.

Girl power is imbricated in the film's seeming endorsement of retaliatory acts as a form

of female empowerment through Hayley's invocation of girl power discourse to taunt Jeff with the power that she wields over him as she is torturing him, as well as the film's employment of representational tropes associated with girl power narratives featuring tough girl protagonists in its depiction of Hayley. There is a marked difference in Hayley's appearance and behavior after she has succeeded in overpowering Jeff that functions on a visual level to signal the thematic connections in the film between toughness and female empowerment. For example, when Hayley is posing as a potential victim in order to manipulate Jeff, she wears a short skirt and a red hooded sweatshirt that evokes allusions to the fairytale "Little Red Riding Hood," another story in which an adolescent girl is stalked and menaced by a seemingly harmless predator, although with a much different outcome. Hayley is shy in her demeanor, declining to make eye contact with Jeff, and she appears both deferential and submissive in her body language, hunching her shoulders when she stands and casting her gaze towards the floor. In contrast, after she has succeeded in her plan to disarm Jeff, she changes into jeans and a tank top. She becomes much more assertive and "hardened" in her demeanor, looking Jeff directly in the eyes when she interrogates him. The manner in which she carries her body also changes to project confidence and competence, while her manner of speech similarly shifts from soft-spoken to aggressive, with a sarcasm—and a proclivity for cursing—that were absent from her self-presentation at the beginning of the film.

While the toughness displayed by Hayley in planning and executing her punishment of Jeff plays against cultural expectations of what teenage girls are like and what they are capable of, the film explicitly draws attention to cultural associations of girlhood with victimhood through the ways in which Hayley plays to Jeff's assumptions concerning girls' weakness and vulnerability in order to outsmart him. She references this in the dialogue of the film when she

points out to Jeff that it is not only adolescent girls who should be wary of accepting drinks that they have not mixed themselves, as well as in her sardonic response to his plea that "a teenage girl shouldn't do this" with the line "I've seen your idea of what a teenage girl should do." If adolescent female empowerment in this film comes in the form of girls refusing victimization by refusing to conform to societal expectations of what teenage girls should do, however, it is debatable whether *Hard Candy* furthers or impedes the assumed political project of girl power media texts in challenging hegemonic cultural attitudes towards girls. This is largely because while the film certainly shifts traditional representations of adolescent femininity in ways that portray girls in a different light than earlier media texts, this does not necessarily mean that the film represents girls more positively or that it encourages viewers to see them in a positive light.

This is also the case with *Teeth*, which, like *Hard Candy*, subverts horror film conventions in order to tell a story of adolescent female empowerment, but with the result that female empowerment ends up being represented as a source of horror in the film and not necessarily a cause for celebration. *Teeth* is the story of Dawn O'Keefe, a reserved, sheltered high school student from a conservative Christian family who discovers, much to her confusion and dismay, that she possesses the *vagina dentata*, the "devouring female genitals" which pervade the myths and legends of many patriarchal cultures, and that Barbara Creed argues serves as an inscription point for male anxieties concerning both symbolic and genital castration (106). Dawn first becomes aware of her physical anomaly when her boyfriend, frustrated with her strict adherence to the abstinence pledge they have both taken, attempts to force her to have sex with him. In response to this physical coercion, her vagina develops teeth and severs his penis during intercourse, leading to his death. As the film progresses, Dawn is taken advantage of sexually by her stepbrother, who repeatedly makes unwanted advances towards her, a male

gynecologist who molests her during a pelvic exam, and a male classmate who pretends to have romantic feelings towards her in order to get her to sleep with him so that he can win a bet with his friends. In each instance, the *vagina dentata* invests Dawn with the power to protect herself from—and ultimately to fight back against—sexual exploitation.   The film ends with Dawn, having become the primary suspect in her boyfriend's death, deciding to run away. In the final scene she makes the decision to intentionally deploy her *vagina dentata* as a weapon against a man who has given her a ride out of town, and who demands sexual favors in exchange for helping her.

In this way, rather than being represented as a mark of abjection, as in most of the art and legends of patriarchal cultures, the *vagina dentata* is represented in *Teeth* as a mark of empowerment. It facilitates Dawn's transformation from powerless victim to female avenger who, like Hayley, turns male sexual violence back on itself in order to punish the attempted violation of her body—and through that violation, the erasure of her personhood. At the same time, in presenting audiences with a tongue-in-cheek horror narrative in which the "monster" is a teenage girl with an actual *vagina dentata*, the film also appears to be self-consciously parodying the horror film conventions through which, as Creed among others has argued, female sexuality is routinely represented as monstrous in U.S. popular culture. In this sense, the film also appears to owe a narrative debt to Fred M. Wilcox's 1956 film *Forbidden Planet*, with its "monster from the id," although *Teeth* attempts to critically comment on patriarchal culture's fears of female sexual desire and not just to literalize them as *Forbidden Planet* does. As Creed notes, the trope of the *vagina dentata* recurs in popular horror films, where it is often symbolically invoked through images of "flesh . . . cut, bodies violated, [and] limbs torn asunder" by "devouring creature[s]"—from the shark in *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) to the alien entity in *Alien* (107).

In literalizing this representational convention, *Teeth* not only draws audiences' attention to it, but also to the cultural values that underpin it. This is most evident in the frequent references in the film to both mythological and popular representations of the *vagina dentata*, as well as the film's representation of Dawn's stepbrother, whose simultaneous fascination with and repulsion by the female genitals pointedly—and self-reflexively—manifests the twin desires and dread provoked by the female body within the patriarchal imaginary.

Along these same lines, the positioning of the female body as a site of sexual desire—and thus of sin—in right-wing religious discourse is also critiqued in the film. That Dawn does not realize that she possess a toothed vagina until her boyfriend sexually assaults her, nor that having a toothed vagina makes her unique, is attributed in the narrative to her lack of knowledge about her body, which the film explicitly ties to the abstinence-only sex education curriculum employed at her high school. In a scene at the beginning of the film, the students in Dawn's sex education class question why the line-drawing of the vagina in their textbook is obscured by a large sticker, while the illustration of the penis is not. Their male teacher, who cannot bring himself to even say the word vagina out loud, replies that the state school board has "rightly" ordered illustrations of female genitals be censored for reasons "that should be obvious." In a later scene, after her unintentional castration of her boyfriend, Dawn is shown desperately trying to remove the sticker so that she can compare her vagina to the one in the picture. In this way, the film not only ties Dawn's empowerment to her ability to claim control over her body, but it also ties her disempowerment to the shame with which the female body is invested in both cultural and religious discourses within the U.S.

It is worth noting within this context that although *Teeth* has become something of a cult hit, enjoying popularity in the home video market, the film had difficulty in securing a distributor

after its premiere at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, in large part because U.S. distributors

feared that the nature of the film's subject matter made it unsuitable for general release, and thus

a financial risk. It was finally picked up by the Weinstein Company, and given a limited, unrated

theatrical release, although it was banned in cinemas owned by the AMC theater chain, which

"deemed the movie too offensive to show" (Tucker 48). It is unclear whether it was the

depictions of rape that upset the sensibilities of the theatre chain, or if instead it was the film's

graphic depictions of genital castration, which include not only images of full-frontal male

nudity (long a taboo in U.S. cinema) but also images of the male body exhibiting the "bleeding

wound" central to psychoanalytic accounts of both castration anxiety and the positioning of

female sexual difference as the locus of that anxiety. It is interesting, though, that in the same

year in which *The Hills Have Eyes II* (Martin Weisz), *Grindhouse* (Robert Rodriguez and

Quentin Tarantino), *Disturbia* (D.J. Caruso), *Saw IV* (Darren Lynn Bouseman), and *Eastern

Promises* (David Cronenberg) all saw widespread theatrical release despite their repeated and

graphic depictions of physical and/or sexual violence—not to mention *Hostel II*, which is in

many ways an extended representation of violence against women—the Weinstein Company was

reluctant to submit *Teeth* to the MPAA for ratings review out of fear that it would be saddled

with an NC-17 rating. In this light, the film's recurring cutaway shots to Dawn's boyfriend's

severed penis laying abandoned on the floor of the cave in which he died, in which the camera

rapidly zooms in for a close-up while ominous music plays on the soundtrack, take on an

additional layer of irony. These shots are meant to be humorous, and they intentionally

exaggerate the horrors inspired by images of castration in patriarchal culture for both comedic

and critical ends, but they also point to the very same cultural value system that rendered this

image so much more "offensive" in the eyes of the AMC theatre chain than the scenes of women

being brutally raped, mutilated and tortured in *Hostel II*, which was cleared for exhibition in AMC theatres.

If *Teeth* functions as commentary on the cultural values that render representations of rape acceptable content for mainstream films but not representations of castration, however, the film stops short of challenging those values. [1] It may poke fun at the positioning of the vagina within the patriarchal symbolic as both a reminder and an instrument of castration, but it still represents Dawn as a castration threat, even if it does so in a humorous manner. Likewise, while the film satirizes the representation of female sexuality as monstrous in mainstream horror films, it does not provide an alternative to such representations. Thus, although both the *New York Times* and *Entertainment Weekly* labeled *Teeth* a feminist horror film in their reviews of the movie, in failing to provide an alternative to the representational practices it satirizes, the film arguably does not provide feminist commentary on sexual violence or a feminist model of female empowerment. Both rape and castration are invested with specific power dynamics in patriarchal culture; rape figures as an assertion of power over the victim (whether female or male), while castration anxiety is rooted in fears of the loss of power granted to men under patriarchy by virtue of their sexual difference from women. In situating Dawn's empowerment in her ability to fight back against sexual victimization, *Teeth* may indeed critique the deployment of sex as an instrument of power in patriarchal culture. Ultimately, however, since girl power in the film is only conceived of as the power to punish men through sex (as Dawn retaliates against her sexual exploitation exclusively during sexual acts), it entirely fails to provide an alternative discursive framework in which sex is reimagined outside of patriarchal terms as something other than an act of dominance.

The same is true of *John Tucker Must Die*, although in a slightly different way. Unlike

Hard Candy and *Teeth*, *John Tucker Must Die* does not take as its subject matter sexual violence against teenage girls. However, the film does follow in a long tradition of "battle of the sexes" narratives in Western culture that present heterosexual relationships as a war between women and men, and thus, in which heterosexual romance is conceived of primarily as a struggle for dominance. In this film, too, girl power is positioned as the power of adolescent girls to punish male characters for their sexual transgressions—in this case infidelity—with the result that, in this film too, acts of female vengeance are equated with acts of female empowerment. At the same time, as in both *Hard Candy* and *Teeth*, in *John Tucker Must Die* (hetero)sex becomes the instrument of retaliation for the films quartet of girl avengers, who seek retribution against the title character for cheating on them by attempting to subject him to public acts of humiliation.

The protagonist of *John Tucker Must Die* is Kate, a high school junior who despairs that she is "invisible" since none of her classmates at her new school respond to her overtures of friendship, or really even seem to notice her at all. This changes after she is unwittingly caught in the middle of a fight between Carrie, Heather and Beth, three of the most popular girls in school, who discover that John Tucker, the star of the basketball team, has been dating all of them at the same time unbeknownst to any of them. Angered that he has lied to them and used them all for sex, the girls hatch a plan for revenge that involves getting John to fall in love with Kate so that she can break up with him in front of the entire school, thereby humiliating him in the way that he has humiliated them. To this end, they transform Kate into the most desirable girl among the junior class, coaching her through her seduction of John, while Kate comforts the three of them in the wake of their betrayal by him.

Both their budding camaraderie and their scheme to punish John is complicated, however, when Kate finds herself falling in love with John, who is revealed to have unexpected

depth. This endangers not only her friendship with Carrie, Heather and Beth, but also her

developing romance with John's brother, Scott, who is the only one to notice Kate when she is

still "invisible," and who is therefore positioned within the narrative as the better romantic

partner for her because he is attracted to the person she really is and not the persona she adopts to

catch John's attention. Kate eventually goes through with the girls' plan for revenge, playing a

video of her mocking John and his feelings for her at his birthday party, where it is viewed by the

entire student body. While she is wracked with guilt over her complicity in hurting him, her

public humiliation of John also has the opposite effect of what the girls intended, thus thwarting

their attempt at revenge. Seeing their prank as petty and spiteful, the school rallies around John,

while Kate, Carrie, Heather and Beth are subjected to their own public shaming. The film ends

with John forgiving Kate for manipulating him and apologizing to Carrie, Heather and Beth for

lying to them. Rather than learning the lesson they wanted him to take away from their

manipulation of him, though, in the final scene he is shown resolving to be completely honest

with all the girls that he dates in the future about the fact that he has no intention of being in a

monogamous relationship with any of them.

Because in *John Tucker Must Die* Kate is not directly seeking retribution from John, but

instead only participates in the plan to humiliate him to avenge the wrongs he commits against

Carrie, Heather and Beth, the film actually situates Kate's empowerment (signified by her

transformation from "invisible" to an accepted member of the girls' inner circle) in girls'

friendships and their loyalty to one another rather than in acts of vengeance. In this way, the film

appears to gesture towards girl power discourse by emphasizing female friendships as a source of

empowerment for girls. However, since loyalty to one's friends takes the form of helping those

friends to punish a wayward ex-boyfriend in the film, it also links female bonding to acts of

revenge in ways that make it impossible to separate them, since the entire basis for the friendship between all four girls is their desire to get back at John.   As such, the film does not so much celebrate female friendships as promote the message that, rather than competing for boys' romantic attention, girls should instead band together to terrorize boys. This somewhat undercuts the "empowering" potential of that message, since it suggests that the only options for girls are to be pitted against one another in fights over romantic partners or else to be pitted against boys in struggles for dominance, and that either way girl's empowerment can ultimately only come at the expense of each other or at the expense of boys' disempowerment.

The film's endorsement of girl power is also compromised by its depiction of its four central female characters, none of whom are portrayed in a particularly positive light. *John Tucker Must Die* falls within the genre of the teen comedy, and in its depiction of Carrie, Heather and Beth, the film appears to be attempting to satirize popular cultural stereotypes of adolescent girls. However, in portraying them as one-dimensional caricatures of the over-achiever, the head cheerleader and the social activist (whose primary character trait is not her concern for social causes but rather her sexual promiscuity), the film engages less in critical commentary than in vicious, mean-spirited parody that invokes these stereotypes without ever deconstructing them. In this way, as in the case of *Teeth*, the film pokes fun at hegemonic representational tropes, but does not in any way challenge those tropes or provide an alternative to them. Meanwhile, Kate, though a more fully-developed character, is also not portrayed in a very flattering manner. While John, the ostensible villain of the film, is redeemed when he is shown to have more to his character than what appears on the surface, Kate violates her sense of right and wrong and compromises her moral integrity for peer acceptance, thus proving herself to be a lesser person than she first appears to be. Even more problematic, because all four girls receive a

comeuppance at the end of the film for trying to humiliate John, *John Tucker Must Die* ends up being less a story of female empowerment through revenge (which is problematic enough) than a story of girls being put back in their places after challenging male supremacy.

Along these same lines, because the girls engage in numerous attempts to embarrass John over the course of the film, all of which backfire, *John Tucker Must Die* also ends up representing them as incompetent, thereby recalling the zany but inept protagonists of popular culture texts like *Gidget* and *The Patty Duke Show*. This also does more to reinforce dismissive hegemonic stereotypes of adolescent girls than to counter them. Even the plots the girls hatch to embarrass John recall the antics of Gidget and Patty, although within a definite twenty-first century twist. For instance, the girls first submit John's picture for use in an informational campaign concerning the transmission of genital herpes, thinking that this will lead to him becoming a sexual pariah if the other girls at school believe he has an STI. However, instead John receives approval for advocating safe sex practices, and ends up winning a public service award. The girls then slip him estrogen pills hoping that if the pills cause him to experience violent mood swings he will get kicked off the basketball team, only to have the entire team praise him for his bravery in openly expressing his emotions when he breaks down crying in the middle of a game and complains about all the pressure the coach is putting on him. Finally, Carrie, Heather and Beth persuade Kate to use the promise of sex to convince John to wait for her wearing a pair of women's panties, and then arrange it so that he is caught wearing them in front of the entire team. Rather than humiliating him or (in a narrative turn that carries explicitly homophobic overtones) calling his sexual orientation into question, this touches off a trend among the boys at school, who all start wearing women's underwear in emulation of John.

As a result, the girls not only prove themselves ineffectual when it comes to taking

revenge upon John, but John is proven to be far more quick-witted and capable than they are, since he is able to thwart their attempts at retribution without any real effort on his part. At the same time, because all of the pranks that the girls play on him carry overt connotations of emasculation, there is a way in which they reinforce the coding of the figure of the female avenger within U.S. popular culture as a castration threat, much in the way that *Hard Candy* and *Teeth* do. However, if all three films fail to counter patriarchal associations of female empowerment with male disempowerment, *John Tucker Must Die* fails to grant adolescent girls even this highly problematic form of empowerment, since all of the attempts at retribution undertaken by the girls in the film are unsuccessful. Ultimately, then, while their representation as castration threats may undermine the film's girl power message, the fact that they are represented as *incompetent* castration threats makes it very difficult to argue that there is anything even remotely subversive about the film or the cultural view of teenage girls that it promotes.

Within this context, it is worth noting that Kate's use of the promise of sex to attempt to sexually humiliate John in *John Tucker Must Die* follows a strategy for adolescent female empowerment enacted in all three of the films discussed in this section, in which girl power is conceived of as the power to turn male heterosexual desire back on itself in order to punish boys/men for their sexual uses or abuses of them. Each film contains specific scenes in which their protagonists deliberately invite sexual advances in order to entrap the men they are taking revenge upon. In *Hard Candy*, when Hayley is trying to entice Jeff into asking her to go home with him, she leaves the bathroom door ajar as she changes her shirt so that Jeff can catch a glimpse of her partially unclothed. In *Teeth*, after Dawn decides to intentionally use her *vagina dentata* to punish the man who demands sexual favors from her at the end of the film, she coyly

turns to him and smiles in a seductive manner. In *John Tucker Must Die*, Kate convinces John to wear female underwear by posing for him in revealing lingerie via web cam, teasing him with the erotic display of her body, while refusing to come to him in person until he agrees to her request. Significantly, these scenes follow a tactic common to postfeminist media texts like *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City*, in which soliciting the male gaze in order to turn it back on itself is represented as an assertion of female power.

Addressing the sexual objectification of women in patriarchal culture, as well as the visual objectification of women at the center of the "images of women" school of feminist cinema scholarship inspired by Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, these representations seek to challenge the power exercised through the act of looking within hegemonic culture by reversing the power dynamics between subject and object of the gaze. To this end, they trade on postfeminist discourses that equate women's empowerment with a calculating sexuality that is "overtly and publicly" deployed in service of manipulating the men around them (Levy 26). The problem with embracing this female "play with the heterosexual male gaze"—what Sarah Projansky terms "to-be-looked-at postfeminism" (80)—as a form of girl power in *Hard Candy*, *Teeth* and *John Tucker Must Die* is that it still reproduces an ideological schema in which the only power girls can exercise is through their sexuality. Moreover, while such representations depict girls as powerful in their objectification rather than powerless, they still foreground their cultural positioning as objects to be looked at rather than subjects who see.

This somewhat undermines the ostensible intent of these films to critique adolescent girls' sexual objectification and sexual exploitation in popular culture texts—or in U.S. society more generally—since the only method of empowerment they endorse is girls' willingly embracing their objectification in order to use it to their advantage. Additionally, much in the

same way that situating girls' empowerment in acts of vengeance against boys/men inverts—

rather than subverts—the division of power along the axis of sexual difference in patriarchal

culture, representations of girls turning the gaze back on itself as a strategy of empowerment still

depend on the deployment of the gaze as an instrument of dominance that is exercised along an

explicitly gendered division between subject and object of the look, and in which the power of

one sex is therefore still contingent upon the disempowerment of the other. Ultimately, then,

while the figure of the girl avenger as she is depicted in *Hard Candy*, *Teeth* and *John Tucker*

Must Die exercises girl power by refusing victimization, the texts themselves are unable to refuse

patriarchal understandings of adolescent femininity or adolescent female power, with the result

that girl power can only be conceived of in these texts in patriarchal terms that ensure the

maintenance, rather than the subversion, of the status quo of gendered power relations within

patriarchal culture.

Outsider Girls

        Popular media texts that feature the outsider girl, another girl power variant on the

representational trope of the tough girl, are also centrally concerned with providing alternatives

to hegemonic representations of adolescent femininity, as well as shifting hegemonic cultural

attitudes towards teenage girls. As in warrior girl narratives and girl avenger narratives, this is

primarily accomplished in outsider girl texts by presenting viewers with representations of

teenage girls who reject adolescent female norms. Outsider girl narratives tend to revolve

around high school culture and the peer interactions between and within high school cliques.

Their protagonists are girls who do not fit in among any social group within their schools or the

towns in which they live, who are labeled "freaks" or "losers," and who generally only have one

or two friends who are similarly shunned by their larger peer community. Sometimes simply excluded and sometimes harassed or bullied, outsider girls fight back against their marginalization, but at the same time they also refuse to conform to hegemonic models of girlhood. While, as discussed in chapter two, the outsider girl has been a recurring character in teen films from the 1980s onwards, in the late 1990s and the early 2000s this discursive figure became a primary inscription point for girl power discourse in the popular television series *Daria* and *Veronica Mars*, whose eponymous protagonists both embody girl power messages of asserting one's personhood, being true to oneself, and talking back against attempts to make one feel inferior, all of which are presented in these shows as markers of adolescent female empowerment.

Although neither Daria's nor Veronica's rejection of adolescent female norms takes the form of rejecting feminine gender identification in these texts, it does involve deviating from the styles of dress and bodily presentation exhibited by the other teenage girls around them, as well as cultivating interests and participating in leisure activities that likewise fall outside of those embraced by the majority of their female peers. This follows the representational pattern of outsider girl texts in U.S. popular culture more generally, in which what makes their protagonists outsiders are their values, attitudes and interests, and not necessarily their gender identification. At the same time, both Daria and Veronica embody traits that mark them as disaffected youth within the significatory lexicon of U.S. popular culture, including cynicism, rebelliousness, a mistrust of authority, and a tendency to mock the conventions and the values of mainstream society. However, neither one is represented as pathological or emotionally damaged in the tradition of juvenile delinquent or girl problem texts. In fact, the *Daria* episode "Esteemsters," in which Daria is forced to enroll in a self-esteem course after a mandatory psychological

evaluation at school flags her as a problem girl, explicitly pokes fun at this representational tradition. Instead, in both shows Daria and Veronica are represented as being empowered by their outsider status, which they embrace, but which is also presented as a deliberate choice on their part rather than an unwanted result of the narrow-mindedness of their peers.

In this way, while girl power is linked to the toughness that Daria and Veronica display in shrugging off ostracism for refusing to comply with normative enactments of girlhood, it is also linked to their conscious assumption of the role of outsider. Whereas the warrior girl protagonists in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dark Angel* and *Kim Possible* all regret their exclusion from the ranks of their peers and long to be "normal" girls, Daria and Veronica have no interest in being included in the activities or the company of their female classmates, and they not only have no desire to be like other girls, but they consciously reject the rituals and practices associated with normative girlhood. As such, while girl power is linked in both *Daria* and *Veronica Mars* to refusals of hegemonic femininity, girl power as it is articulated in both texts ultimately becomes the power to set the terms through which one's identity as a girl is expressed, as well as to demand that one's enactment of that identity be respected regardless of how closely—or not closely—it conforms to cultural expectations.

Daria's eponymous protagonist first appeared as a recurring character on MTV's *Beavis and Butthead*. An animated series directed at teen viewers, it aired on MTV from 1997-2002. It remains one of the most popular original programs developed by the network, and although it never reached much of an audience outside of MTV's key demographic, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Daria* has had an impact on U.S. popular culture far beyond its actual viewership. The series chronicles the experiences of smart, acerbic Daria Morgendorffer as she negotiates life with her workaholic parents, her popular, image-obsessed younger sister, and her shallow, vapid

classmates at Lawndale High School, who Daria, herself not interested in fashion or cheerleading and preferring reading the newspaper to taking part in extracurricular activities, approaches like an ethnographer observing an alien society. The series skewers teen culture, and Daria's outsider status provides the narrative lens through which it is able to sardonically comment on rituals of adolescence such as dating, afterschool jobs, the college application process, and obtaining one's drivers license. However, the focus of *Daria* is less on universal adolescent experiences than girls' experiences of adolescence, with the result that female gender expression is often a central issue in the series and hegemonic constructions of girlhood are often a central point of critique.

For example, the episode "The Lost Girls" involves the editor of a popular teen magazine coming to Lawndale High to spend time with Daria after her English teacher submits an essay that Daria wrote to the magazine's "spend a day with Val contest." The character of Val seems to be based on Jane Pratt, the editor of *Sassy* magazine, which in the 1990s had a reputation as the hip, girl-positive alternative to *Seventeen*. The depiction of the magazine that Val edits also directly references *Sassy*, from its focus on "edgy" content to its spend a day with the editor contest, while the fact that Val and the magazine share the same name appears to be an allusion to the magazine *Jane* that Pratt went on to found after *Sassy* ceased publication. In its satirical portrayal of both Val and her magazine, the series spoofs contemporary adolescent girl culture, but it also provides a critique of the corporate commodification of girls' cultural practices and the ways in which girls are both targeted and exploited as consumers. Val is depicted in this episode as a superficial, self-absorbed opportunist who comes to Daria's high school specifically to promote her magazine. Daria, who does not read teen magazines and who rejects the discourses of beauty, body image and material consumption that they endorse, serves as the mouthpiece for the episode's commentary on "middlebrow, middle-aged profiteers [who] are

looking to suck the energy—not to mention the spending money—out of the quote, unquote youth culture," accusing Val at the end of the episode of "foisting your shallow values on [teenage girls] and making their lousy self-image even worse." In this way, Daria's outsider status not only inclines her to resist the messages about adolescent femininity communicated by *Val* magazine within the narrative, but it also enables her to serve as an extra-textual voice of critique concerning the commodification of girlhood within U.S. culture more generally. In particular, the episode employs Daria's interactions with Val to condemn the ways in which adolescent girls' power is most frequently conceived of as their spending power, and in which the most sustained response to the "girl problem" has been the marketing of books, media texts and other products sold to empower girls by ostensibly promoting their development of self-confidence and self-esteem.

As in the other girl power texts discussed in this and the previous chapter, Daria models girl power through her intelligence, her deployment of speech acts to assert agency and to counter attacks on her personhood, and her defiant attitude, which grants her the toughness to resist the pressure placed on her to conform to the modes of appearance and behavior embodied by the girls around her, as well as to refuse to feel bad about herself for not fitting in. However, where toughness in warrior girl and girl avenger texts manifests largely in terms of acts of fighting back against physical and/or sexual victimization, in outsider girl texts it manifests largely in terms of being true to oneself and standing up for one's beliefs. Thus, what ultimately grants Daria girl power in *Daria* is her refusal to compromise her principles or betray her sense of self.

Daria's resistance to girlhood norms is signaled most visibly in the series through her appearance and demeanor. Where the other girls Daria's age (with the exception of her friend

Jane) embody ideals of adolescent female heterosexual desirability, dress in stylish clothes that tend to be form-fitting and/or to trend towards short skirts and bare midriffs, and express themselves through animated facial expressions and varied intonations in speech, Daria purposely aims for drab and disinterested in her self-presentation. Her baggy green jacket and her knee-length black skirt conceal more of her body than they reveal, while her clunky boots and large, black-framed glasses are deliberately anti-fashionable. Her shoulder-length auburn hair is drawn in a manner that suggests functionality rather than style, implying a lack of concern with her appearance that is underscored by the contempt with which she comments on the obsession of the girls around her with their weight, their grooming, and the question of their attractiveness. At the same time, Daria is also drawn so that her face is always expressionless, and is voiced so that all of her lines are delivered in a detached monotone. Her lack of affect, together with her ironic mode of speech, are conventional signifiers of the figure of the outsider in U.S. popular culture, but in the case of *Daria* they are also presented as deliberate tactics that the show's protagonist employs to resist interpellation into the enactment of girlhood performed by the girls around her.

Throughout the series Daria stands firm against attempts to persuade or to coerce her to be more like other girls. Her mother pushes her to be less "negative" and to become involved in school activities, her teachers discourage her expressions of dissent, and her sister, Quinn, continually scolds Daria for embarrassing her. In response, Daria intentionally cultivates her odd-girl-out reputation, sleeping in a bedroom with padded walls and getting fired from a job at the mall for refusing to smile at customers. In many ways, Daria's nonconformity is invoked as a mark of individuality in the series, so that resisting attempts to fit in becomes a matter of remaining true to herself. This is suggested in the episode "Misery Girl" when Daria, angered

that her classmates perceive her as depressed and morbid, tells Jane "I'm not miserable. I'm just not like them." In this sense, the girl power that Daria exercises is also the power to stand out from the crowd, even if it results in ostracism, rather than altering her personality or sacrificing her sense of self in order to gain acceptance.

At the same time, however, both Daria's outsider status and her resistance to fitting in are also represented within the series as a matter of principle, so that her nonconformity becomes a mark of integrity. This is suggested in "The Lost Girls" when Val anxiously assures Daria during her visit to Daria's school, "I want to fit in while I'm here," and Daria responds, "Therein lies the difference between us." Not only does this line situate Daria's refusal to act like her classmates as a deliberate choice, but it also positions it as a refusal to adopt a way of being that is contrary to her values and beliefs. The discursive connection established within the series between Daria's nonconformity and her integrity is also illustrated by the episode "Arts 'N Crass," in which Daria and Jane are pressured by their principle to alter a poster that they designed for a school-sponsored art contest. The poster features an image of a conventionally attractive girl staring into a mirror juxtaposed with a poem about eating disorders, which their principal wants to substitute with a poem about the benefits of a healthy diet. Central to the dispute between the girls and Principal Li over the poster in this episode is the question of what meaning can or should be inscribed onto a representation of normative girlhood. Where Principal Li insists on an affirmative message, Daria and Jane insist on a critical message that encourages resistance to (rather than compliance with) female bodily norms. Because Daria's and Jane's refusal to alter the image is represented in terms of them standing up for their beliefs, their own deviations from girlhood norms are invested with the same purpose in this episode. In this way, refusing to fit in becomes an assertion of personhood in so far as it is tied to Daria's

desire to remain true to both her sense of self and her system of values, and the exercise of girl

power in *Daria* is linked to girls' willingness to stand up for themselves and the things that they

believe in.

This conceptualization of girl power as girls being true to and standing up for themselves

also structures the narrative of *Veronica Mars*, in which both Veronica's toughness and her

empowerment are similarly represented in terms of her refusal to compromise her integrity or her

sense of self. *Veronica Mars* aired from 2004-2006 on UPN and from 2006-2007 on The CW,

the network formed after the merger between UPN and The WB. Although the series was never

a ratings hit, it did manage to attract a dedicated fan following, as well as garnering praise from

television critics who championed the program for its complex narratives, its blend of noir

elements and teen TV plots, and its "headstrong, complicated lead character" (Fudge 15). The

show's positive reception by critics played a role in the decision by CW executives to pick up the

series when the network began consolidating The WB's and UPN's programming, but it was its

popularity with young female viewers that prompted the network to pair it with *Gilmore Girls* in

a bid to draw those viewers to the fledgling network (Jensen). This pairing was also presumably

a bid to draw advertisers seeking to market to this demographic to the network as well, as

evidenced by the 2006 deal struck between The CW and American Eagle Outfitters, in which the

8-10 p.m. timeslot on Tuesday nights during which the two programs aired was branded "Aerie

Tuesdays" as part of a promotional campaign to launch the company's new Aerie lingerie and

sleepwear line. In addition to purchasing traditional ad time, American Eagle also ran

promotional spots before each commercial break for the first half of the 2006-2007 television

season in which adolescent girls dressed in Aerie apparel sat around discussing the plot

developments in that evening's episodes of *Gilmore Girls* and *Veronica Mars*. While the subject

of girl power was never broached during these spots, they did include occasional expressions of admiration for the independence of the shows' adolescent female protagonists, thereby mobilizing the girl power modeled by those protagonists to sell the products being advertised during the shows to viewers much in the same way that the network used it to sell the shows themselves to viewers.

The claim of *Veronica Mars*'s eponymous protagonist to the status of girl power heroine stems largely from her "sharp wits, steely nerves and . . . wicked sense of humor" (Bianco 04D), as well as her "tough and intelligent" blend of "street and book" smarts (Gallo 70). Set in the fictional town of Neptune, California, a wealthy enclave that Veronica describes in the pilot episode as "a town without a middle class," the show follows Veronica as she splits her time between attending high school and assisting her father in his work as a private investigator, while also occasionally solving cases for her classmates on a freelance basis. In its focus on a teen girl detective, the show owes a very obvious narrative debt to the *Nancy Drew Mysteries*, although there are some significant differences between the depictions of Nancy and Veronica in each of these texts that point to the thematic ties established in *Veronica Mars* between Veronica's coding as an outsider girl and her exercise of girl power. Where Nancy comes from a background of wealth and privilege, Veronica is a member of the working class. Where Nancy is almost universally well-liked, Veronica is an outcast among her peers. Where Nancy is obedient and well-mannered, Veronica is resistant to authority and defiant in her attitude. And yet, if Veronica is not portrayed as a "good" girl in the way that Nancy is, she is portrayed as an honorable one, a girl who has a strong sense of right and wrong and who does not hesitate to stand up for those who are being mistreated. In this way, standing up for what is right, even if makes you unpopular, is coded as an expression of girl power in *Veronica* Mars, just as standing

up for one's principles is coded as an expression of girl power in *Daria*, with the result that girl power in *Veronica Mars* similarly becomes the power to go against the tide of popular opinion in order to remain true to oneself and one's beliefs.

In Veronica's case, both being true to herself and being true to her values involves her refusal to accept subordination among her wealthy classmates because of her working class status, an additional gesture of refusal that is tied to her exercise of girl power in the text. The racial and class divides that structure both the town of Neptune and the organization of the social hierarchy at Veronica's high school are a major narrative focus during the first two seasons of the series, in large part because Veronica's working class status relegates her to a subordinate place within a student body divided between those whose parents "are millionaires" and those whose parents "work for millionaires," among whom Veronica fits into the latter category ("Pilot"). Concurrently, her friendship with Weevil, the head of a Latino motorcycle gang who occasionally lends Veronica support in her investigations, opens Veronica's eyes to the racial inequalities within both her school community and the community of Neptune. Significantly, most of the cases that Veronica investigates for her classmates involve her either exposing acts of violence, sabotage or exploitation committed by wealthy students against working class students, or else clearing working class students who have been wrongly accused of misdeeds by school administrators, who brand them as troublemakers because of their socio-economic status. In this way, both Veronica's principles and the girl power that she exercises in defending those principles are tied to her rejection of a social order that allows Neptune's wealthy (mostly white) citizens to get away with wrongdoings because of the power and privilege that their money grants them.

At the same time, though, Veronica's working class roots and her exposure of the

transgressions of her wealthy classmates are not the only reasons that she is shunned at school. It is revealed in the pilot episode that Veronica was at one time a central member of the school's clique of wealthy students, nicknamed the 09ers for the zip code in which they all reside. Her acceptance among the 09ers—and the popularity that went along with it—was ensured by Veronica's friendship with the bad-girl socialite Lilly Kane, as well as her romantic relationship with Lilly's brother, Duncan. However, when Lilly was brutally murdered, Veronica's father, who was sheriff at the time, wrongly accused Lilly's father, one of Neptune's richest and most powerful residents, of the crime. Once Lilly's father was cleared of any involvement in her death, Veronica's father was forced out of his job in disgrace, and Veronica suddenly found herself a pariah at school, dumped by Duncan and cast out of her former circle of friends. Thus, where Daria assumes the role of outsider in *Daria* because she has no desire to be one of the popular girls, Veronica becomes an outsider in *Veronica Mars* because she is expelled from the ranks of popular girls. However, by the time that the narrative of the show begins, Veronica has already come to value her outsider status, and she is depicted as regretting the girl that she was when she was one of the 09ers rather than regretting that she is no longer that girl, or trying to become that girl once again.

Most of the episodes in the first two seasons of the series alternate between the diegetic present and flashbacks to Veronica's past as one of the 09ers. These flashbacks serve to further establish Veronica's outsider status in the present, but they also serve to underscore her empowerment, as well as to tie that empowerment specifically to her ostracism by the 09ers, which frees her to speak her mind and to stand up for beliefs—as well as for herself—for the first time. In contrast to her depiction in the diegetic present as assertive, confident and independent, Veronica is depicted in the flashback sequences as passive, hesitant, and a far more of a follower

than a leader. This latter point is illustrated most explicitly in the episode "Lord of the Bling," in which Veronica's father is hired to find a former classmate of Veronica's who has gone missing. The flashback sequences in this episode detail Veronica's memories of Yolanda, the missing girl, as well as the remorse that she feels over the fact that Lilly turned the entire student body against Yolanda, mistakenly believing that Yolanda had made a pass at her boyfriend, which eventually forced Yolanda to transfer schools.

As Veronica recalls the last time that she saw Yolanda, she is shown in flashback refusing to intercede with Lilly on Yolanda's behalf, not because she doesn't believe that Yolanda is innocent, but rather because she is afraid to risk Lilly turning her anger on her. The sequence ends with a shot of Veronica turning her back on Yolanda with a look of regret on her face and crossing the school parking lot to join Lilly, who has been impatiently shouting for Veronica. In her voice over narration accompanying this shot, Veronica in the diegetic present wonders how her father would react if he discovered that his "fiercely nonconformist daughter caved to peer pressure and left a totally cool person on her own." These lines suggest the shame and the reproach with which Veronica views the lengths she once went to to be accepted among the 09ers, reinforcing the show's coding of her outsider status as positive because it has made her a better person. At the same time, however, it also ties both her outsider status and the empowerment that she derives from it to her willingness to register dissent, since the most striking contrast between Veronica in the diegetic present and in the flashback sequences in this episode—as well as the thing that she is most ashamed of concerning her behavior towards Yolanda—is the way in which she compromised her principles to fit in by not objecting to Lilly's treatment of Yolanda even though she strongly disagreed with it.

That Veronica gains girl power from learning to be her own person is also suggested in

the series through the differences in her appearance between the flashback sequences and the sequences that take place in the diegetic present. In the flashbacks Veronica wears her blonde hair in a long, straight style that matches those of all of the other 09er girls. She is costumed mostly in skirts paired with button-down shirts or sweaters, all in pastel shades that compliment her pink lipstick (the only make-up that she wears), and all of which resemble the types of clothing worn by her female friends.   In contrast, in the diegetic present Veronica's hair is worn in a shorter style. She is most often depicted wearing jeans, long-sleeved t-shirts and black motorcycle boots, which not only deviate from the manner of dress embodied by the 09er girls, but also—significantly—from conventional models of adolescent female apparel within U.S. culture.   Even when Veronica appears in more traditionally "girlie" clothing, her choice of miniskirts and combat boots still suggest transgression from the normative enactments of girlhood embodied by the 09er girls, while her heavy, dark eyeliner and black nail polish likewise do more to set her apart from the other girls around her than to fit in among them. In this way, Veronica's unconventional manner of dress and bodily presentation are represented in *Veronica Mars*, much as they are in *Daria*, as a reflection of Veronica's nonconformist identity such that her refusal to dress or act like other girls becomes a mark of her refusal to compromise her sense of self.

If the girl power that Veronica exercises in the series is located in her resolve to be true to herself regardless of the cost, however, it is also located in her ability to stand up for herself when her personhood is challenged. Like Daria, Veronica faces both ostracism and teasing for her deviation from girlhood norms, and like Daria, both her integrity and her empowerment are tied to the toughness that she demonstrates in coping with this rejection. This is illustrated most clearly in *Veronica Mars* in the flashback scene in the pilot episode in which Veronica recalls

attending a party thrown by her former friends shortly after they stopped speaking to her in order

to "show everyone that their whispers and backstabbing didn't affect me." The strength of

character Veronica displays in this statement is reinforced by the manner in which she deals with

the consequences of attending this party. As she reveals in her voice-over, she was slipped a

drink laced with GHB by one of the 09er girls in an attempt to humiliate her, a petty act of spite

that sets in motion a chain of events that lead to Veronica being sexually assaulted—by far the

most extreme and the most horrific instance of persecution enacted against her because of her

outsider status over the course of the series.[2]

The flashback sequence detailing these events ends with a scene of Veronica waking up

the morning after the party to discover that she has been raped, which is comprised of shots of

Veronica straightening her clothing, forcing back her tears, and walking slowly to her car.

Filmed from a low angle, these shots are framed to connote stoicism rather than helplessness, an

implication furthered by the voice-over that accompanies them, in which Veronica confides to

viewers, "I never told my Dad. I'm not sure what he would have done with that information, but

no good would have come of it. And what does it matter? I'm no longer that girl." While this

final statement might be interpreted as an indicator of loss, it is delivered in a way that suggests

empowerment rather than grief. As such, the series attempts a delicate balance between refusing

victimization and acknowledging the trauma of sexual assault by framing Veronica's response to

being raped in terms of survivor discourses advocated by feminist activists, in which women

who have been abused or assaulted are encouraged to take back the power stripped from them by

"self-consciously redefin[ing] their relationship to the experience from one of victim" to one of

"survivor" (Naples 163).

It is partly Veronica's coding as a survivor that enables her to cope with the aftermath of

being raped, as well as to refuse the attempts of Neptune's sheriff to further victimize her by blaming her for the assault when she reports it. In a later flashback in the pilot episode, the sheriff is shown mocking Veronica because she cannot remember the details of the assault, as well as suggesting that she is wasting his time since there is "not a shred of evidence" that the rape actually occurred. Rather than accepting his humiliation of her—which constitutes an assault on her personhood akin to the rape—Veronica fights back by getting even with the sheriff in the diegetic present, embarrassing him on the witness stand while he is testifying in a case that she has been hired by one of her classmates to look in to. As the sheriff is reprimanded for malfeasance by the judge, Veronica is shown coolly meeting the sheriff's angry gaze and then smiling and winking at him before exiting the courtroom. In this way, Veronica further demonstrates girl power by asserting her personhood in the face of the sheriff's attempt to strip her of it. While this echoes the location of girl power in girls' ability to fight back against victimization in avenger girl narratives, in the case of *Veronica Mars*, Veronica's depiction as an outsider girl shifts this paradigm so that her act of fighting back is framed in terms of her standing up for herself rather than her seeking retribution

Within this context, it is also worth noting that while fighting back against victimization constitutes girl power in both girl avenger and outsider girl narratives, outsider girls fight back using speech acts rather than acts of force. Although both warrior girl texts and girl avenger texts emphasize talking back as an exercise of girl power, talking back is the primary way in which protagonists respond to persecution in outsider girl texts, as outsider girls exclusively rely on their intelligence and their facility with words to counter efforts to diminish their personhood. This is illustrated in both *Daria* and *Veronica Mars* through the ways in which their protagonists deploy sarcasm as a weapon to fight back against attempts to cut them down or to put them in

their places.

For example, in the *Daria* episode "The Misery Chick," Daria responds to an offensive remark made about her by an obnoxious Lawndale High alumni by retorting, "I've seen you insult or proposition just about everyone you've come across, so my guess is that you're the football player guy. Congratulations. You must have worked very hard to become such a colossal jerk so quickly." Similarly, in the *Veronica Mars* episode "M.A.D." Veronica is teased by two 09er boys when her car breaks down in the school parking lot. In response to their wisecrack that she must have her "eye on that Miss White Trash title," Veronica replies,

> Guys, come on. The talent is making a grilled cheese sandwich on the engine
>
> block.   Guys, come on. You can't put your car up on cinder blocks in the yard if
>
> you don't have a yard. You know, I think I can do both sides of this little act
>
> now. So how about next time you don't bother. I got it covered

In both cases, these protagonists use sarcasm to counter challenges to their agency by deploying words as a show of power, as well as a verbal assertion of personhood.

This reliance on sarcasm as both an instrument of power and a demonstration of agency aligns Daria and Veronica with the eponymous protagonist in the 2007 film *Juno* (Jason Reitman), whose coding as an outsider girl is likewise signified through her ironic manner of speech, and who likewise employs speech acts to fight back against the judgment and name-calling she encounters when she becomes pregnant at sixteen. To the extent that both sarcasm and verbal displays of aggression are considered "unladylike" behavior, there is a way in which speaking out in *Juno*, *Daria* and *Veronica Mars* becomes another way in which their protagonists resist interpellation into normative enactments of girlhood. In this sense, talking back therefore constitutes a double act of refusal in these texts, in that it allows their protagonists

to refuse the denial of their personhood and normative models of adolescent femininity at the same time. If talking back grants outsider girls empowerment, however, it also makes that empowerment contingent upon their disempowerment of others, as the same sarcasm that allows the protagonists in *Juno*, *Daria* and *Veronica Mars* to assert personhood by countering insults with witty comebacks necessitates that they do so by putting down those who seek to put them down. Ultimately, then, their protagonists can only assert personhood by stripping others of their personhood, a condition that calls into question the extent to which outsider girl narratives themselves resist hegemonic values.

Refusal that Isn't Resistance: Reaffirming Patriarchy in Girl Avenger and Outsider Girl Texts

While girl power texts featuring outsider girls celebrate girls' nonconformity, they also only celebrate nonconformist girls. In the same way that resisting the pressure to conform to normative models of girlhood is coded positively in these texts, embodying normative models of girlhood is coded negatively. Moreover, while normative girls persecute outsider girls, outsider girls treat normative girls with hostility and contempt. The result is that outsider girls are pitted against normative girls in struggles over power in these texts, and rather than encouraging community or coalition between girls, outsider girl narratives instead encourage divisiveness and conflict. Thus, much as the exercise of girl power comes at the expense of boys'/men's disempowerment in girl avenger narratives, it comes at the expense of other girls in outsider girl narratives, with girl power conceived of as a reversal of the hierarchical distribution of power that gives girls who embody normative enactments of girlhood ascendency in U.S. society over girls who deviate from normative enactments of girlhood. This is not the same thing, however, as providing an alternative to this model of power relations in which the manner that girls

express their identities as girls is not a criterion for either social approval or social marginalization.

At the same time, while girl power is tied to assertions of personhood in outsider girl texts, their messages that empowerment requires one to be true to oneself threaten to reduce personhood to a question of individuality, with the result that the act of asserting one's personhood in these texts becomes less about agency than individual self-expression. The freedom to express one's subjectivity without limitation or censure is certainly the basic human right at the center of political struggles over identity, as well as a principal goal of feminist, queer, transgender, disability, and civil rights movements. However, in all of these movements identity is conceived of in political terms, and the assertion of personhood is both understood and deployed as a political act. It is this understanding of identity as always political that grants the enactment of marginalized identities the status of a form of resistance that outsider girl texts gesture towards in linking girls' empowerment to their refusal of normative girlhood. The problem is that in outsider girl texts the political gets lost in the personal until it is erased completely. Because barriers to empowerment in these texts are only represented in terms of individual acts of persecution, and empowerment is likewise limited to individual acts of resistance to that persecution, the structural dimension of oppression is ignored, while the coalitional action required to counter the oppression of *all* members of marginalized groups is disregarded in favor of the celebration of individual projects that result in the empowerment of individual(ist) girls.

This is also true of girl power texts like *Bend It Like Beckham* (Gurinder Chada, 2002) and *The Longshots* (Fred Durst, 2008) that provide a variant on outsider girl narratives by focusing on female athletes who are ostracized because of—but also empowered through—their

participation in traditionally male sports. In these films, their protagonists' desire to play soccer and football respectively constitute a refusal of girlhood norms akin to Daria's and Veronica's refusal to comply with the modes of appearance and bodily presentation enacted by their female peers in *Daria* and *Veronica Mars*. Likewise, girl power is exercised in *Bend It Like Beckham* and *The Longshots* through their protagonists insistence on pursuing their dreams of playing on amateur teams in sanctioned competitive leagues, which is represented in these films in terms of these girls being true to themselves and standing up for their right to follow their chosen paths regardless of the opposition they face in doing so. However, in both of these films the institutional barriers to girls' participation in traditionally male sports, as well as the institutional inequalities in the funding of girls' athletic programs and the athletic opportunities available to girls, are entirely overlooked. The success of these girls in achieving their goals of playing on official teams is also presented as the result of their individual drive and talent, while no consideration is given to the structural battles that real-life female athletes continue to face. Moreover, although these two films are among the few girl power texts to feature girls of color as their protagonists, the ways in which their protagonists' racial/ethnic identities contribute to their outsider status through the opposition they encounter in the mostly white leagues in which they play is only ever referenced indirectly. This results in a further occlusion of the political by the personal in these texts, as they become yet another example of the ways in which girl power narratives extend representation to girls of color while simultaneously precluding recognition or examination of their identities as girls of color, reducing race/ethnicity to an individual character trait while erasing its political aspects.

The refusal to acknowledge the political dimension of girls' resistance to gender norms in outsider girl texts mirrors the refusal of girl avenger texts to consider the victimization of girls

from an institutional, rather than a personal, perspective. In both cases, while representing girls' resistance to subordination may qualify as a more "positive" representational practice than earlier depictions that represented girls who encounter violence as powerless victims or girls who deviate from girlhood norms as pathological, it also points to the ways in which positive representations are not the same as subversive representations. These texts may offer audiences scenarios in which girls gain empowerment by refusing to be abused or diminished, but in doing so, they reinforce the very same value system that enables the disempowerment of those girls in the first place. Thus, while they celebrate girls' power, they are only able to conceive of that power in patriarchal terms that dictate that power can always and only be exercised over someone else.

This additionally points to the ways in which popular culture texts that endorse pro-girl messages can be girl-positive texts without being feminist texts, a distinction that holds true for the girl power texts discussed in the next chapter as well. Girl avenger narratives may depict girls fighting back against victimization, but the methods they use to fight back are rooted in patriarchal values and practices, and they in no way reflect feminist strategies for resistance to gender-based oppression. This may be a large part of the reason that girl avenger narratives are also far more ambivalent about girls' exercise of power than they are affirmative of it; because the power that girls exercise in these texts is exercised in patriarchal terms, it is presented as girls' infringement of patriarchal power rather than girls achieving liberation from patriarchal oppression—thus the coding of girl avengers as castration threats, whether in the narrative tradition of the femme fatale or the monstrous-feminine, both of which reflect patriarchal anxieties surrounding female empowerment rather than feminist models of female empowerment.

Conversely, while outsider girl narratives are far more celebratory when it comes to their depictions of girls' empowerment, girls' exercise of power is still enacted in patriarchal terms in outsider girl texts. They too fail to provide a feminist alternative to patriarchal models of power, and they too do not in any way reflect or articulate support for feminist values. Ultimately, then, for all their emphasis on acts of refusal as gestures of resistance, girl avenger and outsider girl texts are not themselves resistant texts, but rather texts that promote refusal without resistance. They may indeed refuse girls' subordination under patriarchy, but they stop short of refusing patriarchy itself, and in this sense they appear to be far more invested in maintaining the patriarchal status quo than subverting it even as they challenge girls' subordinate status within patriarchal culture.

CHAPTER V

THE POWER OF GIRLIE-NESS:
RESIGNIFYING HEGEMONIC FEMININITY AS A STRATEGY OF EMPOWERMENT IN
GIRL POWER TEXTS

In the essay "Commodified Agents and Empowered Girls: Consuming and Producing Feminism," Ellen Riordan suggests that the logic behind girl power discourse as it has been articulated within U.S. culture is that "we should value girls and traditionally girl activities more than we currently do," since "if we start to value girls more and celebrate their culture, girls in turn will feel positive about themselves and will achieve higher self-esteem" (280). Under this rubric, girls' empowerment is conceived of entirely in terms of the attainment of a positive self-image, and is entirely contingent upon girls receiving affirmative messages about both girlhood and their identities as girls from discursive sites across the culture. Popular media texts participate in this project by serving as one of these sites at which the abilities and the potential of girls is touted, while celebratory images of girlhood are mobilized in an effort to make the pre-adolescent and adolescent audiences that they are aimed at feel good about themselves.

The devalued status of girls within patriarchal culture is certainly a contributing factor in their disempowerment (as it is for adult women), but the idea that the *only* barrier to educational, social and/or cultural power that girls face is the negative self-image that results from cultural messages about their inferiority stems from girl problem discourse and its emphasis on Pipher's "girl poisoning culture" as the primary cause of girls' oppression. The solitary focus in girl problem literature on negative media messages and their effects on girls' psyches is one of the reasons why girls' self-esteem has become the principal barometer for measuring their disempowerment, as well as the exclusive site at which intervention towards girls' empowerment is located within both girl problem and girl power discourse. It is also the motivation behind the

deployment of positive media representations as a strategy for girls' empowerment in the schema that Riordan outlines above, in which empowerment is equated with (and limited to) girls feeling good about themselves.

Within contemporary mass media girl power texts, celebrating the rejection of hegemonic girlhood is not the only form that this mandate for positive representations has taken. While the texts discussed in chapters three and four locate girl power in deviations from adolescent female norms and exult in either girls' adoption of masculine gender traits or their reworking of feminine gender traits, the other approach taken by girl power texts to represent girls in an affirmative manner has been to celebrate their enactment of hegemonic girlhood and to insist on recognition of both its pleasures and its value. Rather than equating empowerment with the refusal of feminine-coded behaviors or attributes, which are assumed in girl problem discourse to be inherently oppressive, these texts promote the message that it is not performing girlhood according to normative models that leaves girls disempowered within patriarchal culture, but rather the ways in which that culture seeks to curtail girls' exercise of power. As such, they suggest that girls need not necessarily renounce the ways of being conventionally associated with girlhood in order to demonstrate—or to obtain—social equality.

To this end, girl power texts that fall into this second category celebrate the rituals, practices and modes of bodily presentation associated with hegemonic femininity, but they also attempt to resignify hegemonic girlhood by inscribing onto conventional ways of being a girl a more positive value than they have traditionally been assigned within patriarchal culture as a whole. In this way, these texts appear to adopt a strategy for female empowerment endorsed by the type of Third Wave feminism that Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards have termed "girlie feminism." According to Baumbardner and Richards, girlie feminism attempts to counter

"society's low estimation of women" by refusing to subscribe to it (135). It operates from the belief that "you don't have to make the feminine powerful by making it masculine" and that for women doing so "means that we're believing our own bad press" (135). Therefore, girlie feminists embrace "the tabooed symbols of women's enculturation—Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels," and transform them from tools of oppression into tools of resistance by insisting that they need not only function as "booby traps set by the patriarchy" (136). Likewise, girlie feminists maintain that taking pleasure in enacting traditional female gender roles or embodying hegemonic models of femininity can be something other than "shorthand for 'we've been duped,'" and do not necessarily facilitate women's oppression or signal their internalization of that oppression (136).

This is also the central principle endorsed by girl power texts that locate girl power in the enactment of hegemonic girlhood. Rather than refusing normative models of adolescent femininity on the grounds that conventional performances of girlhood only serve to interpellate girls into subservient gender(ed) roles, these texts refuse the negative values assigned to hegemonic girlhood by challenging the notion—embraced by both patriarchal and some feminist discourses alike—that the only way for girls to be empowered is for them to renounce hegemonic femininity. In these texts girl power is manifested in girls' self-identification as "girlie," as well as their engagement in traditionally girlie activities. Their protagonists conform to hegemonic models of girlhood, but they defy the cultural expectations attached to those models, proving themselves integral members of—and contributors to—the communities in which they operate. In the process, they also demand that girls be taken seriously and respected. On a representational level, these texts celebrate the behaviors and character traits conventionally associated with girlhood within the United States, but on a narrative level they frequently link

girlie practices, interests and skills to the resolution of plot conflicts such that the protagonists are able to save the day by mobilizing their girlie expertise. In this way, girlie traits become specialized skills rather than useless skills, and girlie knowledge and pursuits are recoded in ways that render them important rather than frivolous—as they are generally viewed (and dismissed) within patriarchal culture.

Because, as discussed in chapter two, girlhood has been a site for anxiety, contempt and/or denigration in U.S. popular culture for much of the twentieth century, there is something potentially radical in representing girlhood as a site of value, admiration and pride in popular media texts. There is also something undoubtedly empowering for girls in receiving cultural affirmation through media representations, since power is generally granted in hegemonic culture only to those whose ways of being are invested with cultural approval. Moreover, to the extent that media texts that locate girl power in the performance of hegemonic femininity take the very aspects of girlhood that have been the locus of ridicule within dominant U.S. culture—and which have been invoked as justifications for girls' subordinate cultural status—and redeploy them as signifiers of their individual and social worth, they follow a tactic of resistance deployed by cultural movements such as the Black Pride and Gay Pride movements. Like these movements, girl power texts featuring girlie protagonists use resignification as a political tool, (re)appropriating negative stereotypes used to strip members of a marginalized social group of their personhood and invoking those stereotypes instead as positive assertions of identity. In the case of mass media girl power texts, however, the problem with using the master's tools to try to dismantle the master's house is that as Audre Lorde has argued in another context, "only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable" when repurposing the tools of oppression is imagined as the only strategy for countering that oppression (111). Investing

patriarchal views of girls with positive, rather than negative, significations may be effective as a gesture of resistance to patriarchal values, but it does not accomplish a change to the larger ideological system in which girls are devalued; all it does is protest the devaluing of girls within that system without offering an alternative to it.

As this chapter argues, challenging the cultural value placed on normative girlhood within patriarchal culture might be individually empowering for those girls who embody adolescent female norms, but measuring empowerment in terms of girls feeling positive about their identities as girls does nothing to facilitate their institutional empowerment, nor does it do anything to transform the institutions in which girls are disempowered. This is a point that has been largely obscured in all of the critical debates over the relative merits of endorsing the rejection of hegemonic femininity verses endorsing the embodiment of hegemonic femininity as a strategy for adolescent female empowerment in girl power texts, because these debates overlook the fact that neither strategy seeks to empower girls in any way other than to provide them with popular culture representations that are meant to make them feel good about the manner in which they enact their girlhood.

Likewise, debates over the effectiveness of girl power representations as a strategy for girls' empowerment have also largely failed to acknowledge that neither type of girl power representation offers audiences a conceptualization of girlhood outside of patriarchal terms, which would allow for an alternative understanding of girlhood not situated—or constrained— within patriarchal discourse. The result, as this chapter suggests, is that the ways of being an empowered girl modeled in both types of girl power text are entirely based on patriarchal understandings of gender, power and the relationship between the two. The positioning of girlhood as the site for intervention in girl power discourse contributes to this ability of girl

power texts to challenge girls' places within patriarchal society without challenging patriarchy, as the focus within girl power discourse on the manner in which girls enact their girlhood rather than the institutional structures within which they do so allows girl power narratives to reinforce rather than challenge patriarchal ideology regardless of whether those narratives encourage girls to reject or to reclaim hegemonic femininity.

At the same time, Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown argue that girl power texts that reify hegemonic girlhood reinforce discourses of gender essentialism, confirming popular notions that hegemonic enactments of adolescent femininity are indicative of the "natural" expression of girlhood (as well as the "natural" state of being a girl), since these texts tend to conflate the reclamation of traditional models of girlhood with the reclamation of girls' essential identities as girls. In the process, these texts also only position those girls who conform to conventional models of girlhood as beneficiaries of girl power, just as within warrior girl, girl avenger or outsider girl texts it is only girls who deviate from this model of girlhood that are able to exercise girl power. It is worth noting within this context that girls who deviate from girlhood norms are not absent from girl power texts featuring girlie protagonists any more than girlie girls are absent from girl power texts featuring warrior girls, girl avengers or outsider girls—in fact, in the case of *John Tucker Must Die*, the girl avenger protagonists in the film are actually represented as girlie girls. However, it is only either girls who conform to girlhood norms or girls who deviate from girlhood norms who exercise girl power—and who are represented as empowered—in these texts. It is never all girls at the same time. Thus, while none of these different types of girl power texts suggest that girlhood can only be enacted in one way, they all (without exception) suggest that there is only one positive and empowering way of enacting girlhood. Indeed, while girl power texts may all seek to provide girls with affirmative messages

about girlhood, not all girls receive affirmation in/from these texts. Much as girl power texts themselves are divided into two categories based on girls' embodiment of or deviation from normative girlhood, girls themselves are divided in the same way within the texts, and only one group ever exercises power, while that exercise of power is always at the expense of the disempowerment of the other group.

If, as suggested in the previous chapter, this divisiveness functions to limit girls' empowerment within these texts by ensuring that only select groups of girls have access to power, it also raises questions concerning the ends towards which popular representations that conceive of girls' power in this way are deployed, and how (or if) they function as a models for the empowerment of adolescent female audiences, as commentators often claim that mass media representations of girl power are intended to do. Both Riordan and Lamb and Mikel Brown are critical of the ways in which girl power discourse commodifies girls' empowerment, locating it in girls' consumer power and acts of material acquisition, a frequent objection to girl power discourse that will be discussed in greater detail below. However, assuming that the protagonists in these texts are intended as role models for adolescent female empowerment is in many ways itself also a problematic supposition.

Critiques of girl power texts as blueprints for girls' empowerment tend to conflate representations of empowered girls with strategies for empowering girls, a conflation that is encouraged by the emphasis placed in girl power discourse on positive media representations of girlhood as a strategy for girls' empowerment. It is questionable, though, whether mass media girl power texts actually do (or intend to) provide girls with behaviors to emulate in their daily lives, nevermind provide them with programs for empowerment.   The very emphasis in girl power discourse on deploying "positive" media representations in order to empower girls by

making them feel good about themselves situates empowerment in passive acts of consuming

girl power texts, not in the active performance of the behaviors represented in those texts.

Ultimately, then, because deploying representations of empowerment as a strategy for

empowerment doesn't ever encourage audiences of girl power texts to do more than just

consume them, it is possible for these texts to endorse girls' empowerment without facilitating it.

This sets further limits on the effectiveness of these texts as tools for the empowerment of actual

girls within U.S. society since, as this chapter argues, taking pleasure in representations of

empowerment is not at all the same thing as achieving institutional empowerment, and

representations of empowered girls in no way guarantee the institutional empowerment of those

girls.

The Power of Girlie Girls

Amy Heckerling's 1995 film *Clueless* was one of the first girl power texts to try to

reclaim hegemonic femininity, and in many ways it has served as a template for all of the

successive films and television programs that fall into this category of girl power narrative. The

protagonist of *Clueless* is fifteen year old Cher Horowitz, the popular, privileged daughter of a

wealthy Beverly Hills attorney, whose chief passions in life are clothes, Christian Slater movies

and hanging out at the mall with her friends. Although she appears on the surface to be an

incarnation of the superficial, self-absorbed Valley Girl stereotype, obsessed with material things

and her social standing among her high school peers, the film reveals Cher to be intelligent,

compassionate, and charitable, possessing a depth and a moral code that plays against cultural

expectations engendered by her Valley Girl exterior, much as in the case of the representation of

Buffy in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In this way, while Cher embodies character traits, interests

and behaviors associated with white, heterosexual, upper-class girlhood, the film portrays her "doing" this type of girlhood in a way that shifts the cultural values generally attached to it within dominant U.S. culture, with the result that Cher is positioned within the narrative as an object of admiration rather than an object of ridicule. At the same time, while the film is a comedy that parodies this particular version of girlhood, its exaggeration of girlhood norms is deployed in service of critiquing cultural attitudes surrounding hegemonic adolescent femininity rather than denigrating girls who embody it, which allows the film to celebrate rather than to mock girlie girls, as well as to encourage audiences to do the same.

Clueless is a modern-day retelling of Jane Austin's *Emma*, and the plot of the film revolves around Cher's personal growth as she discovers the pleasures and the rewards of helping others. Significantly, most of the good deeds that Cher performs over the course of the narrative involve girlie knowledge or abilities, and are accomplished thanks to her mastery of girlie pursuits. For example, her first venture into altruism involves facilitating a romance between her debate teacher and her English teacher, an endeavor that is not entirely undertaken for selfless reasons, as Cher hopes that falling in love will make her debate teacher happier, and thus more receptive to giving her a higher grade. Later in the film, having discovered that the satisfaction she gets from doing things for the benefit of others is more gratifying than manipulating others for her own benefit, she decides to help Tai, the new girl at school who is something of a misfit, by giving her a makeover and instructing her in how to become popular. In both cases, Cher utilizes skills that are generally coded as "girlie" interests and aptitudes in U.S. culture—matchmaking, an awareness of fashion trends, expertise in beauty regimens—to accomplish her good works. Significantly, within the narrative Cher doesn't just use her girlie skills to help others, but rather girlie skills are represented as specifically required to lend

assistance in the situations she intervenes in, so that her proficiency in girlie activities is coded as an asset because it allows her to be of service in a way that no one else can. In this way, both girlie identity and girlie practices are invested with importance within the text because they give Cher an edge that enables her to improve the lives of others, while also facilitating her endeavor to become a better person.

At the same time, the film also attempts to reclaim hegemonic girlhood by inserting girlie knowledge into contexts in which it would normally be considered superfluous, but within which it gives Cher a distinct advantage in the narrative. For example, Cher wins a classroom debate on immigration law by comparing restrictions on immigration to refusing entry to guests at a party, using an anecdote about the fiftieth birthday party she organized for her father to illustrate her point. While knowledge of how to be a good hostess and knowledge of the legal and political complexities of immigration issues are generally considered to fall into two separate spheres in U.S. culture, and to be in no way relatable, Cher defies the coding of girlie knowledge as irrelevant to social concerns by making an argument for social policy based on girlie knowledge, which allows her a perspective on the topic of the debate that none of her other classmates share.

This strategy of inserting girlie knowledge into contexts not generally perceived as the domain of adolescent girlhood, as well as investing that knowledge with the power to give girls an advantage—rather than a disadvantage—in their success within those contexts, also structures the narrative of the film *Legally Blonde* (Robert Luketic, 2001), in which being a girlie girl is integral to the educational and professional achievements of its protagonist. *Legally Blonde* tells the story of Elle Woods, a pampered socialite who spends her final year of college dividing her time between organizing sorority events, getting manicures, and studying fashion merchandising.

When Elle's boyfriend, Warner, breaks up with her upon receiving news of his admission to Harvard Law School, claiming that she does not fit in with his aspirations to an eventual political career (in which he will need to marry "a Jackie, not a Marilyn"), Elle resolves to attend Harvard herself in order to demonstrate her seriousness and win Warner back.

Although she aces the law school entrance exam, Elle encounters resistance from both her fellow classmates and her professors at Harvard, who dismiss her because she does not fit the mold of the typical ivy league law student. This further motivates Elle to succeed in her studies, although it also shifts her desire to do so from convincing Warner that she would be a suitable wife for him to proving that she has what it takes to succeed as a litigator. To this end, Elle works hard to propel herself to the head of her class, eventually obtaining a prestigious internship in which she assists in a high profile murder trial. Significantly, Elle's girlie knowledge ends up providing the key to winning the trial when her familiarity with hair care regimens allows her to catch a witness in a lie. The film ends with Elle, having triumphed in her first case, delivering the valedictorian speech at her law school commencement before embarking on a career at a prominent law firm. It also ends with her declining to get back together with Warner when he expresses a desire to resume their relationship, turning his earlier rejection back on him by declaring, "If I'm going to be partner in a law firm by the time I'm thirty, I need a boyfriend who's not such a complete bonehead."

In the same way that Cher's representation in *Clueless* both challenges the Valley Girl stereotype and resignifies the cultural meanings attached to the figure of the Valley Girl, *Legally Blonde* undertakes a similar representational project with regard to the stereotype of the "dumb blonde," a particularly misogynist representational trope within patriarchal culture. Elle embodies all of the character traits of the dumb blonde—she is bubbly in her demeanor, image-

oriented, and ignorant of most things outside the sphere of fashion and popular entertainment—but she is not dumb. Instead, Elle is represented as highly intelligent, as well as hard-working, dedicated, and self-disciplined. She is depicted tirelessly studying for the LSATS, pushing herself to excel in her classes, and working overtime to help win the murder trial, all pursuits that defy the stereotype of the dumb blonde, but also cultural expectations concerning the abilities and the interests of college-aged girls who appear to fit this stereotype.

At the same time, the toughness and integrity with which Elle deals with her initial ostracism at Harvard echoes the representation of the protagonists in the outsider girl texts discussed in the previous chapter. Her refusal to disclose her client's alibi to the lead attorney in the murder trial after the client swears Elle to secrecy—even though it might cost Elle her internship—suggests an adherence to a strict moral code that similarly aligns her with the girl power heroines in outsider girl texts in terms of the emphasis placed in those texts on girls being true to themselves and standing up for what they believe in. The difference is that in *Legally Blonde* it is Elle's adherence to, rather than deviation from, hegemonic femininity that renders her an outsider, and the girl power that she demonstrates in being true to herself in the film is located in her refusal to compromise her girlie identity in order to be taken seriously in a profession in which seriousness is equated with the performance of masculinity. In this way, much like Cher in *Clueless*, Elle's representation in *Legally Blonde* plays against the cultural expectations engendered by her appearance, interests and character traits, transforming a disempowering stereotype of girls/women into a representation of female empowerment, while at the same time locating that empowerment specifically in Elle's girlie identity.

Legally Blonde is full of girl (and girlie) positive messages that contribute to this endeavor. Although Elle initially attends law school to win Warner back, she ends up earning

her degree for herself rather than to impress him. Indeed, once she gets to Harvard, the focus of the film shifts from Elle's efforts to transform herself to please an ex-boyfriend who treats her badly to her efforts to obtain personal and professional fulfillment on her own terms. This includes her insistence on succeeding in law school without giving in to the pressure to abandon her girlie persona, which the film invests with positive significations by making it the key to— rather than an impediment to—her success as an attorney. The empowerment that Elle achieves as a result of these things is signaled at the end of the film in her line in her commencement speech about learning to believe in herself, as well as the independence and self-assertion that she demonstrates in refusing Warner's proposal on the grounds that she deserves a romantic partner who respects her and supports her goals.

At the same time, the film also draws on girl power discourse that emphasizes girls' friendships as a source of empowerment by stressing the importance of female community in Elle's journey towards self-empowerment. At the beginning of the film, Elle receives encouragement from her friends in her sorority, who help her to study for the LSAT exam and who celebrate with her when she receives her acceptance letter from Harvard. Although at Harvard Elle is initially persecuted by Warner's new girlfriend, Vivian, who mocks Elle for her girlie persona, Elle and Vivian develop respect for one another as they work together on the murder trial, and by the end of the film they are represented sticking up for and supporting one another. In both cases, traditionally girlie activities are depicted as the method through which these communities of girls bond together. The sorority members exchange advice on clothes and take group trips to the salon to get their hair and nails done, while Elle and Vivian share stories about dating Warner and gossip about their colleagues. Consequently, activities culturally-coded as "girlie" pastimes are linked to female empowerment within the film through the ways in

which they figure into the formation and sustenance of female support networks that contribute to Elle's cultivation and exercise of autonomy.

Within this context, it is worth noting that, once at Harvard, Elle also receives support and guidance from Paulette, the middle-aged manicurist that she befriends, as well as encouragement from an older female professor—two instances of intergenerational female bonding that extend the scope of girl power in *Legally Blonde* to encompass both women and girls and to positively represent cooperation between them as a source of power for girls. Significantly, Elle bonds with both Paulette and Professor Stromwell in the beauty salon where she gets her nails done, and which is represented in the film as a site of both shelter and nurturance for her. In this way, the film takes a practice that is often associated with female vanity and self-indulgence in mainstream U.S. culture and recodes it as a signifier of female community, as well as the power that girls/women derive from the support of that community. This is one example of the ways in which the film seeks to reclaim aspects of hegemonic femininity through processes of resignification, but it also points to ways in which the girl power that Elle exercises in the film is located in her participation in girlie practices, as well as her girlie identity—a theme that is also expressed through her name, which is both the French pronoun "she" and the title of the world's most widely circulated women's fashion magazine.

It is in Elle's use of her knowledge of beauty practices to discredit the primary witness in the murder trial, however, that the film most explicitly locates the girl power that she exercises in her enactment of hegemonic femininity. Elle's familiarity with the "cardinal rule of perm maintenance" allows her to easily spot an inconsistency in the witness's testimony that none of the other attorney's on the case notice. It also allows Elle to trick the witness into confessing to committing the murder during her cross-examination, in which she uses an anecdote about a wet

t-shirt contests participated in by one of her sorority sisters both to prove her contention that the witness is lying and to disarm the witness by playing to expectations that she cannot be a competent attorney because she is wearing a pink dress and talking about a wet t-shirt contest. Earlier in the film, Elle's girlie persona also enables her to gain rapport with her client and to convince the client to give Elle the details of her alibi, something that none of the other attorneys on the case had been able to do. In both instances, Elle's girlie identity invests her with specialized knowledge and skills that are integral to winning the trial, and that she alone possesses by virtue of being a girlie girl. Thus, like *Clueless*, the film resignifies the cultural value placed on the practices associated with hegemonic femininity, partly by making them crucial to Elle's professional success rather than an impediment to that success, but also by recoding girlie knowledge as significant knowledge rather than superfluous knowledge.

At the same time, the film also attempts to reclaim hegemonic femininity by granting both girlie knowledge and girlie practices a central place in the public sphere, thereby countering the marginalized position that feminine-coded interests and pursuits are relegated to within patriarchal culture. To the extent that Elle's empowerment in the film is tied to her success in law school, as well as her victory in the murder trial, her exercise of power becomes dependent upon her knowledge of the law, as well as her command of the rules of speech, conduct and procedure within the courtroom, even if the power that she exercises is located in her girlie expertise. In this sense, in order to enter into and exercise power within the public sphere through her participation in the legal system, Elle must gain mastery of the master discourse of criminal law, a common trope in female empowerment narratives in which empowerment is tied to women succeeding in traditionally male professions. However, because it is Elle's mastery of the discourses of female beauty that ultimately guarantees her success in the public sphere, the

film also inserts girlie discourse into the cultural mainstream, granting knowledge of hair care an equal significance to knowledge of legal codes that invests both types of knowledge with equal import in terms of their social value. Thus, while being a girlie girl grants both Cher and Elle individual empowerment in *Clueless* and *Legally Blonde*, Elle's girlie skills and knowledge also enable her to exercise power within the public sphere in *Legally Blonde*, thereby facilitating her access to institutional empowerment as well as personal empowerment. In the process, it also positions girl power as the power to exercise authority within the public sphere, while at the same time inserting girl power into the spaces of public life rather than relegating it to the domain of girls' private lives or their individual self-esteem.

On a visual level, the links established in *Legally Blonde* between Elle's exercise of girl power, her social empowerment, and her enactment of girlie identity are also conveyed through the film's mise-en-scène, which is proliferated by objects and images associated with hegemonic femininity. The production design of *Legally Blonde* is saturated with the color pink, identified by Elle as her "signature color," which dominates the color palette of her wardrobe, as well as the décor in her dorm room. She has a penchant for accessories and furniture that incorporate faux fur, glitter and/or rhinestones, while her Chihuahua, Bruiser, is a breed of dog considered within U.S. culture to be a particularly "girlie" pet—a connotation that is emphasized in the film by the way in which Elle dresses him up and carries him around in her purse. Elle's environment, together with her use of these items within that environment, reinforce her girlie coding, suggesting a pleasure in girlie things that Elle invokes as a source of pride, as well as a central component of her identity.

This is also indicated through the film's title sequence, in which Elle is introduced to audiences through an extended montage in which she herself is not revealed until the final shot.

Instead, this sequence is almost entirely composed of images of Elle's dorm room, in which the camera pans across bottles of nail polish, stacks of magazines, and photos of Bruiser in bejeweled frames cluttering her dresser. These images are interspersed with shots of her getting dressed, although these shots consist of close-ups of the back of her head as she brushes her hair, her necklace as she fastens it around her neck, and her shoes as she steps into them, so that the focus of viewers is directed to her actions and her accessories rather than to Elle herself. In this way, Elle's character is primarily defined through the girlie accoutrements she surrounds herself with and the girlie practices she engages in, while the attention paid to these things by the camera doubles as a celebration of the rituals and paraphernalia of hegemonic girlhood.

If this spotlighting of the products and practices associated with normative enactments of adolescent femininity functions as part of the representational project undertaken by girl power texts featuring girlie protagonists to empower girls by celebrating aspects of hegemonic girl culture, however, it also participates in the commodification of empowerment that Riordan, Lamb and Mikel Brown attribute to mass media representations of girl power. The close-up shots of Elle's girlie accoutrements may celebrate the pleasures that girlie girls ostensibly take in enacting their girlie identities through the use of those accoutrements, but they are also product placement shots that function to advertize the consumer goods being displayed, as well as to link girls' cultural practices to the consumption of those goods. In this sense, the close-ups are also employed to give audiences a clear view of the labels on these items, which include Herbal Essences hair care products and O.P.I. nail polish, both brand name consumer goods that are primarily marketed to adolescent girls.

To the extent that Elle's empowerment in the film is tied to her embodiment of hegemonic femininity, while her embodiment of hegemonic femininity is signified in this

sequence by her use of these products, the film is implicated in the commodification of adolescent female empowerment in two ways. It contributes to the equivalence of girls' empowerment with their purchasing power in girl power discourse by promoting the idea that empowerment can be gained through—and is solely limited to—"the power to make choices *while shopping*," as Lamb and Mikel Brown suggest (3, italics in original). At the same time, it also illustrates what Riordan identifies as the complicity of girl power media texts in employing "the rhetoric of empowerment" to "draw in and claim an audience" for both the texts themselves and the advertisers who sponsor them (285). The problem with equating girls' empowerment with material consumption in this way, as all three argue, is not just that it transforms empowerment from a political issue to a question of consumer practices, but that in doing so it also "[confines] agency to an individual level" while foreclosing the possibility of efforts towards "structural transformations that [would] indeed change the lives of women living within patriarchal and capitalist structures" in which they are relegated to a subordinate position (Riordan 284).

This becomes one more way in which girl power as it has been articulated in the U.S. mass media limits projects for girls' empowerment by conceiving of that empowerment only on an individual level. At the same time, it also illustrates the ways in which, by organizing campaigns for girls' empowerment around media representations that are intended to make girls feel good about themselves, girl power narratives featuring girlie protagonists don't merely participate in the commodification of girl power, but they also facilitate it, since one of the cornerstones of consumer culture is the idea that one can feel good/better about oneself through the purchase of consumer goods—be they products that signify one's styling of one's self along the lines of a particular identity category or media texts that affirm that identity category. This is

not the only limit placed on the power that girls are able to exercise within U.S. society when their exercise of agency is confined to acts of consumerism, however. This conception of adolescent female empowerment further circumscribes that empowerment by ensuring that it is only available to those girls who possess both the leisure time and the disposable income to engage in the types of material consumption promoted as empowering within this schema. Thus, in the case of both *Clueless* and *Legally Blonde*, if girl power is located in these films in the shopping, manicures and other forms of consumerism that both of their protagonists participate in as part of their enactment of their girlie identities, it is also limited to girls who fall into the upper income brackets necessary sustain both this type and this level of consumption.

Riordan, Lamb and Mikel Brown argue that the commodification of adolescent female empowerment in girl power texts such as *Legally Blonde* and *Clueless* automatically disqualifies those texts as potential tools for the subversion of the dominant social order, as well articulations of feminist discourse. They are correct in this assertion. However, that these texts cannot function as political tools for (feminist) structural transformation does not necessarily mean that their viewers cannot—or do not—read empowering messages from them. Moreover, while these texts certainly do not endorse strategies for girls' access to institutional power, they do promote girls' empowerment and they do represent empowered girls in positive ways, two things that set them apart from the earlier popular culture texts discussed in chapter two, in which girls' power is only ever conceived of in terms of delinquency, pathology or social disruption. Thus, while the representations of girls' exercise of power in girl power texts featuring girlie protagonists may be problematic (much as it is in girl power texts featuring warrior girls, girl avengers or outsider girls), the fact that they are affirmative of adolescent female empowerment at all does raise the question of whether or not these texts can—or should be—simply be dismissed no

matter how compromised or limited their articulation of that empowerment might be. To the extent that they do assert both the need for girls' empowerment within U.S. society and the value of that empowerment, girl power texts arguably do accomplish a limited discursive shift. They advocate for the necessity of remedying girl's subordinate social status rather than maintaining it, even if they can only conceive of power and empowerment in patriarchal terms that ensures that patriarchal social structures will remain intact even if girls' position within them is altered.

I want to be clear here that I am not in any way arguing that this cancels out the problematic aspects of the representation of adolescent female empowerment in these texts. Nor am I proposing that popular culture representations that offer celebratory images of empowered girls in any way take the place of political projects aimed at enabling actual girls to achieve institutional empowerment. However, the role of mass media texts as ideological apparatuses rests on their ability to shape our beliefs, values and ways of thinking, and to the extent that girl power texts encourage audiences to cheer on girls' empowerment rather than fearing it or condemning it, there is a limited use to these texts as tools for ideological change, even if they do not function as tools for social change.

Thus, while recognizing that mass media representations of girl power are extremely limited in their effectiveness as instruments for social change, I would like to suggest that it is possible that these limits can circumscribe their effectiveness without negating it entirely, and that in the same way that it is crucial for critical analyses of girl power representations to point out their limits, it is also necessary for them to acknowledge the ways in which these representations have succeeded in shifting cultural views of girls and girlhood. It is precisely this latter goal that girl power texts featuring girlie protagonists take as their central representational project, and in this they have been effective even if they fail to extend this

project to encompass the transformation of girls' social status under patriarchy. In resignifying the embodied and cultural practices associated with normative enactments of adolescent femininity, these texts suggest that it is not wearing dresses, putting on makeup or engaging in other girlie activities that are oppressive to girls, but rather cultural messages that tell them they are less than boys or that encourage them to be docile, self-effacing, and subservient rather than confident, self-assured, and assertive of their personhood. Ultimately, then, even if these texts do not accomplish—or endorse—radical social change, in insisting on a differentiation between the causes of oppression and the signifiers of the identities of an oppressed social group, they do suggest a radical rethinking of the relationship between girls' oppression and their enactment of hegemonic femininity that arguably does encourage a shift in how we think about girls and how we conceive of their empowerment.

Mean Girls and Gossip Girls: The Negative Side of Girl Power

In the period between 2000 and 2002 representations of girl power like those discussed above and in the previous two chapters abounded in U.S. film and television. While TV shows like *Gilmore Girls*, which aired on The WB from 2000-2006 and on The CW from 2006-2007, examined girl power from an intergenerational perspective, locating girls' empowerment in the nurturance and support derived from strong mother-daughter relationships, films like *Real Women Have Curves* (Patricia Cardoso, 2002) provided audiences with coming of age narratives in which the exercise of girl power took the form of girls asserting their right to self-determination concerning the direction of their futures. *Real Women Have Curves* also provided a much need counterpoint to media texts that sought to celebrate girlhood, but only in terms of the experiences of white, middle class girls who conform to cultural ideals of beauty and body

size, by offering an affirmative representation of a working class Latina girl who embraces her fat identity rather than despairing over it, seeking to alter it, or wishing it away. It is partly because of the sheer number of girl power texts released during this two year period, but also because of narrative content such as this, that 2000-2002 marks the high point of mass media girl power representations. Unfortunately, it also marks a turning point within U.S. popular culture, after which representations of girl power take on a decidedly negative cast, and girl power narratives take on a censorious rather than an affirmative tone.

Beginning with the release of the film *Mean Girls* in 2004, girl power has increasingly become equated with bitchiness and a sense of entitlement within popular mass media texts, while the exercise of girl power is now most often conceived of in terms of girls berating, manipulating, bullying or otherwise seeking to demonstrate dominance over one another. *Mean Girls* is by no means the first cultural site at which this model of adolescent femininity was articulated, but it did provide a representational template for a large number of the film and television texts that have followed in which girl power manifests as petty, malicious, domineering behavior, including *The OC*, *One Tree Hill*, *Gossip Girl* and The CW remake of *Beverly Hills 90210*. In all of these texts, affirmative representations of empowered girls are replaced by disparaging representations of spiteful, self-important, self-involved divas who alternately terrorize and seek adulation from the other girls around them.

Mean Girls is the story of sixteen year old Cady Heron, who, after being home schooled for all of her life, enters a suburban Illinois public high school at the beginning of her junior year. Cady initially has difficulty fitting in, but is eventually befriended by Janis and Damien, two fellow outcasts who bond with her over their lack of commonality with the other students in their class. When circumstances throw Cady and popular girl Regina George together, Regina invites

Cady to begin hanging out with her and her friends, and Janis convinces Cady to do it so that she can gather dirt on them in order to retaliate for all of the humiliation that they have inflicted on Janis over the years. Once among the popular girls, however, Cady begins to enjoy the benefits that go along with being at the top of the school's social hierarchy, and she turns her back on Janis and Damien in order to ensure her acceptance among Regina's clique. After Regina steals the attentions of a potential boyfriend away from Cady, however, the two girls begin a campaign to bring each other down that eventually devolves into a free-for-all of sabotage, rumor-mongering and backstabbing, culminating in Regina distributing copies of a book in which she has written hurtful comments about most of the student body and attributing its authorship to Cady. The film ends with both girls facing admonishment from school administrators, as well as Cady being chastised by her parents and her teacher/mentor Mrs. Norbury for betraying her friends, her values, and herself, after which Cady begins a campaign to promote respect and collegiality among her classmates.

The script for *Mean Girls* is based on Rosalind Wiseman's bestselling self-help book *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends and Other Realities of Adolescence*, which is one of the key works on the contemporary girl problem discussed in the introductory chapter.   It paints female adolescence as a time of intense antagonism and animosity between girls, which is materialized in acts of "relational aggression," a supposedly female type of bullying that takes the form of gossip, ostracism, name-calling and spreading rumors. Wiseman's book is full of generalized assertions concerning the widespread nature of relational aggression in U.S. middle schools, such as "Every girl I know has been hurt by her girlfriends" (2), "99.99 percent of all girls gossip" (112), and "It is inevitable that your daughter will experience . . . exclusion from parties, the breakup with the best friend,

excommunication from the clique without a moment's notice]" (151-152), as well as essentialist statements concerning girls' inherent cattiness. All of these allegations are supported by anecdotal evidence drawn from Wiseman's experience running an intervention program that conducts anti-bullying seminars in middle schools, although the size of the sample that she draws her data from is never disclosed, making it difficult to ascertain if the behaviors she discusses are really all that common (a claim that has been strongly disputed). The examples she provides to illustrate instances of relational aggression are also framed in an extremely vague manner that makes it impossible to differentiate between hypothetical scenarios and actual, observed behaviors, further calling into question the frequency and the scope of this particular manifestation of the girl problem.

Mean Girls takes the claims of *Queen Bees and Wannabes* at face value, however, reproducing them faithfully in its depiction of adolescent girls and their volatile, contentious— ultimately transitory—friendships with one another. The book is even credited in the film's title sequence, presumably to lend credence to its narrative, a gesture that seems odd when taken in conjunction with the satirical tone of the film until one considers that it is not Wiseman's book that is the object of its satire, but rather mean girls themselves. Indeed, while the mean girls phenomenon is definitely exaggerated in the film, is still presented as an indisputable "reality" of contemporary girlhood, and the film does far more to confirm—and to reinforce—the mean girls stereotype than to challenge it, even going so far as to include a scene in which Mrs. Norbury counsels the girls in Cady's school on their bad behavior using language and exercises taken directly from the book. In this way, the film appears to align itself with Wiseman's condemnation of mean girl behavior, positioning itself at once as a cautionary tale about the harm caused by acts of relational aggression and a warning to real-life mean girls about the fate

that awaits them if they don't mend their ways.

What is significant about this film within the context of this study is that there is a way in which it also functions as a cautionary tale concerning adolescent girls' exercise of power. Wiseman's mapping of the dynamics of middle school cliques is organized around a discussion of the distribution and circulation of power among their members. In fact, in her schema, cliques are entirely based on struggles over power, in which the girl at the top of the social hierarchy, the "queen bee," assumes and maintains her position through "a combination of charisma, force, money, looks, will and manipulation" with which she "reigns supreme over the other girls and weakens their friendship with others, thereby strengthening her own power and influence" (25). These are not girls who are in need of empowerment, then, but rather girls who need to have their exercise of power curtailed, since they (by virtue of being girls apparently) are only capable of exercising power in "bad" ways—a point that Wiseman makes repeatedly throughout her book as she differentiates between good and bad popularity, good and bad teasing, etc. Indeed, where much of the literature documenting the girl problem presents girls as victims in need of empowerment, *Queen Bees and Wannabes* divides girls into those who exercise power in negative ways and those who aspire to exercise power in negative ways, a pattern that is repeated in *Mean Girls*, in which Janis tries to become like Regina and Cady comes close to replacing Regina, but neither of them ever considers an alternative way of being to Regina's—nevermind a way of relating to the other girls in their school that is not based on holding power over them.

It is here that *Mean Girls* intersects with girl power discourse. Where girl power media texts offer celebratory representations of empowered girls and applaud their exercise of power, *Mean Girls* offers a nightmare scenario of female empowerment in which empowered girls are represented as villains rather than role models, and girls' exercise of power is denounced rather

than lauded. In this way, the discursive figure of the mean girl is positioned as girl power's negative aspect, raising red flags concerning the consequences of girls' power if it is not controlled, or at least channeled towards a "proper" outlet of expression. This is not the only way in which representations of mean girls have been deployed to counter girl power discourse in recent popular media texts, however. Television programs such as *One Tree Hill*, the new *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Gossip Girl* also represent girls' exercise of power in terms of their meanness, but whereas *Mean Girls* censures this exercise of power, these other programs delight in it, celebrating girls' meanness, but not necessarily affirming it.

Gossip Girl in particular follows this pattern, inviting viewers to take pleasure in the scheming, vindictive, dictatorial behavior of queen bee Blair Waldorf, who continually voices declarations of her superiority over the girls around her, and who, instead of having friends, is attended by girls that she openly refers to as her "minions," who fawn over her and do her bidding. In its representation of Blair as the epitome of girl power gone awry, the series reifies bitchiness while still presenting it in highly negative terms. This is not a series that attempts to reclaim the term bitch by embracing it as a positive label rather than an insult, defying patriarchal culture's censure of women who speak their minds and assert their opinions. Nor is it a series that celebrates girls' enactment of bitchiness as either a subversive gesture or a strategy of female empowerment. Instead *Gossip Girl* invokes bitchiness as the negative consequence of girls' attainment of power, appropriating girl power discourse, but only to rob it of its endorsement of girls' empowerment. Like *Mean Girls*, the series represents girls as having unlimited access to power and using it badly, both of which suggest that the need for adolescent female empowerment has passed, but also that it may not have been such a good idea in the first place.

Thus, the infiltration of mean girls into popular media texts in the period from 2004 onwards inaugurates a series of reactionary representations of girls' exercise of power that signal a concomitant cultural backlash against girl power discourse in the U.S. This backlash has been fueled by a shift in both popular and political rhetoric that has replaced concerns over girls' social status with concerns over boys' social status, as well as a cultural turn away from the liberal social policies that positioned the need for greater institutional power for girls as a priority, both of which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter in relation to Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga*—in many ways the ultimate girl power backlash text. Ironically, though, the emphasis within girl power discourse on media representations as both the cause of and the antidote to girls' oppression has also played a role in facilitating the backlash against girl power. Singling out the media as the one and only social institution that needs to be transformed in order for girls to gain empowerment suggests that all that needs to be done in order to redress the structural inequalities between girls and boys is for media representations of girls to become more positive. This logic has paved the way for claims that the proliferation of girl-positive media texts in the last twenty years is proof that girls' empowerment has been achieved, in spite of the fact that there have been few substantive changes during that time in the social conditions under which girls live their lives in the United States. It has also been used as a justification to devote cultural attention—and social resources—to other projects.

This is one further way in which limiting girls' empowerment to passive acts of viewing girl-positive media texts has served to limit the effectiveness of those texts in accomplishing girls' empowerment. By confusing the sense of empowerment girls might derive from watching representations of girl power in the media with the actual (institutional) empowerment of girls in U.S. society, girls *feeling* empowered also takes the place of girls *being* empowered as the goal

of mass media representations of girl power. This is not to suggest, again, that popular culture texts that represent girls in a positive manner or that are affirmative of girls' individual and social value have no place in campaigns for girls' social empowerment. To the extent that representational practices reflect dominant cultural values, they can also be deployed to shift those values, a project that has been undertaken, for example, by digital videos like Joy Nash's "A Fat Rant," which achieved viral distribution through email and social networking sites, and which explicitly positions itself as a challenge to dominant cultural attitudes concerning body size. In this sense, processes of representation and resignification can both be utilized as ideological tools to advocate for social change, but they do so by laying the conceptual groundwork for such change, not by accomplishing it outright.

Ultimately, then, while girl power texts that seek to reclaim hegemonic femininity in order to strip it of its use as a justification for girls' subordinate social status align themselves with this project, the deployment of these texts as a strategy for the empowerment of girls within U.S. society fails because it fails to ever move beyond representation to concrete forms of social activism. In many ways, this makes a backlash against girl power appear an overreaction, but it also positions that backlash as a preemptive counterstrategy, as anti-girl power rhetoric that takes girls' empowerment as a fait accompli seeks to foreclose the possibility of social transformation before it ever moves from the representational to the actual. Thus, texts like *Mean Girls* and *Gossip Girl* that suggest that girls' empowerment has not only been achieved, but also only had negative effects, set the stage for the backlash texts discussed in the next chapter, in which girls' renunciation of power replaces girls' exercise of power as that which is celebrated in and endorsed through their narratives.

CHAPTER VI

GIRL POWER'S TWILIGHT YEARS:
STEPANIE MEYER'S *TWILIGHT SAGA* AND THE BACKLASH AGAINST GIRL POWER

In 2002, precisely ten years after the AAUW report detailing the gender-based discrimination faced by girls in U.S. classrooms was released, the Bush administration announced that it was directing the Department of Education to make an examination of boy's educational equity a priority. This announcement followed the release of two books, William S. Pollack's *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* in 1998 and Christina Hoff Sommers's *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men* in 2000, both of which helped to inaugurate the idea that there was a "boy problem" on the rise in the United States, in which boys' imperiled physical and emotional well-being hung in the balance, and in which all of the social attention paid to remedying girls' disempowerment in recent years had not only exaggerated the social marginalization of girls, but also contributed to the social marginalization of boys. These books opened up public debates concerning the "harm" that projects for girls' empowerment had done to boys, in the process shifting cultural attention—and social resources—away from programs to empower girls and towards programs to (re)empower boys. This is despite the fact that, as E. Anthony Rotundo points out in his review of *The War Against Boys* in *The Washington Post*, there is (and continues to be) little evidence to support its claims that boys now face educational or social problems in greater numbers than ever before, or in greater numbers than girls. In fact, most research seems to suggest that while boys and girls both negotiate obstacles to psychic development and social opportunities in adolescence, they face different problems and different social and cultural pressures, though boys do not face the institutional barriers to success or the cultural messages

concerning their inferiority that girls do.

While the verifiability of a boy problem in contemporary U.S. society continues to be a source of a great deal of dispute, the refocusing of social attention onto the welfare of boys in recent years points to the same cultural turn that has engendered a backlash against girl power discourse in popular rhetoric, as well as popular culture representations. Both the boy problem and the anti-girl power backlash emerge against the backdrop of a move towards increased cultural conservatism in the United States, prompted by the infiltration into the cultural mainstream of neoconservative ideology that touts a return to "traditional" social values, including the ascendency of men over women in the public sphere and women's willing resumption of their "proper" places within the domestic sphere. The backlash against girl power has also been facilitated by the social policies of the George W. Bush administration, which supported programs and legislative initiatives aimed at either quashing or reversing efforts to extend recognition and protections to minority groups—from a proposed constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage to measures towards immigration reform. At the same time, both the cultural and the political climate in the United States after the terrorist attacks in 2001 have also contributed to a move away from support for programs promoting social change, as challenges to the established social order and the status quo of power relations take on an increased threat (and become an increased source of anxiety) amongst rhetoric promoting the need for social unification and stability.

It is perhaps not surprising that against this backdrop girl power discourse should begin to recede from the pop culture landscape, or that popular culture texts promoting girls' empowerment through either deviations from adolescent female norms or alternative performances of adolescent femininity should begin to vanish from the mass media. This is not

to suggest that media texts endorsing girl power have entirely disappeared. Both girl power rhetoric and girl power representational tropes persist in recent films like *Juno* and *Whip It* (Drew Barrymore, 2009), as well as the television series *Life Unexpected*, which premiered as a mid-season replacement on The CW in January 2010. However, pro-girl power texts appear with much less frequency in the U.S. mass media than they did in the first half of the previous decade, while backlash representations like those discussed in the last chapter appear in ever-increasing numbers. Representing adolescent female empowerment negatively, as mean girl narratives do, is not the only strategy through which girl power has been rejected in recent popular culture texts, however. There have also been a large number of texts that promote anti-girl power sentiments by celebrating a return to "traditional" adolescent female gender roles, in which girls' passivity and submissiveness are represented in positive terms, and in which girls' relinquishment of agency is represented as more fulfilling and—ironically—more empowering than their exercise of agency or their assertion of personhood.

This chapter examines these representations as a reactionary response to girl power discourse. It argues that their calls for a return to "traditional" enactments of girlhood, together with their claims concerning the unhappiness that the exercise of power causes girls, mobilize rhetorical strategies borrowed from discourses of the anti-feminist backlash. As with anti-feminist media texts, anti-girl power media texts suggest that girls have already achieved access to greater social power in the U.S.—and that the exercise of power is therefore a choice rather than a political right—while at the same time maintaining that the rewards of "choosing" to exercise power are nothing compared to the rewards of willingly surrendering autonomy in order to be taken care of and provided for. In addition to insistently reasserting conventional gender roles, these texts also reaffirm the subordinate place granted to girls in U.S. society by suggesting

that girls don't really mind being in an inferior position to boys, and that therefore there is no

real need to grant them access to greater institutional power, since they have no desire to exercise

it in the first place. At the same time, as this chapter will demonstrate, although these texts seek

to counter girl power discourse, they do so by appropriating aspects of it, touting a return to

traditional gender roles as empowering for girls in ways that still affirm the value of female

empowerment, but that couch that empowerment in decidedly disempowering terms.

The Girl as Blank Slate: Anti-Girl Power Representations of Adolescent Femininity

The discursive figure at the center of this category of anti-girl power mass media texts is

perhaps best conceptualized in terms of the representational trope of the "girl as blank slate."

Where the protagonists in girl power texts are confident and assertive, the girl as blank slate is

self-effacing and submissive. Where the protagonists in girl power texts voice their opinions and

insist that those opinions—and their right to them—be respected, the girl as blank slate doesn't

appear to hold any opinions, and rarely demands that her views be listened to or considered.

Likewise, where the protagonists in girl power texts take proactive measures to actualize their

desires, stand up for themselves, or fight back against being pushed around, the girl as blank

slate allows others to make decisions for her and to act on her behalf—in fact, she appears to

prefer to do so. In this way, while asserting agency is central to representations of girl power

protagonists, relinquishing agency is a central trait of the girl as blank slate. Similarly, while

assertions of personhood are an integral part of the power exercised by girl power protagonists,

the girl as blank slate does not assert personhood—partly because she does not wish to exercise

power of any kind, but also partly because she does not appear to have much of a self to assert.

As the designation "blank slate," suggests, these girls are represented as little more than empty

canvases onto which other characters (and also readers/viewers) can project their desires or the personalities that they feel best suit these girls. This is largely facilitated by the fact that the girls themselves seem to have few desires and little personality of their own, and certainly none that they ever openly express.

The character of Amy Jurgens on the ABC Family series *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, which premiered in 2008, exemplifies this representational trope. In the pilot episode, Amy, who is a sophomore in high school, discovers that she is pregnant. The father of her child is a boy who took advantage of her the summer before at band camp, and who has not spoken to her since they slept together. How she feels about this situation is unclear, as Amy has virtually no reaction to the news of her pregnancy. She doesn't get upset, she doesn't get angry, and she doesn't make any plans. Instead she walks around expressionless and mostly silent, until she is finally forced to tell her parents what has happened. While her parents, the baby's father, and her current boyfriend all make plans and argue over how best to handle the situation, Amy expresses no opinions, and allows them to make all of the decisions about her pregnancy and the eventual care of her child for her. She initially opts to have an abortion, but changes her mind after her boyfriend expresses reservations. Likewise, she reverses her decision to put the baby up for adoption after her sister objects to this plan. The passivity that she demonstrates throughout this process is reinforced by the passivity she displays in the flashback episode detailing the night that she conceived her child, in which she is depicted having sex in order to acquiesce to the desires of the baby's father, giving in to the pressure that he places on her to sleep with him, and not out of her own desire to do so. Far from getting any pleasure out of the experience herself, Amy confides to her friend Madison that it happened so quickly that she was not even certain that they actually had sex, a statement that is perhaps meant to dispel romantic

myths about losing one's virginity, but has the effect of implying that Amy has so little selfhood that she was not even present in her body for the experience.

At the same time, unlike the teen mothers in *Juno* and *Gilmore Girls*, Amy does not assert autonomy, resolve to take steps to provide for her and her baby's welfare, or take action to make sure that what she feels are the best interests of both herself and her child are served. In fact, pregnancy does not make Amy more independent, as it does for the protagonists in these girl power texts. Instead, it only serves to make her more dependent and more submissive. Worse, the only time that Amy does assert herself within the narrative, it is to object to the fact that others expect her to take an active role in her life. In "Money for Nothing, Chicks for Free" she is infuriated when her mother insists that she get a part-time job to help pay for the costs of supporting her child, while in "Maybe Baby" she is outraged that her mother is not willing to take care of the baby for her after her high school's daycare closes so that she can continue to participate in band after the baby is born. In this way, Amy embodies the girl as blank slate trope by relinquishing her agency when it comes to making decisions about the direction of her life, but also by refusing to exercise agency when she is called on to assume control of her life.

The Secret Life of the American Teenager is not the only recent popular media text to feature the girl as blank slate as a protagonist. Both *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, which aired on Fox from 2008-2009, and *Dollhouse*, which aired on Fox from 2009-2010, also feature central characters who embody anti-girl power ideals of passivity and compliance while almost entirely lacking either personality or personhood. Significantly, both Cameron in *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* and Echo in *Dollhouse* are represented as warrior girls, but whereas the warrior girl protagonists in girl power texts are depicted as fully autonomous leaders, assert personhood both verbally and in their ability to defend themselves physically, and actively fight

back against attempts to dominate or harm them, Cameron and Echo both follow orders that they have been programmed to carry out, are entirely devoid of personhood, and are repeatedly victimized both physically and (in Echo's case) sexually.

The Sarah Connor Chronicles is based on the *Terminator* film franchise, and picks up the story at a point between the second and third films, with Sarah on the run from the FBI along with her teenage son. Cameron is a terminator sent from the future to protect them, much as the character of the T-800 in *Terminator 2* is, although Cameron takes the form of a teenage girl, whereas the T-800 takes the form of an adult man. Cameron may get a name where the earlier terminator characters do not, but this name in no way signals either a claiming or a granting of personhood within the text. She is just as impassive, emotionless, and lacking in affect as the previous terminators, but she does not get to experience the same discovery of selfhood or the development of human connections that the T-800 does in *Terminator 2*. Instead, for the entire series she remains an agency-less machine, who only acts in accordance with her programming, and who spends the time when she is not guarding John sitting motionless and silent—literally switching off her consciousness so that her body becomes an empty shell.

At the same time, while Cameron possess superhuman strength much as the warrior girls in girl power texts do, her strength does not allow her to fight back against physical attack so much as it allows her to survive incredible amounts of physical injury. Thus, it does not allow her refuse victimization, just to endure it. Cameron's strength also does not grant her agency. It does not allow her to assert her desires or to stand up for herself, largely because in the series she is represented as having neither. This is emphasized when damage to her processor causes her programming to go haywire, prompting her to try to kill John. Even this act of going against her programming is not a represented as a conscious decision on her part, since it is the product of a

programming error and not an act of will. It does, however, initiate the one instance in the series in which Cameron does assert agency, which takes the form of her begging John to deactivate her—essentially to end her life—to prevent her from harming him.

It is in this way that Cameron most closely epitomizes the figure of the girl as blank slate. She literally exists only to serve another, has no self outside of this function, and the only time that she asserts agency or expresses a desire within the text it is to protect someone else rather than for her own self-preservation or pleasure. Moreover, while she may assert agency in asking John to take her life, she is unable to actually *exercise* agency even in the limited form of self-sacrifice, as she must depend on John to deactivate her (which he refuses to do). Thus, Cameron is both a literal blank slate, in that her programming is the only thing that animates her or gives her consciousness, but she is also a blank slate in the sense that she entirely lacks self-determination and is subject to the desires and the whims of the man her agency is subject to.

The same is true of the character of Echo in *Dollhouse*. The narrative of the series revolves around a brothel, nicknamed "the dollhouse," which caters to an extremely upscale clientele. All of the workers at the dollhouse have had their personalities erased using technology that also allows them to be imprinted with character traits and sexual skills/preferences according to the desires of the clients who pay for their services. In this way, the dollhouse employees are also blank slates in the literal sense, "dolls" that exist to enact the fantasies of the clients who pay to "play" with them and who literally project their desires onto them. Echo is one of the dolls, although, thanks to a technical glitch, the process to wipe her memory at the end of each client engagement stops working on her, so that she is able to remember partial details of the things she does—and the different people she becomes—while entertaining clients.

Like the other dolls, when she is not imprinted Echo is represented as entirely docile and complaint, lacking not only a distinct personality, but also a sense of self-preservation that renders her child-like (signified most explicitly through the blank expression she exhibits when she is in her non-imprinted state). This does not change after she begins retaining fragments of the personalities that she has been imprinted with, as no matter how many personalities she acquires she never exhibits distinctive mannerisms, patterns of speech or character traits. At the same time, because none of these personalities are of her own choosing, even when she enacts them they are still not an expression of herself or a marker of selfhood. More importantly they only exist in her consciousness as "echoes" of someone else, so that her own person remains an empty vessel to be filled with the personalities and the desires of others.

Unlike Cameron, Echo's technical glitch does enable her to exercise agency as she grows more resistant to the procedure that erases her imprints, although she is never able to resist the programming that imprints her with other personalities in the first place. Thus, like Cameron, Echo remains a victim for the entire series, although she does attempt to fight back against her victimization, initiating a plan to bring down the dollhouse and to free the other dolls. Girl power discourse is invoked in this narrative development, as Echo's actions in fighting back against the brothel operators is coded as an exercise of power, while her insistence on claiming an identity through the personality fragments that she retains is represented as an assertion of self. Thus, Echo's character arc is organized around an achievement of empowerment of sorts, although empowerment for her does not include transformation from blank slate to fully autonomous subject, since her crowning act of agency in the series is to imprint herself with the personality of the man she has fallen in love with after he dies aiding her in the destruction of the dollhouse. In this way, Echo too ultimately only demonstrates agency by sacrificing herself to

ensure the survival of others. Her primary motivation in destroying the dollhouse is freeing her fellow dolls, while her primary motivation in imprinting herself with Paul's personality is to ensure that he will live on even if it is at the expense of her selfhood.

It is worth noting within this context that Echo's selfhood is also erased on a visual level in the series, further suggesting its positioning as an anti-girl power text in spite of the fact that it shares the same creator and executive producer as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The pilot episode of the series includes repeated images of a nearly naked woman being tortured, which are filmed so that the focus of viewers is directed to the eroticized—passive—display of her body rather than the horrific violence being done to her person. Shots of Echo undergoing a similar form of torture occur in later episodes, and are filmed in the same manner. The series also includes frequent scenes of Echo being sent out on engagements with clients, in which the camera lingers over close-ups of her body clothed in reveling dresses or (on several occasions) fetish wear. Because Echo is displayed in these images as an object for erotic contemplation, they too shift the attention of viewers away from the political implications of what takes place off camera when she meets her clients—which amounts to rape—and direct it instead towards sexually objectifying her by making her object of both the cinematic and the spectatorial gaze, a stripping of her personhood that is different in manner and degree, but the same in terms of its dehumanization. Significantly, the fact that Echo is represented in the narrative as essentially without a self facilitates her visual objectification within the series, rather than the other way around, since the fact that she has no personhood to demonstrate renders her more of an object than a person to begin with.

Thus, if the series invokes girl power discourse in its narrative focus on Echo's journey towards empowerment, it does so to appropriate that discourse rather than to support it.

Dollhouse takes the figure of the warrior girl, but transforms her from agent to victim, while simultaneously changing the terms through which the empowerment of this figure is understood, so that empowerment is defined in the series as self-sacrifice rather than self-assertion. This is true of *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* as well, but beyond that it is one of the central narrative elements of popular culture texts featuring the girl as blank slate, as well as a central theme in these texts. It is also arguably the stake in the deployment of this discursive figure as an inscription point for cultural attitudes underpinning the anti-girl power backlash, since representing female empowerment as the power to surrender one's agency and relinquish one's personhood has implications that go far beyond the texts in which this figure appears.

Celebrating girls' submissiveness, self-abnegation and self-sacrifice does more than just reassert traditional female gender roles. It also refortifies the systems of oppression maintained through the enforcement of adherence to those gender roles by seeking to ensure that the subordinate status of girls/women remains in place. Ultimately then, if girl power representations encourage girls to demand that their status as equal subjects under the law be recognized and respected, representations of the girl as blank slate encourage girls to forfeit their status as equal subjects by celebrating their renunciation of, rather than their insistence on, personhood. In the process, such representations divorce agency from empowerment, but they also foreclose the mobilization of assertions of personhood as a political strategy—a strategy that is central to girl power representations, but also to the projects of adolescent female empowerment that those representations claim to support. It is in this sense that backlash texts featuring the girl as blank slate most clearly seek to undo girl power, since in tying empowerment to the relinquishment of agency, these texts actually end up representing girls' voluntary disempowerment as empowering. This is certainly the case in Stephenie Meyer's

Twilight Saga, perhaps the most popular and influential of all the recent girl as blank slate texts, in which the protagonist, Bella, not only excels at self-sacrifice, but is also represented as gaining empowerment through sacrificing her selfhood.

The *Twilight Saga* As Anti-Girl Power Narrative

The *Twilight Saga* consists of four young adult novels published between 2005 and 2008, *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse* and *Breaking Dawn*. The books were all bestsellers, with *Twilight* and *New Moon* both spending multiple weeks in the number one position on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and *Breaking Dawn* breaking sales records, selling 1.3 million copies on the first day of its release alone (Jacks). The novels have spun off into an equally successful film franchise, but beyond that they have become something of a pop culture phenomenon, generating a legion of devoted fans self-identified as "Twihards" whose various communities have a strong presence on the Internet. Twihards are also in evidence in large numbers on video sharing site YouTube, on which *Twilight* fan videos make up a significant portion of the content. While the popularity of the *Twilight Saga* suggests a great deal about the ways in which the cultural values promoted by the books reflect the cultural climate in the U.S. at the present moment, it becomes important within the context of this study because of what the books suggest about how that climate relates to the turn away from girl power within recent popular culture texts, as well as the assumption of the status of girlhood icon that the girl as blank slate has achieved in recent years.

The *Twilight Saga* tells the story of seventeen year old Bella Swan, who moves to a small town on the Olympic peninsula to live with her father after her mother's remarriage. Once there, Bella falls in love with the handsome and stand-offish Edward Cullen, who turns out to be a vampire. Initially, Edward resists becoming romantically involved with Bella because he fears

that if his hunger for blood overpowers him he will not be able to stop himself from killing her. Eventually, however, Edward gives in to his attraction to Bella and they begin dating according to strict guidelines that prevent them from having any physical contact, a plot development that has obvious references to (and expresses obvious support for) the contemporary conservative Christian abstinence movement, particularly given the ways in which Edward's bloodlust and his sexual desire for Bella are conflated in the books.

Over the course of the four novels, Bella is drawn into Edward's secret world, and she begins petitioning him to make her a vampire so that they can be together forever. Edward refuses on the grounds that he does not want to condemn Bella to his fate, and eventually he leaves her in order to give her a chance at a "normal" life, a plan that somewhat misfires when Bella begins dating her friend Jacob, only to discover that he is a werewolf. The love triangle between Edward, Bella and Jacob structures the narratives in the last three books, although Bella is decided from the beginning that she wants to be with Edward, and it is Edward who needs to be convinced that Bella is not better off with Jacob. When the Volturi, the vampire council charged with keeping the existence of vampires a secret, discovers that Edward has revealed his true nature to Bella, they order him to either turn her or kill her, and Bella finally gets her wish to become a vampire. After a lengthy negotiation that ends with Bella having to agree to marry Edward before he will make her a vampire, the two wed shortly after Bella's high school graduation. However, before Edward can effect Bella's transformation, she unexpectedly (and inexplicably) conceives a child on their wedding night, a development that nearly leads to her death due to complications from the pregnancy and the childbirth. Edward saves her by making her a vampire at last, and after a protracted showdown with the Volturi over whether or not their child poses a threat to the human world, the fourth book ends with Bella, Edward and their

daughter settling down to an eternity of heteronormative domestic bliss.

In its depiction of Bella, the *Twilight Saga* draws on girl power representational tropes, suggesting the extent to which girl power narratives have altered the pop culture landscape, so that even texts that don't support girl power can't entirely escape its influence. The first book in the series, in particular, goes to great lengths to establish Bella as strong-willed and independent, invoking her decision to move in with her father after her mother remarries to support this depiction, as well as the self-sufficiency she (supposedly) demonstrates in taking over the domestic duties from her father after she arrives. Bella's self-sufficiency is also suggested through repeated references in all four novels to the fact that she has had to grow up fast, since her mother required more care than she was able to give Bella. For example, in *New Moon* Bella confides to readers ". . . my mother had wanted to marry Phil on a beach in Mexico. Of course, like all her plans it had fallen through. But not before I'd made all the practical arrangements I could for her" (421). While this passage illustrates self-reliance in terms of Bella's ability to carry out the tasks required to take care of these plans for her mother when she herself is still only a teenager, it also does so through the matter-of-fact tone in which Bella imparts this information, which implies that she has become so used to the reversal of the parent and child roles in her relationship with her mother that she no longer feels anger, pain or resentment because of it.

Conversely, Bella's coding as strong-willed is suggested through Edward's alternate bemusement and frustration with her ostensible stubbornness, which is emphasized throughout all four novels. Significantly, Edward only accuses Bella of being stubborn when she disagrees with him or resists behavior he is trying to pressure her into. In this way, what is coded in the books as stubbornness is actually Bella asserting agency, with the result that even the most minor

assertions of adolescent female personhood are recast as intransigence within the narrative. For example, in *New Moon* Edward teases Bella for her stubbornness when she protests his decision to allow his vampire "family" to throw a birthday party for her in spite of the fact that she has expressly asked him not to. Similarly, in *Eclipse* Bella is again labeled stubborn by Edward when she refuses to let him pay for her college education, as well as to talk her into attending college, which she does not wish to do. Edward also identifies both Bella's stubbornness and her independence as the motivating factors behind her initial resistance to his condition that she marry him before he makes her a vampire—although in point of fact her reluctance stems from her fear that her mother will disapprove of this decision and not because Bella herself has any objection to being an eighteen year old bride. In this way, stubbornness and adolescent female independence are conflated in the novels, so that independence is still invoked as a marker of empowerment, but in far less positive terms than in girl power texts. At the same time, by linking stubbornness to assertions of agency, all four novels end up promoting the view that any time a girl expresses an opinion or desire, or insists on her right to make decisions about the direction of her life, she is being obstinate, as well as—to use Edward's most frequent term for Bella's assertions of agency—"unreasonable."

Thus, while *The Twilight Saga* mobilizes representational tropes appropriated from girl power texts, it does so in order to undermine girl power, much in the same manner as the other backlash texts described in the previous section. Indeed, not only is Bella the paragon of dependence and passivity, but her supposed stubbornness and self-reliance only ever manifest in the most selfless and self-effacing of ways. For example, if invoking her cooking, cleaning and waiting on her father as markers of self-sufficiency is problematic, this is largely because these behaviors so closely resemble those of the dutiful daughters and (more disturbingly) good wives

that populate so much of U.S. popular culture. Like these representational archetypes, Bella demonstrates both her subservience and her compliance with traditional female gender roles through her willingness to put the comfort and the needs of the paterfamilias ahead of her own, as evidenced by the numerous instances in which she rushes home, delays homework, or otherwise interrupts her day to make sure that dinner is on the table on time. Similarly, the only time that Bella is depicted acting in a manner that truly demonstrates self-reliance, it is in *Breaking Dawn* when, fearing that she will be killed trying to protect her daughter from the Volturi, she secretly makes arrangements for Jacob to smuggle her daughter out of town and to care for her in the event of Bella's death. Significantly, while Bella does exhibit both independence and capability in setting this plan in motion, she only takes proactive measures in this instance to protect her daughter, so that, much as in the case of the protagonists in *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* and *Dollhouse*, in *Breaking Dawn* too Bella only demonstrates autonomy in acting in the service of others, and never on her own behalf.

At the same time, while evidence of Bella's agency is in short supply in the *Twilight Saga*, evidence of her passivity abounds. Throughout all four novels, Edward consistently makes unilateral decisions about what is in Bella's best interest and acts accordingly, even when his decisions run counter to what she wants. The most egregious example of this occurs in *New Moon* when he breaks off his relationship with her (for her own good) in a particularly callous manner. Far from being angry with him, however, Bella meekly accepts his decision, and although she is so devastated by his loss that she suffers an emotional breakdown that nearly requires psychiatric hospitalization, she immediately takes him back without reservation when he returns and expresses repentance. Much criticism has already been directed at the books for the ways in which Bella's relationship with Edward so perfectly mirrors textbook descriptions of

abusive relationships: Bella's involvement with Edward isolates her from her family and friends.

She is hypervigilant around him and constantly monitors her behavior out of fear of doing

something that will elicit his displeasure. She assumes responsibility for his bad treatment of her

and makes excuses for him no matter how much suffering he puts her through. However, as her

decision to take him back at the end of *New Moon* demonstrates, it is not merely the

romanticizing of abusive behaviors that is problematic in the depiction of Bella's relationship

with Edward; it is also the way in which that relationship requires Bella to surrender all control

over both her life and Edward's place in it to him.

This establishes a pattern that repeats throughout all of the subsequent books, in which

Bella entirely relinquishes her agency to Edward. Not only does she go along with every

decision that he makes about their relationship, but she cedes control of that relationship to him

completely. He decides that they will marry. He decides the conditions under which he will

make her a vampire. He decides the conditions of their intimacy, and in each instance she

acquiesces to—and complies with—his wishes. The control that Edward exercises over Bella

when it comes to their sexual relationship is particularly unsettling, because while it is justified

in the narrative by the fact that her life is in danger if they get too carried away in their passion

for one another, it is represented in terms that require Bella to willingly (and absolutely) submit

to Edward's power over her as well as Edward's desires, which include suppressing all traces of

her personhood so that she becomes little more than an inanimate prop for his use.

Whenever they kiss, for example, Bella is instructed to stay perfectly still. She is not

allowed to respond in any way, and if she does Edward immediately withdraws from her. She is

also not allowed to initiate physical intimacy, but instead must wait until (or if) he does so. In

the few instance in which Bella breaks these rules, Edward punishes her by either sulking, flying

into a rage and chastising her, or else disappearing without any indication as to when he will return. These instances are few and far between, however, because Bella is both accomplished in submissiveness and happy to submit to Edward in almost every way.

   In fact, the only time that she fights him on anything in the novels it is his refusal to grant her desire to make her a vampire—the only other desire she ever asserts outside of her desire for him. This has been a particular point of critique on the part of feminist commentators, because it points to the ways in which the only time Bella asserts herself in the narrative it is to insist on remaining in an entirely one-sided relationship with a man who is manipulative and controlling and who treats her badly. At the same time, however, it also signals Bella's representation according to the trope of girl as blank slate, since Bella is not just represented as submissive and other-directed in *The Twilight Saga*, but she is also represented as largely without any personality traits outside of her desire for Edward. The only opinions that Bella ever expresses in the novels concern Edward's physical perfection (which in some cases go on for entire pages). She appears to have no interests outside of housework, and although she starts off in the first novel as an avid reader, she abandons her passion for books as soon as she meets Edward. She also repeatedly assures Edward that she will do anything he asks if he will stay with her, and she follows through on this promise by altering everything about herself and her life to please him. In this way, while Bella appears to sacrifice her personhood for Edward's approval, she also presents herself as a blank canvas onto which he can project his vision of who he wants her to be. The problem is that Bella doesn't appear to have much of a self to begin with in the novels even before she meets Edward, so that ultimately she doesn't so much sacrifice her personhood for his love as she allows him to dictate her personhood entirely, much as she allows him to set limits on her exercise of that personhood by submitting to his control over her.

Within this context, it is worth noting that the only times that Bella exercises agency in the novels it is to demonstrate her willingness to be with Edward no matter the cost to herself. In *New Moon*, after Edward leaves her, Bella begins engaging in dangerous behavior because she discovers that if she risks her life, she hears him admonishing her in her head. This leads to Bella intentionally crashing a motorcycle and eventually jumping off of a cliff, nearly drowning in the process. While none of these instances of self-harm are explicitly coded as suicide attempts, they do suggest that Bella is willing to give up her life just for the *impression* of being with Edward, a suggestion that becomes even more troubling when taken in consideration with the fact that these are the only instances in which Bella acts of her own volition in the novel, most of which she spends nearly catatonic with grief over Edward's abandonment of her.

In an even more disturbing example, in *Breaking Dawn* Bella exercises agency by insisting that she and Edward consummate their marriage while she is still human, in spite of the risk of Edward losing control and killing her. It is worth noting here that while a great deal of the criticism of *The Twilight Saga* has focused on its pro-abstinence message, the series' depictions of sex are equally troubling, as are the messages that it communicates about sexual relationships outside of the directive to refrain from engaging in them until after marriage—most notably the notion promoted through Edward's depiction that men have no control over their sexual impulses, as well as the message promoted through Bella's sexual relationship with him that fulfilling relationships for girls are those in which their sexual partners have absolute control over girls' bodies, what they do with them, and what is done to them. Sex is depicted as dangerous and deadly in the novels, but not as pleasurable or as an act of intimacy. Instead, the narrative conflation of Edward's bloodlust with his sexual lust, together with his enhanced vampire strength, makes sex with Bella a violent and potentially fatal prospect for her. This

point is driven home by the following passage from *Breaking Dawn*, which is included in the

chapter that details the loss of Bella's virginity:

> I stared at my naked body in the full-length mirror behind the door . . . There was
>
> a faint shadow across one of my cheekbones, and my lips were a little swollen,
>
> but other than that my face was fine. The rest of me was decorated with patches
>
> of blue and purple. I concentrated on the bruises that would be hardest to hide—
>
> my arms and my shoulders. They weren't so bad. My skin marked up easily. By
>
> the time a bruise showed I'd usually forgotten how I'd come by it. Of course,
>
> these were just developing. I'd look even worse tomorrow. (95-96)

This entire passage seems to have been lifted directly from a narrative about spousal

abuse rather than a romance in which the relationship between the lovers is depicted positively,

and the fact that the two are so easily confused in the *Twilight Saga* is problematic, to say the

least. However, if representations that depict fearing violence from your sexual partner as

romantic are cause for concern, more horrifying is the fact that Bella's only concern in this

chapter is Edward's guilt over having hurt her. Indeed, far from caring about the damage done to

her person, Bella is depicted as being so consumed by her love for Edward and so desperate to be

with him that she insists on continuing to risk her health and safety to have sex with him, and

when he refuses, she sets out to seduce him in order to overcome his resistance. Thus, Bella's

exercise of agency in this instance involves both her asserting her sexual desires and acting on

them, but because those desires are entirely directed around her obsession with Edward, it is

difficult to read it as an example of Bella's empowerment, particularly since empowerment

within this context is the power to chose to have violence done to one's person in the name of

love.

Breaking Dawn also includes the only other exercise of agency that Bella demonstrates in the novels outside of the two instances discussed above. After becoming pregnant, Bella refuses to terminate her pregnancy, even though the part-vampire child she is carrying is gestating at an accelerated rate, and is killing her in the process by feeding on her blood through the umbilical cord. All of the other characters in the novel try to convince Bella to abort, noting that it is unlikely that either she or the baby will survive childbirth even if she manages to carry it to full term. However, Bella is adamant that the potential life of the fetus is more important than her own life, and she explicitly invokes both her autonomy and her right to have others respect that autonomy in sticking to her decision to bear the child. In this way, the novel very obviously mobilizes anti-choice rhetoric in applauding Bella's desire to continue on with a high-risk pregnancy, despite the fact that it will cost her her life, while simultaneously appropriating pro-choice discourse to do so.[1] At the same time, however, the novel also mobilizes girl power rhetoric by representing this narrative turn as evidence of Bella's empowerment. Furthermore, as in the case of *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* and *Dollhouse*, it also repeats the narrative pattern indicative of girl as blank slate texts, in which empowerment is conceived of as the relinquishment of personhood, since Bella's exercise of agency in this instance is not directed towards the demonstration or defense of her personhood, but rather is deployed in service of sacrificing herself to save someone else.

Significantly, if Bella's submissiveness and selflessness (in both senses of that term) are invoked in the *Twilight Saga* to code her in the representational tradition of the girl as blank slate, it is the fact that her relinquishment of her personhood—first to Edward and then to her daughter—is represented as empowering that aligns the novels with anti-girl power backlash. Much as in other anti-girl power popular culture texts, the novels take the central goals of

adolescent female empowerment and the central signifiers of that empowerment in girl power narratives—the assertion of personhood, the exercise of agency, and the insistence on being true to oneself and one's aspirations no matter how much adversity one faces—and shift the ends towards which the power derived from these things is exercised, so that they become about girls surrendering their status as subjects rather than claiming it. This becomes evident in the novels not only in terms of the ways in which Bella's exercises of power are all directed towards self-sacrifice, but also in the representation of the power that she does exercise in terms of her capacity for self-denial and self-effacement.

The *Twilight Saga* is explicit in its representation of Bella's relationship with Edward as empowering for her, even though that relationship entails submitting to his control, subordinating her desires to his, and existing only for him—all of which seems particularly disempowering, especially when taken together with the emotional suffering and the physical peril that Bella routinely experiences as a part of that relationship. Nonetheless, Bella repeatedly asserts that her life is much better for being involved with Edward, a testimonial that the novels mobilize to suggest empowerment by invoking girl power discourses that equate empowerment with feeling good about oneself. This discursive move is also what allows the novels to position Bella's surrender of her agency to Edward and her exercises of self-sacrifice as empowering, because she asserts that it is both what she desires and what will make her happy. Nowhere is this more clear than in *Breaking Dawn* when Bella resolves to sacrifice herself to the Volturi to protect Edward and her daughter. In reflecting on this decision, Bella confides to readers "All I wanted was to love him [Edward] for as much as possible in the limited time given to me" (573), beyond that, she continues, she is happy to do whatever she can to "give the others a chance" (577).

At the same time, Bella is also represented as becoming empowered after becoming a

vampire. Once Edward turns her, Bella begins to demonstrate a self-confidence and a belief in herself that she did not possess when human, both of which are invoked to signal empowerment as they are in girl power texts, although, again, in *The Twilight Saga* these things empower Bella in the sense of making her feel good about herself rather than by granting her additional agency. Moreover, while Bella gains supernatural powers when she becomes a vampire, those powers manifest entirely in terms of a capacity for self-abnegation. The bloodlust that torments all the other vampires is not an issue for Bella, as she proves herself to have a limitless facility for denying it. Her power as a vampire is therefore represented primarily as the power of self-control, which not only reinforces her passivity, but, in the tradition of the representational trope of the girl as blank slate, replaces self-assertion as the mark of an empowered girl. Similarly, Bella gains an additional, unique vampire ability after her transformation, something that it is revealed only certain vampires do. However, while Edward's unique vampire power takes the form of the ability to read minds, Bella's special power takes the form of the ability to project a psychic shield around others to prevent them from being affected by the powers of other vampires. In this way, the power Bella gains through becoming a vampire also becomes the power to protect others, which reinforces the ways in which self-sacrifice and the relinquishment of personhood through the willingness to put the needs of others ahead of one's own are both represented as empowering in the novels. Ultimately, then, to the extent that these representations appropriate girl power tropes in order to shift the exercise of girl power from asserting power over oneself to exercising power in service of others, they suggest the ways in which popular culture representations of the girl as blank slate are not merely deployed to counter girl power discourse, but also to promote the idea that relinquishing one's personhood and renouncing one's agency is what empowerment looks like for adolescent girls.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Girl Power

This question of what empowerment for girls looks like in the *Twilight Saga* harkens back to the point raised in chapter one that it is the ways of being a girl instantiated through popular culture representations and the ends that are served by encouraging girls to adopt those ways of being that are the central stake in both mass media representations of girl power and their analysis. Girl power discourse may not have succeeded in either initiating or accomplishing substantive social changes in terms of the opportunities available to girls in the United States or the barriers to opportunity that they face, but it has had a significant impact on popular culture representations of adolescent femininity that, in many ways, have forever altered the pop culture landscape. Even as the rhetoric of girl power has begun to recede from public discourse and to disappear from popular culture texts, its influence continues to be evidenced, all of which makes the question of that influence all the more crucial.

Mass media girl power texts position themselves as both a response to and a deviation from earlier pop culture representations of adolescent girls that depict them as vapid, shallow, boy-obsessed, and entirely lacking in intellect or competency. They also challenge the devalued status of both girls and girlhood in dominant U.S. culture by insisting on girls' individual worth and their social value. In representing girls as confident, competent, honorable and assertive these texts present girls in a positive manner that counters the negative significations they are conventionally invested with in mainstream cultural texts, as well as mainstream cultural discourses. In doing so, girl power texts also encourage new ways of thinking about girls and new ways of conceiving of girlhood. At the same time, girl power texts that situate girls' empowerment in their deviation from adolescent female norms provide a counter to narrative traditions that equate gender transgression with delinquency, while girl power texts that locate

girls' empowerment in their reenactment of girlhood norms seek to resignify hegemonic adolescent femininity by representing it as a source of power rather than disempowerment. To the extent that all of these representations aim to represent girls differently and/or more positively than they traditionally have been represented in mainstream U.S. popular culture, they have succeeded in shifting how we as a culture understand what it is and what it means to be an empowered girl at the present moment.

However, as discussed in chapter two, concerns about the power girls have access to and the manner in which they exercise that power have been central to both popular discourses about girls and popular culture texts featuring girls since the emergence of girl as an identity category in the late nineteenth century. What changes in mass media girl power texts is the manner in which girls' power is represented. Girl power texts stand out from previous popular culture representations of adolescent female empowerment in that they assert the need for that empowerment rather than discouraging or condemning it. If girl power texts celebrate girls' exercise of power, though, they are not unqualified in this celebration. In fact, while girl power texts do advocate girls' assertion of both agency and personhood within the public sphere, they also exhibit reservations when it comes to girls achieving greater social power. Chapters three and four detail the methods through which girls are made to suffer for their exercise of power in warrior girl, girl avenger and outsider girl texts, either by sacrificing personal happiness, forfeiting social acceptance, or being punished for challenging their subordination. In the process, these texts draw on representational tropes that pathologize female power, although they do shift the terms in which the exercise of power by girls is invested with significations of the pathological within mainstream U.S. popular culture, so that rather than the exercise of power being invoked as an indicator of emotional disturbance, psychological damage is positioned as

the (unavoidable) consequence for girls who exercise power. The result is that empowerment may carry rewards for the protagonists in these texts, but those rewards come with—and in some cases are outweighed by—the suffering that empowerment also brings them.

At the same time, while girl power texts may depart from the earlier popular culture texts discussed in chapter two in terms of their avowed support for girl's empowerment, they are aligned with those texts in terms of their recapitulation of patriarchal anxieties surrounding female empowerment. Representations of the warrior girl and the girl avenger are invested with significations of the castrating woman, drawing on patriarchal discourse that conceives of girls'/women's empowerment as contingent upon—and inevitably resulting in—boys'/men's disempowerment. Likewise, warrior girls and girl avengers are also frequently represented using their sexual appeal to entrap or to victimize men, or else they are invested with powers of seduction that cause the men they become sexually involved with to lose their self-control and/or their peace of mind—a powerlessness that constitutes a symbolic form of castration. Such representations draw on the trope of the femme fatale, a narrative tradition that also encompasses patriarchal fears of men's disempowerment at the hands of powerful women, and thus that casts female empowerment in equally negative terms. It also further undercuts the ostensible intent of these texts to promote adolescent female empowerment, in that representing empowered girls as filles fatale effectively limits the power they are able to exercise to their sexuality, which is hardly a new or progressive way of conceiving of female power. As such, to the extent that girl power texts featuring warrior girls, outsider girls and girl avengers reiterate earlier narrative traditions that pathologize powerful girls and/or present them as unequivocal threats to the social (and the patriarchal) order, these texts do not constitute a radical break from earlier pop culture representations of adolescent girls, but rather a continuation of both the representational practices

those texts employ and the dominant ideologies supported by them.

What matters in terms of both the cultural impact and the cultural import of these texts, then, it is not whether girls are represented as empowered within their narratives, but rather the forms that their empowerment takes and how that empowerment is represented. Girl power texts might be progressive in their endorsement of adolescent female empowerment, but the ways in which they conceive of both power and empowerment are not. As discussed in chapters three and four, the exercise of power in warrior girl and girl avenger texts frequently takes the form of acts of violence that conceive of power in terms of force, but not in any other way. Similarly, in outsider girl narratives girl power takes the form of girls asserting supremacy over other girls. In both cases, these texts fail to conceive of power outside of patriarchal terms, in which power is only understood and enacted in terms of dominance and hierarchy.

Addressing the warrior girl archetype, Sherrie Inness questions in *Tough Girls* whether "training an army of girls to grow up to be Ninja warriors" is an effective strategy for social change, but an equally crucial question is whether it is a progressive strategy for social change, as well as whether the society it takes as its ultimate goal is any different—or better—than the one it seeks to transform (9). To the extent that all of the girl power texts discussed in chapters three and four can only conceive of the exercise of power in terms of acts of dominance or humiliation, they fail to deviate from patriarchal understandings of power in any way other than that female characters are the ones who exercise it. Moreover, reinforcing an ideological schema in which women and men can only ever be locked in struggles over power, and one group can only exercise power over the other, does nothing to encourage an alternative to the hierarchical, gendered division of power in patriarchal culture. Again, it merely reverses the position of the dominant and the oppressed groups.

This is also true in a different way of outsider girl and girlie girl texts, in which girls who deviate from adolescent female norms are pitted in struggles for power against girls who conform to them. In these texts too, power is never shared among all girls or between girls and boys. It can only ever be exercised by a select group, and it can only ever be exercised *over* another group. Thus, while within these girl power texts the end toward which power is exercised is indeed the empowerment of adolescent girls, the texts themselves are deployed in service of maintaining patriarchal ideology rather than undermining it. This places serious limitations on the effectiveness of these texts as instruments for subverting hegemonic social values or for promoting social change, because in challenging girls' subordinate places within patriarchal society, but not patriarchy itself, girl power texts seem to be ultimately concerned with ensuring that patriarchy will remain intact even if girls' status within patriarchal culture might change.

This safeguarding of patriarchy is also evident in the girlie girl texts discussed in chapter five in terms of their conceptualization of girls' empowerment as girls feeling good about themselves. Drawing on girl power discourse that measures girls' empowerment entirely in terms of their self-esteem, these texts likewise position the manner in which girls enact their girlhood as the site for intervention in projects for adolescent female empowerment rather than the social structures in which they do so. In the process they conflate girls' empowerment with girls feeling positive about their identities as girls, so that the empowerment endorsed through these texts is based on girls feeling empowered as individuals rather than girls gaining access to power on an institutional level. They also substitute positive representations of girlhood for critiques of the social structures in which girls are granted an inferior status as the discursive strategy they mobilize to advocate for girls' empowerment. Likewise, on the level of narrative,

these texts similarly conceive of girls' empowerment in terms of individual(ist) projects of self-transformation rather than collective projects for social transformation. All of this sets limits on the type and the level of empowerment that girls are able to achieve in girl power texts featuring girlie girl protagonists, but it also points to the ways in which those texts are ultimately deployed, much as warrior girl, girl avenger and outsider girl texts are, to police and to contain adolescent female empowerment within patriarchal society rather than to facilitate it.

This further points to the ways in which positive representations of girls are not necessarily subversive representations of girls, a conflation that is encouraged by the emphasis within girl power discourse on media representations as tools for girls' empowerment. All of the representations of girls in the texts analyzed in this study may encourage audiences to view girls in a new way, but they do not necessarily encourage them to view girls in a way that deviates from hegemonic cultural values or that provides an alternative to patriarchal understandings of gender and power, the relationship between the two, or how either one is enacted. In fact, the entire basis for the reading of these texts as providing audiences with "positive" representations of teenage girls rests on the fact that those representations are positive because they conceive of adolescent female power in patriarchal terms. Additionally, because all of these texts are so heavily invested in the preservation of patriarchy, they also point to the ways in which pro-girl representations are not necessarily feminist representations, a conflation that is likewise encouraged in commentary surrounding girl power texts by the ways in which that commentary draws on discursive associations between feminism and female empowerment to insist that narratives about powerful women always and only support feminist values and reflect feminist practices.

However, if the models of girlhood promoted by girl power texts and the manner in

which girls' power is exercised within them are not reflective of U.S. feminisms, they are not entirely anti-feminist either. The girl power texts discussed in this study may not embrace or articulate feminist values, but they do express some support for feminist goals even if they conceive of those goals and the measure of their achievement in decidedly patriarchal terms. Additionally, much in the same way their articulation of feminist values is qualified by their articulation of patriarchal values (and vice versa), it is also qualified by their incorporation of postfeminist discourse and the discourses of the anti-feminist backlash. If girl power texts draw on feminist discourse to validate the need for girls' empowerment within U.S. society, they also draw on postfeminist discourse to represent that empowerment as having already been achieved, and therefore as being a choice for girls rather than a right. Mass media representations of girl power also frequently draw on anti-feminist discourse in terms of their depiction of empowerment as a bad choice for girls, because empowered girls in such texts end up either miserable or monsters.

While the incorporation of all of these contradictory discourses about female empowerment in girl power texts can be explained in terms of the desire on the part of their producers and distributors to appeal to the largest possible audience in order maximize ratings or box office returns, this does not change the fact that, as a result, girl power is not a patriarchally-identified discourse, a feminist discourse, a postfeminist discourse, or an anti-feminist discourse, but is instead a discourse that is all of these things at the same time. As suggested in the introductory chapter, this means that mass media representations of girl power are subversive in some instances and ideologically orthodox in others—in both cases in highly qualified and inconsistent ways. Mass media girl power texts are therefore perhaps best understood as sites at which cultural understandings of adolescent femininity and adolescent female power are

continually being negotiated and (re)conceptualized. It also suggests, though, that the "power"

exercised through those texts in terms of shaping cultural understandings of what it is and what it

means to be an empowered girl in the U.S. at the present moment is a power that is deployed in

disparate and contradictory ways.

Ultimately, then, while in mobilizing mass media representations as instruments for girls'

empowerment rather than tools of their disempowerment, girl power discourse challenges

accepted understandings of the function of mainstream cultural texts as ideological apparatuses,

it doesn't really challenge mainstream ideology except in highly qualified ways. Indeed, though

the efficacy of this project may have been limited from the start by the investment that the

industries in which these texts are produced have in the status quo of U.S. society, what has

ultimately circumscribed their potential as radical reimaginings of gender and power is their own

investment in that status quo. Alternative representations of girlhood to those sanctioned by

dominant culture serve a variety of important ideological functions, from granting representation

and extending legitimacy to girls in marginalized identity groups to engendering possibilities for

understanding and enacting girlhood in new ways. This arguably becomes even more important

in the current girl power backlash period, as retrogressive images of girlhood have begun to

dominate U.S. popular culture while alternatives to them have begun to disappear. However, as

this study has sought to suggest, it is not enough to represent girls in unconventional ways if

those representations support conventional values. In the end, while the fact that girl power texts

support the notion that "girls rule" is admirable, the ends towards which such representations

are—or can be—deployed rests on the question of what they are represented ruling and how that

rule is both accomplished and exercised. It is upon this question that girl power's legacy rests,

but it is also the answer to this question that determines what the legacy of girl power will be.

END NOTES

Introduction

[1] Girl Power discourse has, in fact, played a limited role in political activism surrounding girls, mostly due to the appropriation of girl power rhetoric by activist projects and not the engagement of girl power discourse with political work. For example, the phrase "girl power" was adopted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1997 as the title for a national public education campaign developed in conjunction with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, the purpose of which was to

> [provide] accurate health information and positive messages to girls and their caregivers; [raise] public awareness about substance abuse and risky behaviors; [help] girls develop the skills they need to resist unhealthy influences and make positive choices; and [support] girls . . . [by helping] them pursue opportunities to build skills and self-esteem through sports, academics, the arts and other endeavors. (http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2000pres/20000426.html, accessed February 28, 2009)

Shortly thereafter, the Girl Scouts began offering a girl power participation patch for Junior Girl Scouts (girls ages 8-11) who take part in activities or carry out projects related to the DHHS program (Lopez, Kathryn Jean. "The Cookie Crumbles." *The National Review*. 10/23/2000. http://www.nationalreview.com/23oct00/lopez102300.shtml, accessed 06/13/2009).

[2] *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. Prods. Tom Gardner and Sut Jhally. DVD. Media Education Foundation, 1998.

[3] The performing arts not usually considered a part of popular culture because of the high culture/mass culture divide instantiated in the writings of members of the Frankfurt School (among others). However, there have been a large number of theatre productions that have achieved pop culture status, and among these, *Wicked,* based on the Gregory Maguire novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, is often associated with girl power.

[4] For more on the Feminist Summer Camp program, see their Website at the following URL: http://www.soapboxinc.com/feminist-summer-camp/

[5] For more on Kiri Davis, see her website at http://www.kiridavis.com/index.php?option= com_content&task=blogcategory&id=0&Itemid=88888952. To view *A Girl Like Me*, go to http://www.youtube.com/user/mediathatmatters#p/search/0/YWyI77Yh1Gg.

[6] This is not by any means to suggest that girls are the only ones who listen to or enjoy the Spice Girls' music. However, in most popular and academic analyses it is the effect of their music on girls' sense of self and their perception of feminism that is the focus.

[7] See, for example, Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*

and Susan Douglas's *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female With the Mass Media.*

Chapter One: Producing Girls

[1] This is not by any means an exhaustive list of feminist uses of Foucault. The theorists listed here are a representative sample of some of the more prominent feminist, media and culture scholars to apply Foucauldian theory to questions of female embodiment and female identity.

[2] In this sense, it is also worth noting that one can perform girlhood, and thus qualify as a girl, regardless of whether or not the gender one is performing matches one's biological sex. Transgender identification is no more or less performative than "normative" gender identification, and to the extent that both require an internalization of gender norms to the point where they are performed unconsciously as an expression of one's "natural" gender identity, transgender identification is no more volitional than gender identification in which one's gender matches one's biological sex according to hegemonic cultural standards.

[3] The one exception is, of course, in discourses that linked male delinquency to homosexuality, in which it was a lack rather than an excess of masculine-coded traits and behaviors that became the mark of delinquency and the cause for intervention.

[4] *Sister Carrie*'s protagonist ends up materially successful but deeply unhappy, while *Daisy Miller*'s ends up dying from malaria contracted during an illicit nocturnal meeting with a suitor amidst the ruins of the Coliseum

[5] It should be noted here that Simone de Beauvoir is actually the first one to make this argument in *The Second Sex*, and most of the girl problem literature that embraces the view that girls lose their agency, their confidence and their sense of self at the onset of adolescence cite de Beauvoir in making this claim.

Chapter Two: The Girl of The Period

[1] For more on First Wave feminist attitudes towards the flapper see Latham pgs. 32-40.

[2] For a thorough examination of the origins and evolution of the figure of the Daddy's Girl see Valerie Walkerdine's *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[3] In 2003 Simon and Schuster retired the original *Nancy Drew* series. They did not retire the character, however. Nancy was updated for contemporary readers (among other things replacing her trademark roadster with a hybrid car) and reintroduced in 2004 as the protagonist of the *Nancy Drew, Girl Detective* series, which was still in publication, with new books being released, at the time of this writing.

[4] For example, Nash notes in her discussion of the V-Girl that "in the popular press, women who took war jobs found themselves alternately praised as patriotic servants and excoriated as bad mothers whose work made them neglect their children. Those neglected children, in turn, were the focus of the delinquency panic" (136).

[5] For example, *Rebel Without a Cause* draws repeated correlations between cultural anxieties surrounding nuclear apocalypse and the delinquent behavior of its three central protagonists, while *Blackboard Jungle* explicitly links delinquency to race and ethnicity.

[6] See, for example, Douglas's discussion of representations of feminism on *Maude* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* in *Where the Girls Are*, pgs. 202-209.

[7] See, for example, "Hel-l-l-p," in which Laurie and her mother decide to go camping, and her brothers, convinced that the two women will come to harm in the woods on their own, convince Reuben, their band manager, to accompany them on a rescue mission, only to discover that Laurie and her mother are far better able to survive in the wilderness than they are. See also "This Male Chauvinist Piggy Went to Market," in which Laurie and Keith agree to switch gender roles after Keith jokes that women are inferior to men. While Keith fails to master cooking, Laurie proves skilled at auto repair, and when word of Keith being bested by a girl at both girl's and boy's activities gets around school and he is teased by the school bully, Laurie steps in and defends Keith by flipping the bully over and pinning him to the ground.

[8] Geri's portrayal of the facts of life is also noteworthy because, unlike most pop culture representations of disabled characters, in which those characters are played by able-bodied actors, Geri was played by actress and comedian Geri Jewell, who has cerebral palsy herself, and who actively campaigns on behalf of disability rights.

[9] It is worth noting here that in addition to sharing the same director, both *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful* were also scripted by writer/director John Hughes, the preeminent auteur of 1980s teen films.

Chapter Three: Tough Girls As Empowered Girls

[1] While readings of tough girl texts as feminist texts argue that they promote feminist values through their representations of strong, assertive women who defy hegemonic gender roles, readings of these texts as anti-feminist likewise assert that they either promote patriarchal values or seek to further backlash rhetoric by containing and/or punishing women for transgressing normative female gender roles.

[2] In an interview included in the featurette "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Television With a Bite" on disk six of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Season Six* DVD box set, Whedon asserts that he envisioned the series as a "low key funny feminist horror movie." In a later sequence in the same featurette, he also claims that he intended the series as way of turning girl power from a "phrase" into a "phase" in U.S. culture.

[3] As both Inness and Susan Douglas demonstrate, contemporary iterations of the tough girl have roots in a number of television shows from the 1960s and 1970s, including *The Avengers*, *Charlie's Angles*, *Wonder Woman*, *Policewoman* and *The Bionic Woman*, all of whom featured protagonists who defied conventional female gender roles, as well as conventional female narrative roles. However, in their deployment of talking back as a tactic of empowerment, they also arguably have roots the smart-mouthed protagonists of series like *Maude* and *Roseanne*.

[4] *TV Guide* listed the series as one of the fifty greatest TV shows of all time in the May 4-10, 2002 edition, while *Entertainment Weekly* listed it as one of the twenty-five top cult TV shows of all time in its September 29, 2009 issue and *Time* listed it as one of the top one hundred best TV shows of all time in its September 5, 2007 issue.

[5] Although Zhora is identified as a soldier in the dossier Dekkard is given concerning the Replicants, she is not shown engaging in any form of combat in the film. Instead, she is depicted doing an erotic striptease at the club where she has been working. She does attack Dekkard when he confronts her, but even the attack is invested with sexual overtones that highlight her sexual desirability far more than her combat skills. The same is true of Pris, who is explicitly identified as a "pleasure model" and whose fight to escape Dekkard is likewise invested with an erotic subtext.

[6] In "'Pretty Smart': Subversive Intelligence in Girl Power Cartoons," Rebecca C. Hains similarly argues that girls' niceness is similarly invoked in *Kim Possible* to diffuse Kim's intelligence.

[7] See Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[8] In the episode "Angel" it is revealed that Angel did many horrible things after becoming a vampire. When he killed the daughter of a Romany tribal leader, he was cursed with the return of his soul, so that he would suffer guilt for what he had done. In order to ensure that he suffered for all of eternity, the curse stipulated that if he experienced a moment of true happiness he would revert back to his evil self, the intention being that he would be so horrified at the prospect of turning evil again that he would avoid any chance at happiness.

[9] Anya and Cordelia are also punished for wielding power in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. After returning to being a vengeance demon in season seven, Anya experiences intense guilt over taking the lives of several fraternity members as part of the wish she grants in the episode "Selfless." She begs D'Hoffryn, the head vengeance demon, to take her life in exchange for returning theirs, but instead he takes the life of her best friend and strips her of her powers. Cordelia gains psychic powers in the first season of the *Buffy* spin-off series *Angel*. However, these powers cause her intense headaches and eventually begin to compromise her sanity.

Chapter Four: Girl Avengers and Outsider Girls

[1] It is worth noting here that an act of castration does occur in *Hostel II*, in which one of the women being tortured castrates the man torturing her. However, while the castration is depicted on screen, visuals of the man's castrated body (whether in medium shot or close-up) are not, suggesting that castration is permissible in mainstream cinema as long as the evidence of castration is not shown to viewers, as it is in *Teeth*.

[2] Some of the information included in this summary of events is not included in the pilot episode. While Veronica first reveals her memory of the night that she was raped in the pilot, it is not until the episode "A Trip to the Dentist," which aired at the end of season one, that she finally uncovers the full details of the circumstances surrounding her assault.

Chapter Six: Girl Power's Twilight Years

[1] In another very obvious invocation of anti-choice discourse, the novel also includes a scene in which Edward, who has been the most vehemently opposed to Bella continuing her pregnancy, changes his mind after discovering that he can hear the thoughts of the fetus, as this evidence of consciousness on the part of the fetus convinces him that its (potential for) personhood must be protected even at the expense of Bella's.

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