"Come on, […] let's go find your inner princess": (Post-)Feminist

Generationalism in Tween Fairy Tales

Melanie Kennedy

University of Leicester

School of Media, Communication and Sociology

University of Leicester

Bankfield House

132 New Walk

Leicester

LE1 7JA

Tel: 0116 223 1624

mjk29@le.ac.uk

Abstract

This article draws attention to the expansion of tween popular culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century and in particular tween fairy tale films, with two aims: first to demonstrate how tween popular culture mediates feminism's history; and second to highlight the continued relevance of the terms "post-feminism" and "neoliberalism" at a time when confidence in their use is waning in feminist media studies. Importantly it looks carefully at the relationship between these two discourses, and reveals that the figure of the tween princess emerges at the intersections of the two. By interrogating the dialogue between the onscreen maternal generations of feminism, represented in the female characters of teen princess, mother, step-mother, and grandmother/fairy Godmother, this article reveals that the fairy tale narrative and the figure of the princess are employed to straightforwardly present feminism's complicated history, and to put forward a <u>post-</u>feminist identity as the only "authentic" choice in this reflexive construction of a feminine self. The princesses are presented as neoliberal icons of post-feminist culture, representing the self as project.

Key words

Princesshood and Tween Popular Culture

As part of the phenomenal expansion of tween popular culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been a significant increase in the mainstream output of

tween princess films --- that is, narratives that are conscious modern-day renditions of well-known fairy tales and which centre on the figure of the princess. Such films include the <u>Cinderella Story</u> films (2004, 2008, 2011), <u>Ella Enchanted</u> (2004), <u>Ice Princess</u> (2005), <u>The Prince & Me</u> and its sequels (2004, 2006, 2008, 2010), <u>The Princess Diaries</u> (2001, 2004), <u>Princess Protection Programme</u> (2009) and <u>Sydney White</u> (2007). These texts construct and address the figure of the tween --- the pre-adolescent girl --- as a gendered, age-defined subject in the process of transformative "becoming". That is, according to these narratives, the tween is defined by her transitional status between girlhood and young womanhood. She must successfully develop an identity, a process of "finding herself" requiring the girl --- both onscreen and the assumed subject addressed by these films --- to become appropriately feminine <u>and</u> reveal and maintain authenticity. The tween is thus positioned as the ideal subject of neoliberalism.

The emergence of contemporary tweenhood coincided with a period of ambiguity surrounding feminism's status recognised by feminists in both academic and popular discourses (see for example Amanda D. Lotz 2001, 105). This murky terrain is further inflected in the texts of tween popular culture. More recently in feminist media studies there have been attempts to "post" post-feminism (see also Rosalind Gill 2016); for some it seems that the term --- which has featured so centrally in feminist media studies of the past 15 years --- has run its course and that the more recent texts and subjects of study now belong to a context of "the perfect" (Angela McRobbie 2015), "post-girlpower" (Anita Harris and Amy Shields Dobson 2015), or "choice feminism" (Shelley Budgeon 2015), all of which seem to me to suggest an <u>advanced</u> state of post-feminism. Whilst in early years of the twenty-first century there may have been a disagreement on what (post-)feminism is, there does

seem to be a general consensus that for women and girls, including tweens, the understanding and experience of feminism and its history and developments --- its waves --- are mediated.

The aims of this article are twofold. First, it seeks to reveal the ways in which tween popular culture participates in the mediated construction of feminism's history by implicitly depicting the different "waves" of feminism as generations of female characters: as teenage princesses, their mothers, step-mothers, and fairy grandmothers. I examine what tween popular culture claims to be the status of feminism today and its relevance to young girls, according to its princess narratives, by interrogating the dialogue between the different generations of feminisms onscreen. In doing so the analysis reveals the way in which tween popular culture naturalises post-feminism as the "authentic" version of femininity over other feminist identities, therefore continuing and extending the work of the cultural "backlash" against feminism in adult media since the 1980s.

Second, and related to the first aim, this article attempts to untangle the terms "post-feminism" and "neoliberalism," which too often in feminist media and cultural studies of the past decade are used together, with little attempt to explain what the relationship is between them --- indeed it seems these two terms can be used interchangeably to mean the same thing in feminist analyses of contemporary women's and girls' popular culture. As well as thinking carefully about the entanglement of post-feminist and neoliberal discourses and particularly the conflation of the two terms, significantly this article responds to recent waning confidence in, and a growing sense of exhaustion of, the use of the term "neoliberalism," particularly in the arts, humanities and social sciences. In her keynote paper at the International Girls Studies Association Inaugural Conference in

2016, Catherine Driscoll stated the term "neoliberalism" has come to simply refer to things that are "bad," and as a way of marking something that the academic using the term does not like. For Driscoll, often we should instead use the term "governmentality," with "neoliberalism" reserved for the discussion of the particular conditions of economics and liberalism that the word originally referred to (Catherine Driscoll 2016). Through my analysis of tween fairy tale narratives' construction of the intergenerations of feminism, I aim to demonstrate that the term "neoliberalism" --- and indeed "post-feminism" --- still have currency, and provide us with the language to articulate the emergence and expansion of tween popular culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Rather than taking these terms for granted or using them to refer to something "bad," they allow us to make sense of the ideological work of tween culture's fairy tale narratives in the retelling of feminism's history and the construction of feminist identities. By analysing these representations of pre-feminist, feminist, and post-feminist identities onscreen and picking apart the relationship between them, we find the coming together and entanglement of post-feminist and neoliberal discourses.

Tweenhood, Post-feminism and Neoliberalism

The period during which the tween gains visibility and attracts attention begins in the late 1980s, and comes to prominence in the mid- to late-1990s, expanding phenomenally after the turn of the twenty-first century. This coincides with the broad socio-cultural recognition of post-feminism following, or rather continuing, a "backlash" against feminism in the 1980s, to use Susan Faludi's words (2006). Diane

Negra notes the way in which "Postfeminism has accelerated the consumerist maturity of girls, carving out new demographic categories such as that of the 'tween'" (2009, 47), but post-feminism's "carving out" of the tween goes much further than that of consumption: the very narratives, themes and ideologies of post-feminism are present and indeed embedded within the texts of tween popular culture. Here I am referring to post-feminism as a cultural discourse and draw upon Angela McRobbie's conceptualisation, in which she argues that post-feminism takes feminism into account, only to suggest that it has achieved its goals and is no longer needed (McRobbie 2004, 255). The tween, then as a discursive construct, and tween culture, come out of and are very much part of a post-feminist context.

An examination of tween princess narratives highlights the close relationship between neoliberalism and post-feminism. I am not suggesting that no attempts have been made to disentangle the connection between them --- there have been some recent valuable contributions which do this (Rosalind Gill 2008; Mary Douglas Vavrus 2012; Anthea Taylor 2012; Catherine Rottenberg 2014; Elisabeth Prügl 2015); rather I am suggesting there needs to be more explicit explanations of authors' uses of these terms and their distinctiveness, and of the relationship between these discourses in analyses of women's and girls' popular culture, rather than taking for granted these loaded and complicated concepts. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff argue that post-feminism should not be seen simply as a response to feminism, but that it is "also a sensibility that is at least partly constituted through the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas." (2011, 7) I would take this further and argue that neoliberalism was a contributing factor to the spread of post-feminism: neoliberalism, in its political, economic, and importantly social shift from the collective to the individual, prompted and accelerated the evolution of the vicious "backlash" rhetoric into the

"softer" discourse of post-feminism. However this post-feminist discourse is just as harmful to the cultural perception of feminism and its advances as the more explicit "backlash" rhetoric, presenting anti- and pre-feminist aesthetics and politics in a commodified and appealing way. As such, post-feminist subjects are inflected with neoliberal characteristics. One of the most visible examples of this identity is the tween --- indeed the culturally constructed figure of the tween is a direct product of this entanglement --- and is epitomised more specifically in tween culture's construction of the princess. One of the most valuable contributions of a working through of the relationship between post-feminism and neoliberalism comes from McRobbie (2009), who persuasively argues that discourses of neoliberalism, with their focus on individualism and the eradication of the welfare state --- and ultimately "re-traditionalisation" --- led to the cultural "undoing" and "disarticulation" of feminism. Such a neoliberal context has led to, she argues, "not so much turning the clock back, as turning it forward to secure a post-feminist gender settlement, a new sexual contract." (2009, 57) However, as noted above, McRobbie's work since then has moved on from an explicit use of the term "post-feminism", to newer terminology such as "the perfect" (2015).

By putting on display the different "waves" of feminism through the classic female fairy tale characters (Shelley Cobb's term "postfeminist generationalism" is apt here [2011]), the princess narratives discussed in this article immerse the tween in post-feminist culture's rhetoric of choice: the tween is constructed and addressed as being able to choose from a range of feminist (or pre- post-feminist) identities --- to try them on as consumable commodities from the onscreen depictions. However, paradoxically alongside the choice of identities available in tween princess narratives is the instruction that the girl must reveal and maintain her "authentic" self. As such

these narratives reproduce the rhetoric of girlhood advocacy in parenting guides and self-help books for tweens which emphasise the need for the girl to be "true" to herself (see Melanie Kennedy Forthcoming). The fairy tale films of tween popular culture have come to prominence at a time in which, as recognized by Sarah Banet-Weiser, there is a cultural yearning for authenticity and a lament for inauthenticity and superficiality that is seen to pervade consumer culture (Sarah Banet-Weiser 2012, 3). Tweenhood --- and in particular the figure of the princess --- are sites onto which this cultural investment in authenticity has been projected. According to the texts of tween popular culture the notion of authenticity is embodied. And as I argue elsewhere, "authenticity" is diametrically opposed to falsity of performance, marketplace commodification, and collapsed with sincerity, originality, uniqueness, and talent in one's biography and inner self – each of which are themselves ideological abstract concepts (Kennedy Forthcoming).

Like Banet-Weiser, however, I understand the authenticity of tween fairy tale films to be "a symbolic construct" (2012, 5). And yet, authenticity is a quality that the texts of tween popular culture insist exists within the self: according to these texts, authenticity is seen to be essential if the girl is to successfully achieve ideal tween selfhood, embodied in the figure of the princess; it exists "naturally" within the young girl, but requires self-work in order to prove and bring this authenticity to the surface. The texts construct the tween as the ideal subject of neoliberalism, in that she must reflexively construct her self by successfully choosing from a range of identity options whilst maintaining authenticity, all of which requires constant self-surveillance and self-work. This form of subjectivity (conceptualised by sociologists such as Anthony Giddens [1991] and Nikolas Rose [1998; 1999]), defined by governmentality, labour, marketability and the notion of "free" choice and the need

for authenticity of selfhood, is a direct after effect of the political and economic shifts to privatisation, free market principles, and conservative ideologies of the 1970s and 1980s in the West, and as such should still be referred to as <u>neoliberal</u> subjectivity.

Whilst some of the princesses in the films discussed here are literal princesses (for example Mia [Anne Hathaway] of <u>The Princess Diaries</u> and Paige [Julia Stiles and Kim Heskin] of <u>The Prince & Me</u> become princesses through bloodline and marriage, respectively), in many cases the leading girls are inferred princesses, through the modern-day adaptation of the original fairy tales from which the film narratives are derived (for example Sam [Hilary Duff], Mary [Selena Gomez] and Katie [Lucy Hale] never become actual princesses in the <u>Cinderella Story</u> films, but fill the role of Cinderella in the narratives of rags-to-riches transformation and heterosexual romance). Of course the makeover narratives of Cinderella and Pygmalion have featured prominently in women's popular culture over the past 100 years. As I argue elsewhere, however, what is distinct about contemporary tween variations of such narratives is the lack of end-point to the tween makeover; instead the lead girls of these narratives must continue working on a perpetual makeover of self-transformation long after the texts' narratives come to a close (Kennedy Forthcoming). The leading teen princesses of tween fairy tales do in part continue the legacy of the Cinderella and Pygmalion narratives in which women make themselves over in the service of men. However, the tween makeovers are much less frequently initiated by male figures; although the girls often undergo physical transformations which lead to the attraction of a male crush, they are more often initiated by female friends. The teen princesses must then carefully balance the demands and priorities of being appropriately feminine, being a suitable heterosexual partner, being a good daughter, and maintaining an authentic self. "Princesshood" in tween popular culture

therefore stands not for actual royalty, for whom service would be provided, but rather the ideal neoliberal female subject of post-feminism who must both selfishly work on her self, managing her priorities and rejecting other forms of feminism, and who must selflessly learn the roles of caregiver and subservient heterosexual partner. Princesshood, then, is a space in which we see the intersections of post-feminism and neoliberalism. The figure of the princess must individually work on her self, be competitive in successfully standing as appropriately feminine, and care for others. If she achieves each of these and manages to balance these roles and demands, and convinces the audience that she really feels the inner emotions she expresses, she will prove herself to be authentic according to these narratives.

The culturally constructed relationship between post-feminism and second-wave feminism has been articulated in terms of a rebellious daughter and a spoil-sport mother (see Stacey Gillis and Rebecca Munford 2004, 177). Thus, an exploration of the onscreen cross-generational female conflict between the staple female fairy tale roles allows for an examination of the dialogue between the different waves of feminism. The different waves of feminism --- and therefore different generations of women --- are separated and pitted against each other in tween princess narratives, each competing for the "best" form of feminism. This article argues that these narratives construct the princess (that is, the ideal post-feminist, neoliberal young feminine subject) as an inherent --- therefore authentic --- identity within the girl, articulated with the empowering rhetoric of choice; this identity, according to tween fairy tale narratives, merely needs to be "found" and brought to the surface.

Female generationalism: post-feminist teenage princesses

Across tween popular culture, one finds what are perhaps best labelled post-feminist teenage girls at the centre of the princess narratives. There are also three other significant types on display across these narratives, and these depictions work to claim how not to be feminist. Feminist scholars and cultural commentators have recognised the ways in which the female character types of fairy tales are illustrated through age-based female stereotypes and represent generational conflict (see for example Susan Douglas 1994). Here, however, I argue that the tween fairy tale character types stand in for "waves" of feminism. Second-wave feminism is often given space through the mothers of the leading teen princesses (in such narratives where the mother is still alive); this figure can be seen in <u>The Princess Diaries</u> and <u>Ice Princess</u>. Second-wave feminism that has been taken "too far" is signalled through the backlash figures of "evil" step-mothers, as seen in <u>Ella Enchanted</u> and the <u>Cinderella Story</u> films; and pre-feminism is represented by the teen princesses' grandmothers, who often fill the role of fairy godmother, and can be seen in <u>The Princess Diaries</u> and <u>The Prince & Me</u> series of films.

The post-feminist teenage princess can be understood as a girl benefiting from the advancements of second-wave feminism, yet who does not explicitly align herself with a feminist ideology. These girls are "lacking" in femininity and therefore confidence, rendering them socially invisible; they have goals and ambitions (usually to excel in school and go on to establish a strong career), but they also yearn --- usually rather desperately --- for heterosexual romance. Ultimately, the girls want to attain a male partner, and achieve a balance of romance and their own aspirations. Many of the girls' names emphasise their lack of femininity and suggest they belong to a context after feminism in which gender-neutral names are accepted: <u>The Prince & Me</u>'s Paige, <u>Ice Princess</u>'s Casey (Michelle Trachtenberg), <u>Princess Protection</u>

Programme's Carter (Selena Gomez), A Cinderella Story's Sam and Sydney White's Sydney (Amanda Bynes). In each case here, the "risk" of androgyny (androgyny would disqualify the girls from achieving appropriate femininity) is removed and the lack of femininity negotiated though the reassurance of heterosexuality.

A Cinderella Story centres on high school student Sam, who typifies the post-feminist leading girls of tween princess narratives. She lives with her step-mother and two step-sisters; she is very hard working and studious, balancing her schoolwork and application to Princeton University with her job as a waitress in her family's diner. Like many leading girls across tween popular culture, Sam's mother died when Sam was young, and her father remarried. Sam's father later died in an earthquake, and A Cinderella Story suggests that Sam lacks the knowledge and training required to perform conventional femininity due to the absence of a mother figure to ("naturally") teach and guide this process. The Cinderella Story films, like The Princess Diaries, Ella Enchanted and Sydney White, are typical of tween media texts that write mothers out of the narrative. The centrality of the motherless teenage girl in tween popular culture plays an ideological function to suggest that the task of becoming the appropriate feminine subject of neoliberalism is all the more difficult without the presence of a biological mother to teach this process, and as such perpetuates this requirement to work hard to successfully achieve a neoliberal feminine identity. What the writing out of the mother in these narratives further works to do is break the matrilineal connection that Adrienne Rich articulates of the mother-daughter bond (1977, 246). As such, the possibility of the passing down of feminism from mother to daughter is prevented. The paradigm of young women resisting identification as part of a new generation of feminism is identified by Kathleen Rowe Karlyn in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century popular cinematic depictions of mothers and

daughters (2011), and this may happen with ease in the tween fairy tales here by removing the biological mother altogether.

Sam's lack of femininity is signalled through her clothing: a grey jumper, black combat trousers, a khaki military jacket and cap, and trainers. However, tween popular culture's use of conventionally beautiful young actresses softens any claims to tomboyishness; in this case, Hilary Duff's blonde hair, full lips, straight white teeth and slim figure reassure us of her femininity. In contrast, her step-sisters Brianna (Madeline Zima) and Gabriella's (Andrea Avery) badly styled hair and matching outfits display a seemingly excessive femininity, which works to both highlight Sam's lack of conventional femininity, and to provide an example of the type of femininity to avoid. The viewer is invited to judge the step-sisters due to the visibility of the work carried out in their quest to be feminine; their efforts to appear beautiful are obvious and therefore signal falseness. Through the step-sisters' falsity and her inappropriate display of femininity, they are at risk of being found out for only "mocking" and "mimicking" femininity, as Jane M. Ussher argues: "Perhaps the biggest risk to the woman doing girl is that her duplicity will be exposed. She will then be punished for not really being girl." (1997, 453, emphasis in original) Of course this reveals the falseness of all beauty practices, but the film suggests that such practices should remain invisible. Whilst the films' teachings of how to become appropriately feminine reveal gender's performativity --- it is not natural --- this contradiction is brushed over by only critiquing girls and women who signal too clearly their femininity as a performance.

Rather than the aesthetic "trappings" of femininity, Sam prioritises her education and is determined to attend Princeton University. Like many of the other post-feminist leading girls of the princess narratives, Sam is single due to her lack of

confidence, which causes her to go unnoticed in the school social structure. In all cases, however, it is made clear that the girls have strong heterosexual desires, and they direct this romantic desire towards a fellow male student. Sam has a relationship with a boy using the pseudonym Nomad via her mobile phone and in an online chatroom for hopeful future Princeton students. It is revealed to the film's audience that Nomad is the incredibly popular and sexually desirable Austin (Chad Michael Murray), who attends school with Sam. Through their mobile phone and online chat room communication, they agree to meet in person at the school's upcoming Halloween dance. However, on the night of the dance, Sam is given extra work to do by her cruel step-mother Fiona (Jennifer Coolidge), who runs the diner left to her by her late husband. Sam complies with Fiona's orders, fearful that if she goes against her step-mother she will lose the money left by her father, which she intends on using to fund her university education. This could be seen as a feminist stance, in her choosing her education and future career over heterosexual romance. However, the diner waitress and Sam's point of female support and guidance, Ronda (Regina King), tells her: "Sam, your dad did not leave this Earth wanting you to be unhappy. It's time for you to find your own bliss, starting with this dance." The diner chef, Bobby (Paul Rodriguez), agrees, telling her: "Sam, you need to listen to Ronda: you're always studying, always working --- you need to take some time for yourself." Thus, whilst Sam is passionately driven to gain a place at Princeton, according to those closest to her, this ambition does not make her "happy" and is not for "herself;" rather, finally meeting her "true love" would fulfil these "needs." This is articulated by her close friends using the rhetoric of the self as project, loosely hiding the regressive gender ideology at work. This moment clearly plays out tween popular culture's construction

of authenticity as being tied to caring for others: being "true" to herself requires Sam to fulfil the role of heterosexual care-giver.

Second-wave feminist middle-aged mothers

Stacey Gillis and Rebecca Munford state that "The generational divide between second-wave feminism and the new forms of feminism --- whether it be a third-wave or not --- is one of the defining characteristics of the movement." (Gillis and Munford 2004, 167) The structures of the films' narratives discussed here lend themselves perfectly to a working through of this generational divide, where Astrid Henry's conceptualisation of the "matrophor" is clearly displayed onscreen. Her articulation of the "matrophor" explains the way feminism, and often feminists, are constructed as "mothers," and the way understandings of the relations between second- and third-wave feminisms are reduced to the mother-daughter relationship (Henry 2004 2-3). I am not suggesting that feminism's history should be understood as a succession of neatly bound waves --- there is feminist historical work which reminds us that this is not the case (Shira Tarrant 2006) --- but rather feminism's history is simplified and narrated in this way by tween fairy tale films.

As Susan J. Douglas states, "Young women [are] not supposed to identify with feminism; instead they [are] supposed to actively dis-identify with it", with feminists being "a threat to women's happiness." (2010, 103) This is the narrative function of the generation of second-wave feminism, represented in the mother figures of tween princess narratives. Their voices are most clearly heard at times in which their daughters must decide which feminist path to choose. In each case, it is made clear to the tween audience that the mother's opinion on the matter is not to be agreed with ---

her values are presented as redundant. Ice Princess features a mother, Joan (Joan Cusack), who is marked as a second-wave feminist. This is inscribed at a visual level through Joan's lack of make-up, unkempt hair, and baggy brown jumpers. Furthermore, her vegan diet and lecturing of feminist literature signals her as "boring" and her chosen lifestyle as "unconventional". When high-achieving and hard working high school student Casey must choose between university or pursuing a career as a figure skater, her mother urges her to take advantage of the gains of second-wave feminism:

> Case, there's no shelf-life on your mind, and if I'd learned how to use mine a little sooner, if I'd gone to college when I was your age, maybe we wouldn't be living like this. […] I have not been able to give you a quarter of the things I've wanted to. […] you need to give me something now.

Casey is shown as having the choice over whether or not to pursue her education, with the assumption that it will not make any considerable difference to her success and financial or social positioning later in life, whereas this choice was not available to earlier generations of women --- women like her mother. When Joan watches Casey working on her school physics project, which involves analysing video footage she has recorded of young female competitive figure skaters dressed in figure-hugging, sparkly leotards, she tells her: "I just can't get past the twinkly little outfits. […] Sets us back 50 years. If I ever saw you squeezing into one of those, I'd probably start crying." Having seen the pleasure and enjoyment Casey experiences when she is on the skating rink, the tween viewer (along with Casey), is not meant to identify with

this position, and is encouraged to want Casey to choose the figure skating path. Joan is presented as a "spoil sport," the redundant, dated voice of second-wave feminism; the persistent pressure that Joan places on Casey to work hard at maintaining her school grades and preparing for her Harvard interview threatens Casey's happiness.

This is clearly signalled in the film's opening scene, inviting the tween audience to read her as the "wrong" influence on Casey when choosing a feminist identity: Casey happily skates on a frozen pond outside her house, until Joan interrupts the moment knocking on the window from inside, and holding up and pointing to Casey's maths book, instructing her to come in and study. This mother-daughter depiction can be seen to exemplify Henry's argument regarding cultural understandings of the second- and third-wave or mother-daughter relationship (in keeping with Douglas's argument), in which the feminist stands in the way of the daughter's freedom, and has become an easy figure to reject (Henry 2004, 11). Along with the onscreen daughters, the tween viewer is encouraged to disidentify with the second-wave feminist voice of the mothers, and by disidentification I use Henry's definition of the term, "An identification against something" (2004, 7). This opening scene epitomises a technique commonly used across tween popular culture, in which choices of feminisms and their associated femininities are straightforwardly split into two opposing categories. Whilst the juxtaposition of identities and values is a common feature of adult women's post-feminist media, in tween popular culture such choice between two paths become heightened, and unambiguously and explicitly visualised. This can be seen most clearly in the films' posters and DVD covers, epitomised in the poster for Ice Princess which features two Caseys back-to-back: one looking serious wearing jeans, a green cardigan, and glasses on her head, whilst holding physics and calculus text books, looking back towards the figure behind her --

- the clearly happier and more confident skating Casey. This version of Casey smiles directly to the viewer whilst wearing a white and gold leotard, tiara, and ice skates.

Louise Fitzgerald sees this motif of mother-daughter disidentification as specific to depictions of single motherhood in post-feminist media, arguing that "feminism is being cast as a position of unjust and unfair maternalism through the body of the lone mother character whose authority is coded as unjust and whose politics deny the daughter her 'rightful' place in the social world" (2009, 255). She goes on to argue that "feminism acts as the obstacle in the transformation of […] female characters" (Louise Fitzgerald 2009, 257, emphasis in original), and I would take this further and suggest that by preventing their daughters from developing and revealing their authentic selves, whether that be claimed through marrying a prince or becoming a figure skater, the mothers are coded as inauthentic --- they are not being "true" to themselves. By extension, therefore, second-wave feminism is presented to be an inauthentic choice of feminist identity. The feminist mother's preferred choice is regarded as "unnatural" --- that is, opposed to authenticity. Furthermore, the mother's attempts to push her own choice onto her daughter (until the close of the narrative, that is) presents her as a selfish feminist (Imogen Tyler 2007); in tween popular culture, selfishness is juxtaposed with authenticity, the authentic girl is she who selflessly cares for others. Of course this is contradictory, in that the narratives encourage the tween to work on her self, but this paradox of selfishness and selflessness is covered up through the explicit juxtaposition of the two opposing paths.

Selfish feminist step-mothers

Following a long cultural history of stigmatised representations of the step-mother, the role of the step-mother in films such as Ella Enchanted and the Cinderella Story films is to show the teen princesses and the tween audience what could happen if they choose the feminist identity offered by the mother figures discussed above. These figures provide a further function of preventing the passing-down of feminism, and the passing down of the "kind of strength which can only be one woman's gift to another, the bloodstream of our inheritance" from one biological generation of woman to another (Adrienne Rich 1977, 246) The step-mothers are evidence of feminism taken too far; these women are claimed to have exploited the advantages made by the second-wave, and the result is a monstrous, grotesque woman, not to be seen as a role model in the leading girl's choosing of a feminist identity. As with the second-wave feminist mothers, and the "mean girls" who feature prominently across tween popular culture (such as Sam's step-sisters Brianna and Gabriella), this inappropriate identity is signalled at a visual level through the step-mothers' excessive femininity, or "emphasized femininity" (R. W. Connell 1987). Through their excessive femininity, then, the tween viewer is given the visual cue that these women should not be trusted as mentors in the development of a feminist identity. The step-mothers, including Fiona in A Cinderella Story, Dominique (Jane Lynch) in Another Cinderella Story, and Dame Olga (Joanna Lumley) in Ella Enchanted, are representative of the "unruly woman," clearly marked as "grotesque" (Kathleen Rowe 1995, 33), and are further emphasised as unfeminine by their threatening and/or "ugly" names and by their portrayal by ageing celebrities.

The tween is encouraged to view the step-mothers as selfish and narcissistic in their lifestyle choices. A Cinderella Story: Once Upon a Song's Gail (Missi Pyle), step-mother of Katie, is the dean of Wellseley Academy of the Arts, attended by Katie

and her step-sister Bev (Megan Park). However, rather than view Gail as an empowering feminist role model with a strong and powerful career, she is presented to be exploiting the gains of feminism for her own desires. In this way, the step-mothers including Gail (and to a lesser extent, the biological mothers), can be seen to extend the cultural depictions of "the selfish feminist and her narcissistic twin, commercialised images of 'liberated women'," to draw upon Imogen Tyler's words, (2007, 185) which began during the second-wave in the "backlash" discussed by Susan Faludi (2006). The selfish feminist is implied through the mother figures but caricatured here in the step-mothers of tween princess films --- the "narcissistic twin," the "liberated woman" --- so that it is made absolutely clear to the tween viewer that "feminism is […] equated with the most superficial of self-esteem practices." (Tyler 2007, 186) Gail is not interested in the education and wellbeing of the school's students; rather she is focused on getting her own "big break" and becoming a celebrity. When a successful record producer, Guy Morgan (Dikran Tulaine), meets with Gail to enrol his son in the school, Gail tries to use the opportunity to transform herself and finally become the celebrity she believes she "deserves" to be. Gail openly admits: "I have got to impress Guy Morgan, so I can finally stop pretending to care about this insufferable school and move to Hollywood, where no-one pretends to care about anything" (emphasis in original dialogue). Gail reveals that she never wants to return to the rural farm on which she grew up, that she wants fame and fortune, frankly admitting that she has no skills and that her role as an educator is laughable.

Although in these moments Gail is completely honest and truthful in her goals and ambition, the tween is nonetheless prompted to read her as inauthentic, in her role as an educator and in her taste in lifestyle choices. Her strong Southern accent and flashbacks of her performing as a country singer earlier in her life render her lifestyle

choices to be of "bad taste," framed using the rhetoric of inauthenticity: she has a self-portrait painted whilst wearing a sari, meditates under the guidance of an Indian guru Ravi (Manu Narayan). Her taste and over-ambition to become a celebrity --- indeed the wrong type of celebrity, one that is too old and does not demonstrate sincerity or talent --- do not fit with her "real" previous identity. Even her Indian guru is revealed to be "fake:" he is in fact Tony, an aspiring actor who is half-Italian and from New Jersey, and taking advantage of Gail's narcissism in order to gain acting experience. A contradictory set of values related to selfhood are revealed here: the tween is taught that the gendered self is a performed one which requires reflexivity and work but one cannot reveal this process or perform a self that is unfitting with one's biography, due to the risk of being "found out." Gail, and the other step-mothers of tween princess narratives, have taken feminism too far; they have focused too much on themselves to the extent that they have neglected their roles of caring for others. Second-wave feminism, and its successors of liberated women, are inauthentic paths for the tween to choose in the development of a feminist identity.

To further clarify this, at the narratives' close, this feminism-taken-too-far must be removed or at least disabled to neutralise the threat of this wrong form of feminism and to ridicule the step-mother for her bad choice of such feminism, which allows the teen girl to fully and freely achieve her authentic feminist identity. It is a further warning to the tween that by choosing the wrong feminist path, as these "evil" step-mothers had, they too could face the same ends. The arrest of Fiona in A Cinderella Story, the breaking of Dominique's legs leaving her housebound in Another Cinderella Story, the cosmetic facial procedure leaving Dame Olga's face immobile and unable to speak in Ella Enchanted, and the return of Gail to her father's farm to perform as an unsuccessful country singer here in A Cinderella Story: Once

Upon a Song work to --- as Elizabeth Bell notes of Disney animated fairy tales --- "re-establish the control and stability of the cultural and natural order in the destruction of the transgressive feminine" (1995, 118), in this case the transgressive feminist.

Pre-feminist fairy grandmothers

Although a less common character found across tween princess narratives, the role of the grandmother, providing the voice of pre-feminism, is to allow the leading girl to understand and appreciate the opportunities they live with following second-wave feminism's advancements, whilst also offering the appeals of pre-feminism. In factual terms the contemporary tween's grandmother --- and the onscreen teen girl's grandmother --- cannot belong to a pre-feminist generation; that is, they would have more likely come of age during the women's movement. Furthermore, Shira Tarrant reminds us that despite the common narrative of waves, feminist activity and activism did indeed continue during the post-war period from the 1940s to the 1960s (2006). However, the geographical displacement of the grandmother figure in tween princess narratives to a foreign, vaguely archaic land (Denmark in The Prince & Me, the fictional European country of Genovia in The Princess Diaries, and the fictional Latin American island of Costa Luna in Princess Protection Programme) acts as temporal displacement to a place seemingly untouched by feminism's advancements. Having the option to trust in her grandmother as a role model in choosing her own feminist path, the teenage princess is able to negotiate the pros and cons of both pre- and post-feminism. This pre-feminist grandmother (and fairy godmother) figure can be seen in The Princess Diaries films' Queen Clarisse (Julie Andrews), The Prince & Me films' Queen Rosalind (Miranda Richardson and Maryam d'Abo), and Princess Protection

<u>Programme</u> in which the role is displaced onto teenager Rosalinda (Demi Lovato) through her impeccable femininity, royal heritage, and training in how to be a princess.

Queen Clarisse's pre-feminism is particularly evident in <u>The Princess Diaries 2: Royal Engagement</u>. The sequel's narrative follows Mia making the decision to obey the law in Genovia which requires that she agrees to an arranged marriage in order to take on the role of Queen. It is revealed that this is the path that her grandmother followed. However, just as her extravagant royal wedding is about to take place in the church, Mia has doubts, and her grandmother offers her advice. Queen Clarisse can be seen to embody "Feminine sacrifice" as described by Bell, imaged in the postmenopausal, nonthreatening grandmother (1995, 119). This figure fills the role of the Disney fairy godmother, who according to Bell, appears and produces magic and service at key moments of transition into womanhood (Elizabeth Bell 1995, 119). As the voice of pre-feminism, Clarisse offers her wisdom to Mia at this crucial moment in her maturation into young womanhood as she prepares for marriage, based on her experience as a woman in the same position as Mia, yet in a time before second-wave feminism. Clarisse encourages Mia to take advantage of the gains of second-wave feminism, in effect suggesting that feminism's goals have been achieved and women are now liberated. She tells her:

> I made my choice: duty to my country over love. It's what I've always
> done it seems, it was drummed into me my whole life. Now I've lost
> the only man I ever <u>really</u> loved [her security guard Joe]. Mia, I want
> you to make <u>your</u> choices as a woman. […] Whatever choice you
> make, let it come from your heart. (Emphasis in original dialogue)

Although the rhetoric of choice is employed here, the tween is nonetheless encouraged to believe that Clarisse did not have the "genuine" and "free" choice that Mia now has. In a time before the women's liberation movement, Clarisse used her "head" and rationally went ahead with the arranged marriage to comply with the strict rules and to please those judging her. Now, women are "free" to use their "heart" in such decisions, allowing their true selves to be released and revealed. Mia decides not to go ahead with the arranged marriage, and instead gives her grandmother a chance for true love by marrying her loyal bodyguard Joe (Hector Elizondo), a luxury she did not have during her pre-feminist youth. Furthermore, Mia asks parliament to change the law requiring that women be married in order to take the throne as Queen. This is a consciously feminist move by the narrative, and Mia is shown to have a young feminine identity informed by feminist politics.

Whilst this is seemingly a feminist move, as Mia is able to benefit from the gains of second-wave feminism, the scene is inflected with the aesthetic pleasures of pre-feminism through the "sparklefication" (Mary Celeste Kearney 2015) of the royal wedding, highlighted in particular by Mia's wedding dress, and Clarisse's tiara, jewellery and golden sateen outfit. For Mary Celeste Kearney "sparkle is the primary visual signifier" of post-feminist, post-girl power culture (2015, 266). In particular Kearney makes the valuable link between post-feminism and neoliberalism in femininity of this culture, recognising that the post-feminist subject is encouraged to see herself as a "capable" individual who can resolve her problems through marketplace choices (Kearney 2015, 265), and therefore sparkle is presented as one of these marketplace choices in the neoliberal, post-feminist subject's construction of her individual feminine identity. Here in The Princess Diaries 2, in the company of her

pre-feminist mentor Mia is able to indulge in the sparkly iconography of "princess" femininity, allowing her the opportunity to negotiate the pre-feminist feminine appeals offered by the royal wedding, alongside her own seemingly feminist values of investing in <u>true</u> love. Following the conceptualisation of a post-feminist sensibility offered by Gill, then, defined by "the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist discourses" (2007, 163), Mia's feminist move to reject the arranged marriage and to change the law, whilst also indulging in the sparkle of pre-feminism, positions her as an ideal post-feminist subject.

Choice and authentic selfhood

In each case, the teen princess is encouraged to focus on <u>herself</u> when choosing her feminist identity. Alongside tween popular culture's scripts of femininity, its feminism(s) teaches the tween to focus on the self, ensuring that she fits into the neoliberal context in which tweenhood exists; at the same time, paradoxically she must also learn how to be an appropriately feminine caregiver and heterosexual partner. The focus on the self goes against the ideology of the second-wave, which strove for gender equality through the employment of the rhetoric "the personal is political," and working together as a sisterhood. The requirement for the tween to work on herself as a way of following the right feminist path furthermore renders tween popular culture's depictions of the evil liberated step-mother as selfish, to be redundant. Tween popular culture claims that this post-feminist identity, among the range of options on offer to the tween, is the preferred choice emphasised through a rhetoric of authenticity. The ambivalence surrounding the plurality and multi-faceted nature of feminism today is very much a characteristic of tween popular culture,

indeed it is part of it. More than this, this ambivalent context of co-existing feminisms can be seen to drive the princess narratives of tween popular culture.

The figure of the princess complicates tweenhood's investment in the authenticity of the self: whilst achieving princesshood signals that the girl has proven her authentic self, the figure of the princess is at odds with the very notion of authenticity as it is constructed in tween popular culture. The princess is a cultural construct which relies on artifice for its recognisability and meaning. The markers of princesshood (grand gown, jewellery, conventional femininity, and exceptional beauty) are all highly constructed, surface attributes; none are natural or found within the self. This contradiction of tween popular culture can be extended beyond princesshood to femininity more broadly, which has been seen by feminists as constructed and dependent on artifice --- indeed, diametrically opposed to the concept of authenticity. Such a disparity between authenticity (nature) and princesshood (artifice) is not explicitly dealt with by the texts of tween popular culture; what is implied, however, is that the ideal post-feminist, neoliberal young female subject --- the princess --- is she who manages the tension between valorisation of one's true self, and the need to conform to the scripts of femininity. Indeed, the figure of the princess in tween popular culture could be said to epitomise the neoliberal self-governing subject who must produce their self as a project, who according to Rose, is obliged to make choices to render their existence meaningful, as long as those choices are intimately tied "to the ethics of individual autonomy and personal authenticity" (1999, 272); the girl can sparkle by adorning herself with the princess gown and tiara, as long as her true inner self is authentic.

There has been a longstanding cultural assumption of the incompatibility of femininity and feminism, and indeed of feminism's apparent rejection of feminine

identities. However, many feminist academics and activists argue that the emergence of post-feminism (or for some, third-wave or "girlie" feminism) allowed for the coming together of femininity and feminism. The post-feminist sensibility, and the cultural construction of the post-feminist girl/woman, claim and demonstrate the compatibility of femininity and feminism, and indeed tween popular culture --- and in particular its princess narratives --- claim that such compatibility is indeed the case.

The texts suggest that this post-feminist identity is the natural choice for the tween, indeed asserting that such an identity exists inherently within the girl, and she merely needs to realise this true choice and bring it to the surface. This is articulated explicitly in Princess Protection Programme when shy, tomboy Carter finds she has been nominated as a princess for the upcoming school homecoming dance. She tells Rosie, a real-life princess disguised as an "ordinary" schoolgirl: "This is not good --- me being a princess is not normal, […] Trust me, I am not a princess" (emphasis in original dialogue), to which Rosie responds:

> Yes, yes you are. It's just you don't feel like one yet. When I came
> here you taught me to act normal, not royal. Now it is my turn to teach
> you. […] Come on, Carter, let's go find your inner princess.

Rosie then teaches Carter how to be a princess, which involves both the selfish act of constructing one's feminine identity (through a makeover montage --- a key motif in tween popular culture) and selfless acts of donating to charity and helping other shy, "plain" girls from school realise their own "inner princesses." The figure of the princess in tween popular culture represents the ideal post-feminist, neoliberal female subject; she both selfishly works on her self and selflessly cares for others. As

demonstrated in the dialogue between Carter and Rosie above, the princess (that is, the ideal post-feminist, neoliberal young feminine subject) is an inherent --- therefore authentic --- identity within the girl, articulated with the empowering rhetoric of choice; this identity simply requires self-work in order to be revealed.

This scene highlights the key characteristics of authenticity as constructed by tween popular culture. First, one's authenticity is in part defined by being <u>visible</u>, either to a diegetic audience such as the high school students attending the masked ball in <u>A Cinderella Story</u>, or mediated as a celebrity in the case of Mia whose (ultimately halted) royal wedding is covered by a celebrity news journalist in <u>The Princess Diaries 2</u>. Second, authenticity is <u>relational</u>: one's authentic self is judged by others by its being visible, and this judgement is encouraged by comparing the authenticity of the self to others' authenticity. Here, the mothers, step-mothers, step-sisters, and grandmothers all function as points of comparison against which to judge the leading teen princesses' authentic selves. And third, the process of getting in touch with, and revealing, one's true, inner self requires emotion work (Arlie Hochschild 1979). That is, by fulfilling the requirements of both selfishly working on herself and selflessly caring for others in order to reveal her authenticity, the princess of tween popular culture must undertake careful management (and performance) of emotions, convincing her audience --- both onscreen and off --- that she sincerely feels the emotions she expresses. In the entanglement of the selfish and the selfless, the work of the self for the service of others --- the nexus of neoliberalism and postfeminism, the individual and the collective --- this is where we locate the princess figure of tween popular culture.

Acknowledgements

References

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2012. Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Bell, Elizabeth. 1995. "Somatexts at the Disney Shop: Constructing the Pentimentos of Women's Animated Bodies." In From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture, edited by Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas and Laura Sells, 107-124. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Budgeon, Shelley. 2015. "Individualised Femininity and Feminist Politics of Choice." The European Journal of Women's Studies 22 (3): 303-318.

Cobb, Shelley. 2011. "'I'm Nothing Like You!': Postfeminist Generationalism and Female Stardom in the Contemporary Chick Flick." In Women on Screen: Feminism and Femininity in Visual Culture, edited by Melanie Waters, 31-44. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Connell, R. W. 1987. Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics. Cambridge: Polity.

Douglas Vavrus, Mary. 2012. "Postfeminist Redux?" The Review of Communication 12 (3): 224-236.

Douglas, Susan J. 1994. Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female With the Mass Media. London: Penguin.

_____ 2010. <u>Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work is Done</u>. New York, NY: Times Books.

Driscoll, C. 2016. "The Girl: Dynamics of Anxiety and Reassurance." Keynote paper presented at the International Girls' Studies Association Inaugural Conference, University of East Anglia, April 7-9.

Faludi, Susan. 2006. <u>Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women</u>, 15th Anniversary edn. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

Fitzgerald, Louise. 2009. "Negotiating Lone Motherhood: Gender, Politics and Family Values in Contemporary Popular Cinema." PhD thesis, University of East Anglia.

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. <u>Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in Late Modern Age</u>. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gill, Rosalind. 2007. "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility." <u>European Journal of Cultural Studies</u> 10(2): 147-166.

Gill, Rosalind. 2008. "Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times." <u>Subjectivity</u> 25: 432-445.

Gill, Rosalind. 2016. "Post-postfeminism?: New Feminist Visibilities in Postfeminist Times." <u>Feminist Media Studies</u> 16(4):610-630.

Gill, Rosalind and Christina Scharff. 2011. "Introduction." In <u>New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity</u>, edited by Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, 1-17. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gillis, Stacey and Rebecca Munford. 2004. "Genealogies and Generations: the Politics and Praxis of Third Wave Feminism." <u>Women's History Review</u> 13(2): 165-182.

Harris, Anita and Amy Shields Dobson. 2015. "Theorizing Agency in Post-girlpower times." <u>Continuum</u> 29(2): 145-156.

Henry, Astrid. 2004. <u>Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism</u>. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1979. "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure." <u>The American Journal of Sociology</u> 85(3): 551-575.

Karlyn, Kathleen Rowe. 2011. <u>Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers: Redefining Feminism on Screen</u>. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Kearney, Mary Celeste. 2014. "Sparkle: luminosity and post-girl power media." <u>Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies</u> 29(2): 263-273.

Kennedy, Melanie. Forthcoming. <u>Tweenhood: Femininity and Celebrity in Tween Popular Culture</u>. London: I.B. Tauris.

Lotz, Amanda D. 2001. "Postfeminist Television Criticism: Rehabilitating Critical Terms and Identifying Postfeminist Attributes." <u>Feminist Media Studies</u> 1(1): 105-121.

McRobbie, Angela. 2004. "Post-feminism and Popular Culture." <u>Feminist Media Studies</u> 4(3): 255-264.

McRobbie, Angela. 2009. <u>The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change</u>. London: Sage.

McRobbie, Angela. 2015. "Notes on the Perfect: Competitive Femininity in Neoliberal Times." <u>Australian Feminist Studies</u> 30(83): 3-20.

Negra, Diane. 2009. <u>What a Girl Wants?: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism</u>. London: Routledge.

Prügl, Elisabeth. 2015. "Neoliberalising Feminism." <u>New Political Economy</u> 20(4): 614-631.

Rich, Adrienne. 1977. <u>Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution</u>.

London: Virago.

Rose, Nikolas. 1998. <u>Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood</u>.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, Nikolas. 1999. <u>Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self</u>, 2nd edn.

London: Free Association Books.

Rottenberg, Catherine. 2014. "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism." <u>Cultural Studies</u>

28(3): 418-437.

Rowe, Kathleen. 1995. <u>The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter</u>.

Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Tarrant, Shira. 2006. <u>When Sex Became Gender</u>. New York, NY: Routledge.

Taylor, Anthea. 2012. <u>Single women in popular culture: The limits of postfeminism</u>.

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tyler, Imogen. 2007. "The Selfish Feminist: Public Images of Women's Liberation."

<u>Australian Feminist Studies</u> 22(53): 173-190.

Ussher, Jane M. 1997. <u>Fantasies of Femininity: Reframing the Boundaries of Sex</u>.

London: Penguin.

Biography

Melanie Kennedy is a Lecturer in Media and Communication at the University of Leicester. Her research is rooted in feminist media and cultural studies, and her interests include tweens and tween culture, postfeminist film and television, neoliberal reality television, and young female celebrity. Her monograph <u>Tweenhood:</u>

<u>Femininity and Celebrity in Tween Popular Culture</u> is forthcoming with I.B. Tauris.

She is the book reviews editor for the Routledge journal <u>Celebrity Studies</u>.