Older Teen Girls and Films

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Dedication

For Samuel and Aiden

Yes, I’m really finished this time.

No, I’m not going to do any more University, ever, I promise.

Thank you. I love you.

Abstract

This project explores 16 to18-year-old girls’ selection, navigation and interaction with mainstream films. It seeks to understand where, how, what, why and with whom they view films. The study further investigates how older teen girls relate to, negotiate and articulate the representations of girls and women in the films with which they engage, exploring the relationship to girl power, autonomy and empowerment as well as postfeminist and neoliberal values.

Earlier research on girl film audiences has focused on broader age ranges: with viewing habits and involuntary impacts presented as homogenous across *all* ages of teen girls. By contrast, this study looks at the experiences of girls in a discrete age range to provide a more granular analysis of an important period in the development of girls’ sense of self. The research centres participants’ perspectives and experiences to challenge some of the findings from previous studies of the teen girl audience. Drawing on and incorporating uses and gratifications, the Media Practice Model, Hall’s encoding/decoding model and Gidden’s concept of self-projects, the research provides a more nuanced and focused understanding of older teen girls as an active and discerning film audience

The research contributes to the existing field of literature on teen girls’ film viewing practices, drawing on survey responses from 119 respondents and interview data derived from focus group interviews with 38 girls from two schools in the rural North East of England. Thematic analysis allows girls to speak of their own experiences as experts on their own lives. Key findings show that older teen girls are significantly less influenced by film characters and plotlines than much of the extant literature suggests. Instead, they are active viewers, proficient in demassification, and demonstrate considerable media literacy skills in the ways in which they decode, negotiate and contest film content. The themes of career, motherhood, romance and femininity, plus perspectives on two popular teen girl characters, are explored within an analysis of findings that challenge the notion of teen girls as a singular and coherent audience group. Rather, participants’ interactions with film are shown to relate to, and be influenced by, their own lived realities and future plans.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis encompasses a qualitative study with rural 16 to 18-year-old A-Level student girls in the North East of England to understand their interactions with mainstream films. It investigates how girls select films and negotiate their meanings in order to assess whether and how film viewing impacts girls' lives, including the planning and production of their self-projects (Giddens, 1991). It considers current understandings of teen girls as a film audience, and contemporary academic views relating to screen representations of girls and women and how they may be sought out and used by girls. The study seeks to understand what links may occur between films and these older teen girls' viewing contexts in terms of the genres and content they chose to view, and the practicalities of viewing involved. The field work comprises face-to-face focus groups held in two schools. A thematic analysis of the fieldwork pinpoints postfeminist neoliberal values that influence these girls' lives and draws on media reception models including that of uses and gratifications; the media practice model; and theories stemming from Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model to shed light on older teen girls' film viewing practices and interpretations.

This chapter outlines the research questions and the aims and objectives of the study, beginning with a presentation of what is specifically being sought and scrutinised. It then moves on to discuss current understandings of girls as a film audience and assess why this age group requires in-depth study. The chapter situates the thesis within current academic debates to foreground gaps within the field and to pinpoint the contribution made to our understandings of older teen girls' film viewing practices and experiences. The concluding section supplies an outline of the content of subsequent chapters.

1.2 Aims of the Research

As explored throughout the thesis, teenage girls are often homogenised, being positioned by both academics and wider society within a single category wherein

their similarities tend to be addressed at the expense of their differences. It is often implicitly assumed that what girls think and feel does not change or develop throughout their teenage years. In addition, a substantial proportion of the research undertaken about girls and film involves participants who are either in their early teens or university-aged, with analyses and results generalised to all ages between. Minimal allowance has been given to girls' developments to maturity or to changes in attitude and interests spanning girls' teenage years. The ways girls feel about films and their viewing habits therefore appear not to develop until they are considered adults – at which stage they are assumed to hold adult-associated opinions and viewing habits. This research contributes to the field of teenage film audiences by expanding our knowledge of the differences between young teens' and young adults' film viewing through an explicit focus on girls aged 16 to 18. This age group is acknowledged to be in a transitional period in terms of identity construction (Van Damme and Biltereyst, 2013), straddling both girlhood and womanhood. Within this thesis, the 16 to 18-year-old age group will be referred to as 'older teen girls'.

The thesis is guided by the following research questions:

> How do older teen girls in rural North East England select, navigate and interact with mainstream films?
>
> a. Where, how, what, why, and with whom do these older teen girls view films, both individually and as groups?
>
> b. How might the choice of films viewed by older teen girls impact on their current lives and future plans?
>
> c. How do older teen girls relate to film representations with which they engage?
>
> d. How are film representations negotiated and articulated by older teen girls?

The main question focuses the research on the practicalities of film viewing to understand what films older teen girls watch; where and how they watch films; with whom they watch; and why they choose the specific locations, films and

viewing styles that characterise their viewing practices and values. The subsequent questions delve further into what my participants think and feel about representations of girls and women on screen. As will be discussed, the media are often thought to promote the expectation that girls should change who they are and how they look, providing pressure and instructions to reach these societal goals. This thesis aims to understand what the participants were seeking from films and how this related to their expectations and plans for their lives, current and future. The research endeavours to explore the beliefs and understandings of teen girls, utilising approaches based on an understanding of active audiences and the variability of audience activity (Levy and Windahl, 1985).

The data generated through this fieldwork foregrounds the voices of older teen girls, acknowledging them as the 'experts' on their own experiences and lives (McCarry, 2005; Beckman, 2014). The underpinning premise of this study is that girls are media literate and capable of being reflexive and critical, with the ability to critique, decode and deconstruct what they are watching. Rather than viewing media as always harmful, the thesis begins to answer Gill's (2012, p. 739) call to seek new ways in which to "…understand the diverse ways young people engage with diverse features of the mediascapes in which we all live" by endeavouring to uncover and understand the negotiations that older teen girls make with the films they view, and the bearing that films have on their lives.

1.3 The Research Context

Films are largely produced, written, directed and starred by men, with a discernible lack of representation of female characters of all ages on screen and within film production (British Film Institute, 2018; Chancellor *et al.*, 2019). This lack of representation of women in film is partly supported by what Ames and Burcon (2016b, p. 34) label the "tired cliché", meaning that while boys do not, or cannot, identify with female/girl narratives, girls are able or forced to identify with male/boy narratives. As Marshment (1993) states in her enquiry into the culture of patriarchy, it is those who subordinate women who define them. Thus, the production of images in films of girls and women, or in films that lack them, is a part of this system of representation.

Brown (2000, p. 36) contends that:

> The media available to youth today have become increasingly specialized, offering different audiences different kinds of content... Part of the push for these specialized media has come from advertisers who have begun to realize how lucrative the teen market can be and have demanded more media vehicles in which to put their products in front of teens.

This claim, however, can only be accurate if teen girls are watching media products aimed at them. It assumes that girls in this age group have the resources to access what is being sold and the desire to emulate what they see. The academic and wider societal assumption that teen girls are watching media aimed at them in specific ways as 'teen audiences' thus requires further investigation. Expected levels of media use, according to audience type, has been combined with media effects scholars' ideas of media as a bad influence for girls (Jackson, 2016) and a belief that youth passively receive and internalise information such as gender stereotypes from the media (Buckingham, 1993) (see Chapter 2 for further discussion). It is therefore essential to undertake research which centralises older teen girls' viewing experiences in order to understand how they watch films and how films are decoded and meaning negotiated.

1.3.1 Media and Older Teen Girlhood

Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) understand girlhood as both a collective and individual attainment whereby girls' participation in cultural practices – practices that are material, social and discursive – constantly shift what it means to be a girl. As Tinkler (1995, p. 183) states, "[g]irlhood is a cultural construct, one which embodies the cross-cutting of gender by age. As with other social categories, girlhood is the product of social processes and is historically and also regionally variable." 'Youth' is further regarded by scholars as a period that is liminal, being between childish pursuits and adult behaviours (Mendick *et al.*, 2018, p. 32). An example of the awareness of a change of status from childhood to adulthood can be seen within the 18-year-old group at the research school referred to within the thesis as Maple Academy (see Chapter 4). When discussing films that they anticipated viewing after their A-Level exams, they listed several animated films such as *Minions* (2015) and *Finding Dory* (2016). The following exchange shows their thinking:

Participant	Basically, just Disney Films
ABH	Disney films you're excited about?
Group	Yeah [laughter]
Participant	I think now we've hit the age where like –
Participant	We are adults
Group	[laughter]
Participant	Well, it was really uncool to like Disney films but now we just don't care
Participant	We just don't care
Group	[laughter] yeah
Participant	And also, I think that's good
Participant	And also, exams will be over
Participant	Yeah
Participant	And we can do what we want

These girls show an awareness that certain expectations are placed on teens for them to appear 'cool' and mature but that more freedom, including that of being able to enjoy things previously considered childish, was a bonus of adulthood and something they relished and looked forward to. The same level of excitement was shown by this group when speaking about being able to vote for the first time. Adulthood provided them with new responsibilities whilst also removing the limitations that characterise this period "…as a time of negotiating an array of external pressures that shaped their transitions." (Mendick *et al.*, 2018, p. 26) It is therefore important that research on the lives of older teen girls reflects the understandings exhibited by these girls in order to trace and recognise the passage from older teen girlhood to adulthood that film viewing may highlight.

The participants in the study are all A-Level students. Schools have a significant influence on teens as these institutions are considered "…spaces in which identities connected with perceived ability are constructed, and also where broader cultural and popular gendered identities are enacted in local conditions." (Paule, 2017, p. xiv) Although making decisions about their future lives (such as career and higher education), the 16 to 18 age group are still subject to parental and teacher influence (Curry *et al.*, 1994). Changes in schooling under neoliberalism and austerity have impacted young people's lives, leading to "…a shift away from the relatively predictable youth transitions of the post-war period… towards more extended and complex transitions." (Mendick *et al.*, 2018, p. 7) These changes have also seen the development of personal responsibility for financial success and the expectation that education will help to provide a good life and social

mobility (ibid.). Further discussion of neoliberalism and neoliberal values occurs in Chapter 2.

The contradictions, expectations and values of this age range of girls in relation to their interactions with and negotiations of film are shown, in the literature review and in the overall thesis, to be severely under-researched. This thesis therefore aims to supply an initial understanding of the interrelations that occur for older teen girls.

1.3.2 The YA Genre

The 1960s saw the beginnings of the Young Adult (YA) literary genre, with a focus on adolescent formation and supplying cultural information to its readers (Younger, 2009). The category is also "…a safe space where young people can read about themselves and discover options, alternatives, and information." (ibid., p. xiv) A wide range of genres involve concerns about development, moving from child to adult (Firestone, 2012), and have been seen as influencing gender and identity formation in readers (Ames and Burcon, 2016b). The traditional age range of YA is 12 to 18, however this has been broadened both upwards and downwards to expand the book market (Cart, 2001; Feasey, 2009). This has become a key factor in publishing decisions regarding marketing and content (Garcia, 2013). Notably, there has been a tradition of exploring strong female representations and feminine identity within the genre. However,

> …the depictions of traditional femininity still finds these characters as subservient and meek. Just because these characters are shown as physically powerful and intellectually superior to male counterparts, women are often still depicted as callously jealous and weak. Further, women are defined as powerful in these books in particularly limiting ways. (ibid., p. 77)

Ames and Burcon (2016b, p. 56) further assert that a girl character's physical appearance is presented as determining their success in obtaining a boyfriend and that attaining this "…happily-ever-after so long associated with YA literature.." sends "…perhaps the strongest message of all: things don't end well for strong, empowered women." Younger (2009, p. xvi) explains that "…body-image issues pervade almost every young adult novel in one way or another; issues of weight, beauty, dieting, and 'lookism' (the idea that a person is judged solely by looks)

can be found in every subset...” Garcia (2013) therefore surmises that although a large number of YA books are available, they are limited by a lack of originality and by the repetition of tropes concerning consumerism, appearance, sex and violence, mainly catering for an upper middle-class, heteronormative white audience. These concerns reflect those regarding the influence of film on teenage girls discussed throughout this thesis.

This gendered genre (Woloshyn, Taber and Lane, 2013) sees over half of YA books being authored by women but with a lower percentage of female protagonists than male in books written for 9 to 18-year-olds (Ames and Burcon, 2016b). However, arguments have also been made that some YA literature complicates cultural representations and restraints through a rejection of traditional ideas of femininity (Younger, 2009). Garcia (2013, p. 23) describes “boilerplate” YA as involving a heterosexual love interest; a protagonist who feels out of place and has special powers; and a globe-threatening villain. Additionally, Garcia explains that these novels are written specifically for the markets in which young people are categorised and promoted similarly to other consumer products and cultural components, which includes the intentional serialisation of stories. The capitalisation of profits from the YA audience has expanded to include the adaptation of YA books into film franchises.

Gateward and Pomerance (2002, p. 15) explain that the rise of girl characters in films during the 1990s was “[t]he most profound shift in mass media [that] has been seen in the film industry. Never before have girls been featured so prominently in commercial films produced both within and without the Hollywood system.” They further judge that the rise in these films has not been reflected in academic research. Bullen (2009, p. 497) states that “[t]he conflation of the pleasures of entertainment with the pleasures of consumption is a key mechanism in the enculturation of the young into consumer society.” This is particularly important as consumption of goods holds feminine associations and theories of mass communication have presented audiences as passive (Gray, 1999). The commodification of girlhood, particularly in relation to the concept of girl power, is discussed further in Chapter 2.

1.3.3 Girls and Media

As will be elaborated in Chapter 2, scholars have widely studied girls' lives to understand the ways in which various forms of media, including films, may impact and influence them. Often, this work has been undertaken not only to show risks to girls and how pressure is exerted on them, but also to try to uncover and assess themes and issues such as empowerment and agency (as discussed later) to pinpoint ways in which girls might resist influence from negative media images. Studies of a wide range of factors impacting girls' lives, including a variety of forms of media, have been researched using differing methods and approaches across a variety of disciplines (Duits, 2008b) leading to a wide range of varied theories. Durham (1999a, p. 211) states that

> The passage out of childhood for many girls means experiencing a loss of self and self-determination as cultural norms of femininity and sexuality are imposed upon them... Mass media play a part in this cultural confinement and repression of girls.

Cultural context is also seen to influence the use of media by adolescents (Arnett, Larson and Offer, 1995) as they relate what they view to their lived realities. It is recognised that meaning is produced communally and that "...the individual audience member is a social being with a specific cultural identity created by the interpersonal relations of the communities to which he or she belongs." (Alasuutari, 1999, p. 14) This recognition supports research such as this study by employing methodologies such as focus groups to analyse audience groupings; learn how older teen girls negotiate media collectively; and understand what influence they might allow or be seeking.

Additionally, while film has historically been an event requiring the planning of a cinema visit, rental of a DVD, or reliant on television schedules, there are a wider variety of viewing options available to today's audiences (Aveyard, 2016). However, film is still understood as a social activity, requiring greater audience immersion than television, with cinema viewing often still viewed as an event (Van de Vijver, 2017). Aveyard further identifies films as having a higher cultural value than television programmes. Diminishment of the status of girl culture has been reflected in the ways films about or aimed at girls, and girls themselves, have been considered within academic research (Bode, 2010; Mitchell, 2016). This

thesis draws upon concerns within girls studies by using the opportunity to discuss films with older teen girls in order to enquire how, or whether, these ideas may intersect and impact on their interactions with films and what they might seek from film viewing. As discussed in the following section, a lack of data specifically relating to films and the older teen age range makes it difficult to gauge whether purported risks and pressures dissipate as girls enter emerging adulthood or whether they remain influential. The lack of data in this area has influenced my research questions and the focus of this thesis.

1.4 Situating the Research – Gaps in the Academic Literature

Despite the array of studies concerning girls' lives, there are still notable omissions concerning the older teen age group who are particularly under-researched. Market research by the British Film Institute (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018), Ofcom (2014, 2017, 2018, 2019), Nielsen (2009) and POLIS (Livingstone and Das, 2010) addresses a variety of areas around teen media use for a variety of reporting reasons. While these wide-ranging surveys are useful in supplying the broader picture of cinema attendance and girls' tastes (as utilised within this thesis), all of these reports group teen girls together within very wide age bands. Many reports also fail to separate results by gender, making it impossible to assess girls' relationship with film in any depth. Understandings of older teen girls' cinema viewing habits are thus revealed to be deficient.

There are distinct age bands used within academia to classify the developmental stages of girls: *pre-teen*, *tween*, *teen*, *young adult* and *emerging adult* are all utilised in research, although the specific ages represented within each bracket may vary. While the legal age of adulthood has risen over time as responsibilities, such as work, marriage and children, have become delayed, emerging adulthood is understood to span the period from age 18 to the mid-20s (Beutler, 2012). Life changes and decisions by girls and women are expected to occur within emerging adulthood, all with the focus on the self and, while encompassing some characteristics of adulthood, not actually considering themselves to be adults (ibid.). Coyne, Padilla-Walker and Howard (2013) determine that changes in media use from adolescence to emerging adulthood are under-studied. It is further proposed that "... to the extent that movies and movie characters may provide

templates for emerging adults' identities, it is critical to understand how and why young adults draw meaning from particular movie characters and themes." (Greenwood and Long, 2015, p. 628) However, participants in this study did not fit the emerging adult classification at the time of the fieldwork. While two groups were 18-years-old, Coyne, Padilla-Walker and Howard (2013, p. 125) explain that emerging adulthood is a specific developmental stage, and that

> [e]merging adulthood has been identified as a time of identity exploration (primarily in the areas of love, work, and world-views), instability (primarily in terms of residence changes), feeling in-between (not yet feeling like an adult, but no longer considering oneself a child), being self-focused, and feeling very positive and optimistic…

This is supported by Lewallen, Miller and Behm-Morawitz (2016). Emerging adulthood is therefore understood as experiential, a time where transitions are made from being dependents to independent young adults (Salmela-aro, Aunola and Nurmi, 2007) and not simply an age band. The 18-year-olds in this study were on the cusp of emerging adulthood but had not yet taken steps to enact their adult plans. The wholesale placing of girls 18 and older within the emerging adult category is another way of neglecting or omitting them from specific research on their lives. As shown within Chapter 2, academic research often involves university students as participants or, alternatively, in their early teens, implying that girls between these ages act as a homogenous group: choosing, viewing, negotiating and interacting with films in the same manner.

The scarcity of information on the cinema attendance habits of older teen girls, and specifically those in rural areas, leaves a deficit of information on the availability, cost, and travel distance to cinemas for older teen girls. Newly built British cinemas are purpose-built multiplexes with an average of 10-15 screens, located outside of city centres (Hubbard, 2002). Girls from rural areas tend to live further away from cinemas and have less public transport available to them. They are also more likely to live some distance from friends with whom they might otherwise share film viewing at each other's homes. British planning research (Collins, Hand and Ryder, 2005) has investigated travel time and distance lived from the cinema to judge whether this impacts cinema attendance. Finding that distance does have an influence, they state that this effect is under-researched.

Collins *et al*. further found that a choice of cinema venues is not always available outside of cities. Considering mode and availability of transport, travel time, waiting time and travel expense, they conclude that travel time constrains the frequency of cinema visits, but that it is not the most significant variable. At the time of the fieldwork, 90 per cent of cinemas in the North East were multiplexes (British Film Institute, 2016), so that when these older teen girls wished to view a film, they were limited by the location that was most easily reachable rather than by venue type.

In addition to a dearth of research on the cinema viewing habits of older teen girls, there is a lack of critical engagement with the viewing of films by girls outside the cinema. Aveyard (2016, p. 144) argues that the "…privileging of the film theatre experience over other forms of cinema has played a role in constraining investigation and conceptualisation of the practices of non-theatrical film consumption". The wide variety of viewing options now available to audiences means that films may be watched anywhere that a screen is available. The fluidity of movement between different formats, spaces and media sources makes situating film viewing more complicated than it has been in the past (ibid.). Within the academic literature, and as discussed in Chapter 2, girls are presented within textual analyses as watching films either in large groups in the cinema (Nash and Lahti, 1999; Gateward and Pomerance, 2002; Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007; Bode, 2010; Shary, 2014), while fieldwork with girls presents them as watching alone in their bedrooms (Larson, 1995; Livingstone, 2005b, 2007). Such studies have engaged with girls younger than those in my sample. Furthermore, research on new media – defined as means of mass communication that use digital technologies such as the internet – has tended to focus on individual elements of film production and consumption such as streaming services (Matrix, 2014; Alexander, 2016; Arnold, 2016). There has also been scholarly discussion of how second-screening, where mobile screen interactions of various kinds co-occur with film or television viewing. This work includes analyses of data on second screen use through data sets collected from social media (Doughty, Rowland and Lawson, 2012; Lee and Andrejevic, 2014) and how these mobile screen devices might impact girls' viewing practices, including levels of immersion through analysis of film industry data and an online survey of 8 to 12-year-old girls respectively (Pea *et al.*, 2012; Hassoun, 2016).

A revival of uses and gratifications theory (Rubin, 2009; Coyne, Padilla-Walker and Howard, 2013; Pittman and Sheehan, 2015) and third-person effects research (Tsay-Vogel, 2016) relating to the influence of new media on various users/audiences has also shaped studies of girls' viewing habits. Such research, however, does not discuss how new media use by girls impacts their film viewing, nor how new media and film viewing – whether in the form of streaming services or second screens – potentially influence and inform each other. Girls' viewing decisions have been presented as highly influenced by fandoms (Nash and Lahti, 1999; Bode, 2010) and, within such research, teen girls have not been assumed to make informed, logical decisions about what they view. Another omission is revealed in research relating to older teen girls' strategies for selecting what to view, particularly in relation to the unprecedented speed at which viewing options and opportunities continue to grow.

While girls and bedroom studies have comprehensively explored general media use by teens through ethnographic studies of girls' interactions within private spaces, using interviews and focus groups (Steele and Brown, 1995; Bovill and Livingstone, 2001; Baker, 2004; Lincoln, 2014b, 2016), this body of work has not focused specifically on girls' film viewing. The teen years are understood to be a time that teenagers separate themselves from their families in order to become more independent (Livingstone, 2005b). They are thought to desire time alone or with their peers and to spend less of their time viewing media with their families. Subsequently, there is a lack of research on teens and family viewing in both the cinema and home. Jones' (2011) study looks at family film viewing by asking American university students to recall their younger years and draft essays about their memories of film viewing. However, no such fieldwork-based studies have been conducted with English older teen girls.

Other academics have theorised family television time as a bonding experience whereby families plan to spend time together (Livingstone, 2007; Jancovich, 2011; Chambers, 2016). However, this body of research does not focus specifically on the viewing of films as a family group. Girls studies research on rural girls is scarce (Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007) and studies specifically regarding viewing habits of rural girls were not found in literature searches, even though viewing routines and the placement of film viewing in domestic routines

must surely differ between urban and rural locations (Gauntlett and Hill, 1999). My study reveals, however, that the lack of opportunity for rural teens to view films with their friends within the home impacts girls' choices about with whom to watch. My research provides useful data and offers important insights into rural girls' viewing habits in order to build up a more nuanced understanding of the lives of older teenage girls.

Academic media studies acknowledge that popular culture and the media are significant sources of socialisation, with certain media messages targeting girls (Hylmö, 2006). However, Coyne, Callister and Robinson (2010, p. 389) argue that "[m]edia aimed at adolescents, particularly movies, is understudied". The purpose of mainstream films is to draw audiences through compelling, appealing and engaging content (Ward, 2003). If successfully engaged, the images and ideas projected in film content may influence the ideas, actions and beliefs of teen girls (see for example Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007; Vares and Jackson, 2015; Daniels, 2016). As mentioned, the fieldwork undertaken to support many of these studies has involved pre -teen, early teen or university student participants. This results in a lack of understanding of older teen girls who fall between these age ranges and have yet to enter emerging adulthood. It is logical to assume a difference in life experience and interests between 12 to 14-year-olds and 18 to 21-year-olds, although little is known about how media use may change between adolescence and emerging adulthood (Coyne, Padilla-Walker and Howard, 2013). For example, in their early teens, girls are likely to be attending the cinema driven by parents; the range of films available are limited by ratings, with parents or pocket money covering the cost of their tickets. In comparison, audience members aged 18 and over might be living away from home and supplying their own transportation and film ticket by a work income or university loans, enabling them to view any film they wish. It is therefore vital to understand older teenage girls' social circumstances; their relationship with the films they view; how they interpret film content; and the influences such content may have on this audience group.

The same issues arise concerning the influence of media celebrities on teenage girls, which has led to studies concerning young people and media consumption. Allen *et. al* (2017, p. 229) state that "[p]oliticians, teaching professionals, media

commentators and even some academics in the UK and beyond frequently denounce celebrity as having a damaging impact on young people – from harmful effects on body image to eroding young people's aspirations." Discourses of girlhood and celebrity culture are acknowledged to have grown simultaneously (Colling, 2017). As will be addressed in both the literature review and the analysis, "[i]n the Hollywood film industry stars have often been exploited as key to gaining audiences for teen film and girl teen films often include actors that function as stars outside of the diegesis." (ibid., p. 47) How older teen girls are influenced by celebrities has been under-studied and overstated. It is therefore important to determine whether celebrities, including actors and actresses, influence or impact teen girls' film viewing practices.

Academic reviews and textual analyses assert that specific types of role models may inspire girls by providing them with inspiration and guidance (Signorelli, 1997; Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007) and by motivating education and employment goals, as discussed in Chapter 7. An alternative explanation from research on role model influence (discussed in Chapter 2) suggests that there are key conditions, such as similarities to the role model, necessary for such modelling to be successful (Kleemans *et al.*, 2018). It also suggests that character traits may be more important than specific actions undertaken by potential role models (Budgeon, 2001). Earlier research has also conceded that "…in media aimed at teenage girls, patriarchally prescribed standards of femininity are overt and unambiguous." (Durham, 1999a, p. 217) and that "…increasingly, people's positioning as members of a particular class, gender or generation is itself mediated through their audience hood." (Livingstone, 1998, p. 6) However, few studies explore whether girls, particularly older teen girls, encounter these impacts, whether they seek out or 'need' role models and, if they do, whether they seek them from films. This thesis explores the broader range of techniques utilised by older teen girls to negotiate their readings of film representations, and the range of gratifications they seek and gain through their film viewing practices.

Postfeminist neoliberal notions of girl power have influenced film representations of girls and women, promoting values associated with strength and empowerment through the characters that carry these ideals in order for companies to profit. The impact of these ideas appear in Harris' (2004b) 'can do' girl. These girls are

perceived as well-situated and eager to conquer the challenges of such values and to take up all opportunities available to them. However, the influence of films on girls' understandings of neoliberal ideas has not been foregrounded in research. I draw on the concept of self-projects, as introduced by Giddens (1991), to understand what neoliberal values are drawn on by older teen girls to build a successful life. Earlier research suggests that media images impact ideas of success in various areas of girls and women's lives by supplying information and inspiration (Meijer, 1998). This thesis considers the influence of neoliberal and postfeminist ideals of empowerment, choice and femininity, conveyed by mainstream films, to understand how older teen girls negotiate with these visions. It assesses how these girls form neoliberal self-projects while also maintaining individuality and autonomy.

A thematic analysis of qualitative data gathered from a computerised survey with 119 participants and focus groups with 38 girls from two schools in rural North East of England enables this research to consider the gaps in earlier research highlighted above.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 's literature review introduces studies of film audiences, including an assessment of uses and gratifications and reception studies. It then outlines how the teen girl audience has been theorised to date, considering recent understandings of girls and media effects theory and debates about role models, cinema viewing, home viewing and girls' engagement with new media. To form a background for my analysis, it then identifies elements of neoliberalism, postfeminism and girl power that comprise a set of influential values that either steer or contradict late teen girls' viewing practices.

Chapter 3 lays out the theoretical framework for the thesis, first by defining girls and girl culture and then by expanding on the theories of uses and gratifications; the media practice model; and audience reception encoding/decoding. Exploring how these theories might be used to examine older teen girls' film viewing, it retains a focus on how these theories and models have previously been used to study girls and their suitability for this research.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach that underpins my research. The research design and reasoning behind it are discussed, followed by information regarding the sample of girls participating and other relevant details. It describes the fieldwork, comprising a computerised survey and focus groups, before moving on to identify the methods of analysis used to assess the collected data. The chapter ends with a reflexive section considering my standpoint as a researcher and any impact I might have had on my participants. This includes a short reflection on what I would modify were the research undertaken again.

Chapters 5 – cinema viewing and 6 – home viewing, explore the where, what, how and why in analyses of older teen girls film viewing. These chapters consider how rural location; finances; friend and family relationships; and the nature of what older teen girls are seeking from films may influence their options and choices. Discussion includes why certain films are chosen for viewing in particular locations; the use of second screens and distracted viewing; as well as the methods used to source information about films to inform choices.

The focus then narrows to four themes identified within the data: Chapter 7 considers future employment and motherhood and Chapter 8 romantic relationships and femininity. These chapters investigate how the participants interacted with and responded to film content relating to these areas. Differences between the 18-year-old groups from both schools are investigated in their attitudes to employment and motherhood. Particular attention is paid to neoliberal self-projects created in these areas and how film content was negotiated to achieve a variety of gratifications such as role modelling and information gathering.

Chapter 9 focuses on two girl film characters most often discussed by my participants in the fieldwork: Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter* and Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games*.[1] It explores why and how the girls related to these differing depictions of girlhood and the actresses portraying the characters. What comprises role models, and whether modelling occurred in relation to these characters and actresses, is considered. The discussion explores girl power

[1] See Appendix I for a full list of references of the books and films in these franchises

elements of the characters as well as postfeminist values in the actresses' behaviour.

Chapter 10 discusses the various themes arising from the findings chapters to answer the research questions posed at the beginning. It shows how older teen girls challenge the many assumptions made about their viewing habits, negotiations and interactions with films. It casts light on the complex gratifications they seek and obtain from films; the reasoning behind their viewing choices; and how representations of girls and women on screen interact with their own self-projects. Areas that warrant further investigation and future research ideas arising from this thesis are also highlighted. Finally, this chapter draws conclusions and considers the significance of the research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the research and existing gaps highlighted in the Introduction. It situates the thesis within the fields of academic literature and introduces the concepts, theories and methods used to study audiences, and their relevance to this research and its methodology. Beginning with an overview of the media effects model; cultivation theory; uses and gratifications (U&G); and encoding/decoding, it then narrows in focus, examining how the 16 to18-year-old girl audience has been researched. To frame an understanding of direct and indirect influences of films on girls, and the level of autonomy they are considered to have, theories relating to role models and third-person effects are also explored.

Guided by the thematic analysis of the fieldwork, discussion of girls as film audience moves to research relating to the practicalities of film viewing and the content teen girls are thought to watch. The first section investigates research drawing on cultural studies, new cinema history, studies of teen film and girls studies. Later sections consider the cinema and home as viewing locations, pinpointing the impacts and implications of these sites on older teen girls' media lives and viewing habits. The discussion then explores how new media expands and changes viewing options and practices, raising new concerns and perceptions about teen viewing.

Finally, a critical review is undertaken to identify key concepts used in the analysis chapters. Giddens' (1991) notion of the self as reflexive project is critiqued from a feminist perspective to ascertain how older teen girls might relate to, and be influenced by, neoliberal expectations about girls' and women's lives. The concept of girl power, specifically in relation to postfeminist ideas of choice and empowerment, is evaluated to demonstrate the impact of these ideas on screen representations of teen girls, and the expectations conveyed to the teen girl audience. Current theories of the teen girl audience are further scrutinised to determine whether they remain relevant to older teen girls and their interactions with film. Chapter 3 includes exploration of these concepts and approaches in greater detail.

2.2 Early Studies of Film Audiences

Early media effects theories presented audiences as passively receiving information without changing or challenging it, and suggested that the background or social standing of the audience had no influence on effects (see Perloff, 1999; Ott, 2007). These approaches were guided by political and consumer influences and concerned with the social and cultural effects of media (Schrøder *et al.*, 2003). In the 1930s, the Chicago School first labelled the audience as a mass, creating a framework which reflected the changes to social life in that period, and framing the audience as a collective, befitting the dispersed and large cinema audience of the time (McQuail, 1997). McQuail (ibid., p. 7) proposes that "[c]alling an audience a mass reflected fears of depersonalization, irrationality, manipulation, and of a general decline in cultural and moral standards." However, although mass media appears vast and impersonal, the experience of the audience is small scale, and becomes part of social lives through interaction with media and viewing choices. Researchers have thus suggested that the audience does not consider media a manipulative force, but, rather, a friendly presence (ibid.).

Theories of media effects were further challenged by Katz's (1957) development of a two-step flow model wherein media messages were understood as mediated by communication and local communities or opinion leaders, rejecting the idea of the audience as a mindless mass (Livingstone, 2006; Valkenburg, Peter and Walther, 2016). Advancing the field further, the cultivation theory developed in the 1970s looked at long term effects of television and mass media on audiences. Valkenburg, Peter and Walther (2016, p. 319) define cultivation theory as arguing "…that the more time people spend "living" in the television world, the more likely they are to believe the social reality portrayed on television." Cultivation theory has been utilised more recently to understand whether the media influence teens' ideas of romance (Hefner and Wilson, 2013; Galloway, Engstrom and Emmers-Sommer, 2015); to consider displays of gendered violence in vampire fiction (Franiuk and Scherr, 2013); to understand possible media effects on body image (Van Vonderen and Kinnally, 2012); and to investigate materialism stemming from viewing celebrity media (Lewallen, Miller and Behm-Morawitz, 2016). The flexibility of the theory is shown in the variety of methodologies in

studies using content analysis (Hefner and Wilson, 2013), surveys (Hawk *et al.*, 2006; Van Vonderen and Kinnally, 2012; Galloway, Engstrom and Emmers-Sommer, 2015), textual analysis (Franiuk and Scherr, 2013) and peer review (Ward, 2003). Although cultivation theory has been shown to be useful in establishing whether media influence might occur through the repetition of messages, standards and agendas (Livingstone and Das, 2010), media effects are difficult to measure and define (Ruddock, 2001) and multiple influences working in combination with media, when taken into account or ignored, can skew interpretations of the data.

Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath (2001) state that British cultural thinking relies on a 'common sense' understanding that showing something means to encourage it, and that this is how film influence works. They also recognise an issue with the understanding of a 'possible impact' from film viewing: "[t]hese two words are effectively unchallengeable because they are virtually without substantive content. What kind of 'impact' on which actual audiences? The idea, the words, are pure rhetoric, and all the more effective because of that." (ibid., pp. 7–8) Critics of media effects theory conclude that results are not indicative of a significant effect, asserting that other societal forces — such as class, gender and ethnicity — may trump any actual effects, and that memory, selection and interpretation are also crucial (Oliver, 2002). In their review of media effects research, Valkenburg, Peter and Walther (2016, p. 322) propose that "[s]ocial influences can also occur more covertly, through an individual's perception of the prevailing norms in the groups to which they belong (e.g., family, peer clique, subcultures). This more subtle influence has received relatively little attention in the literature." Livingstone and Das (2010) support this, explaining that effects should not be considered as occurring immediately after viewing. Rather, they suggest an understanding based in cultivation theory:

> …any effect of the media operates only in combination with many other social influences. Furthermore reality-defining effects must be measured not in terms of an immediate impact on an individual but rather in terms of gradual shifts in social norms over years or decades. (ibid. 2010, p.7)

This chapter is chiefly concerned with theories of media effects and influence within audience studies and cultural studies perspectives, considering those most

relevant to research on girls' interactions with film, and which may help to explain the experiences of older teen girls.

2.3 Uses and Gratifications

U&G research originated to study the appeal of a diverse range of mass media for audiences with differing personalities and social circumstances. It developed to encompass studies focusing mainly on television or child audiences (McQuail, 1984). U&G theories have been used to study radio, print media, television, advertising and, more recently, mobile phones and the internet (Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley, 2010). While previously understood to be a 1970s positivist method, new media advances have reinvigorated these theories and widened the fields of study (Rubin, 2009; Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley, 2010; Sundar and Limperos, 2013). Ruggiero (2000) argues that as more media choices become available through developing technologies, an academic understanding of satisfaction and motivation becomes vital. Studies such as Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley's (2010) focus group research, which explored 24 Irish 12 to 14-year-old girls' use of social networking sites, highlight the lack of research utilising U&G in online contexts. That study applies the theories in a modern context to understand active teen girl audience interaction with all forms of media, rather than the effects of media upon the audience. This research was undertaken with a similar desire but with a specific focus on films and media relating to the older teen girl audience.

Historically, U&G studies have been conducted on a large scale with the intention of generalising results. Descriptive categories have sought to classify audience members into groups (Ruggiero, 2000). U&G research employs quantitative methods, such as surveys and statistics, which many consider the only permissible way to undertake such research (Schrøder, 1999). While early U&G researchers claimed that they wished to understand gratifications to explore the effects of media, Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) conclude that the connection was not substantially investigated. They recognise the criticism that theory and method within U&G are not clearly stated or followed but refute this to argue that implicit and explicit assumptions give coherence to U&G and that particular elements codify its understandings and procedures. The first of these codes is understanding the audience as active and their use of the mass media as goal directed. Secondly,

audience members have responsibility for linking their desired gratifications with what they choose to watch, using media rather than suffering direct effects. Thirdly, media are not the only sources of need satisfaction that demand consideration. Fourthly, the methodology accepts data collected directly from audience members as identifying and explaining their goals for media use. Finally, no value judgements on the cultural significance of mass media should occur during research. All these codes are relevant to the analysis of older teen girls' interactions with film undertaken in this thesis.

However, Leung (2001, p. 498) claims that the development of unified theories within U&G has been held back by "…a lack of clarity among many central concepts such as audience needs, gratifications, motives and uses…". Ruggiero (2000, p. 5) further criticises U&G for failing to "…search for the interrelations among the various media functions, either quantitatively or conceptually, in a manner that might have led to the detection of the latent structure of media gratifications." Leung (2001) also outlines that U&G assumes audiences to be interacting with media to fulfil individual needs, with communication choices made purposefully to fulfil goals. While this base assumption of U&G — that the audience is active and self-reported audience data used to determine motives is valid — has been judged as simplistic and naïve by some critics (Ruggiero, 2000), others believe these conditions are understood by an audience who are aware of different media types and their motives for using them (Valkenburg, Peter and Walther, 2016). Early U&G research found that youths used television for six particular reasons: escape, companionship, arousal, relaxation, learning or habit/passing the time (Rubin, 2009). Within U&G, this type of media use is considered rational, as the audience have specific goals in mind (personal or social) which they are able to explain; however, some consider this ability to be overestimated (McQuail, 1997). There is also debate as to whether the audience are able to understand their own motivations, both conscious and subconscious, and separate those gratifications from general pleasure obtained from viewing (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005). This does not seem to allow for the gratification of pleasure to co-exist with other motivations for viewing. These co-motivations are considered within the analysis offered here.

Early U&G research posits that "…all or most of the relevant factors for audience formation (motives, perceived or obtained satisfactions, media choices, background variables) can, in principle, be measured." (McQuail, 1997, p. 71) However, researchers also find that there will be varied, circumstantial, overlapping and weak motivations, and that expectations are subject to change and personal to each audience member. This culminates in the suggestion that a cohesive theory of audience motivation will have limited success. These perceived failings, however, have led to the development of reception studies and a more individualised approach to audience motivations and interactions with texts.

Despite the criticisms of U&G outlined within this section, there are key factors which blend well with reception studies and with postfeminist and neoliberal ideas discussed in this and the following chapter. U&G has been used to study children's and teens' interactions with media and supplies a framework of theories upon which this research will build. The re-emergence of U&G to investigate new media has also provided ways of analysing and understanding impacts of the internet and on-demand viewing — imperative when endeavouring to understand the media use of older teens who have grown up with ever-expanding access to a wide range of media sources (discussed later in this chapter). Having found, through a review of the literature, that teenage girls are theorised as a collective, the intention of this research was to discover whether this wide grouping did indeed utilise film texts similarly, or if older teen girls differed in any way. Therefore, I undertook focus groups with the aim of asking older teen girls about their personal motivations. The data was analysed using both U&G and audience studies theories. A more in-depth discussion of U&G and how it is utilised within the analysis occurs in Chapter 3.

Building on the U&G understanding of audiences as active, the following section outlines the development of reception studies and Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory to outline how they complement each other and may be used in combination to analyse older teen girls' relationship with films.

2.4 Reception Studies and Active Audiences

Schrøder *et. al* (2003) characterise media effects research as questioning what media does to people in terms of social and cultural effects. Following on from this, the next phase of audience studies was the theorisation of active audiences, questioning what the audience does with media, particularly in terms of satisfying needs. In the 1980s and 1990s, the popularity of audience reception studies rose as attempts were made to draw connections between gratifications and cultural studies (Livingstone, 2000). This has led to the tendency for audience research "…to mean research on reception not, as previously, research on effects." (Livingstone, 2000, p. 11).

While supporting the understanding of audiences as active, cultural studies research shifted audience studies to include the evaluation of the impact of culture and life situation, particularly in terms of class and gender, on audience readings. The understanding of viewers' freedom to negotiate media codes makes the work relevant to feminist research as it acknowledges that the audience actively create meanings that match their world views, cultural positioning (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005) and experiences and interests (Lotz and Ross, 2004). Further advancement in media effects emerged, most notably through the work of Hall who theorised the active nature in which the audience interprets what they view.

Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory takes up the premise that, rather than passively accepting preferred meanings, audiences decode texts according to their personal cultural location and experiences (McCabe, 2004). Hall explains how semiotic signs, which are convention rather than natural, can help the audience understand what they are watching, working as maps to direct them towards ideological messages within texts. However, these signs are not only read in their most obvious form but can "…intersect with deep semantic code of a culture and take on additional, more active ideological dimensions" (Hall, 1980, p. 133). This allows for the reading of a single sign or code in a wide variety of ways, signalling a multiplicity of meanings to the viewer. Hall believed that negotiating meaning was the usual way in which audiences viewed media (Gray, 1999). Encoding/decoding was intended to be political and polemical, challenging the dominant communication model and "... positivistic notions of content analysis

and audience understanding. In short, it was complicating the dominant communication model at the time...” (ibid., p. 26) Hall intended this to be an intervention rather than a fully composed theoretical model to be directly applied to research. It was further seen as bridging the gap between gratifications research and cultural studies by emphasising audience activity in negotiating meaning (Livingstone, 2000).

Despite Hall’s intentions that the theory spark debate, encoding/decoding, as presented in its original form, has been incorporated widely into studies of audiences and has moved research from a focus on texts alone to the understanding that, to judge the impact of a text, the audience must be considered (Ruddock, 2001). It also

> …laid the foundation for and articulated the problems to be addressed in the ‘reception paradigm’ of what became known as ‘media studies’... Hall’s article really presents a fairly simple model, but it was partly just because of its elegant simplicity that it gained a reputation as a key text. (Alasuutari, 1999, p. 2)

As identified by Cavalcante (2018), however, media contain more than ideological battles and, particularly in feminist audience research, the emotions and pleasures involved in or gained from encounters with media are also important parts of viewing choices and experiences. Encoding/decoding has often been utilised in feminist research of girls’ understandings of media (for example Williams, 2002; Gill, 2007c; Jackson, Vares and Gill, 2013; Ringrose *et al.*, 2013), to the extent that the terms are used without explanation.

Encoding/decoding is advanced and critiqued in the work of Morley and Brunsdon (1999), which considers how meaning is conveyed and negotiated by domestic television audiences. One of the earliest studies in this area to use fieldwork with an audience the research also evaluated the impact of class and gender on audience readings. Their understanding of viewers’ freedom to negotiate media codes makes the work relevant to feminist scholars as it acknowledges that the audience actively create meanings that match their individual views of the world and their lived experiences. Morley and Brunsdon’s study tests Hall’s theory (Thornham, 1997) and was intended to “... give some empirical substance to the encoding/decoding model” (Gray, 1999, p. 27). The use

of fieldwork to understand how the audience constructs readings, and how this might link to culture and location, instigated research which became the foundation of a new type of audience studies (Gill, 2007c) and which forms the basis for this thesis. Thornham (1997, p. 73) proposes that

> [t]he focus in David Morley's research on the *act* of reading, and on the relationship between that act and the complex positionings of individuals within culture, also offered a methodology through which feminists might explore their own research in relationship between feminist theory and the textural readings made by actual women.

The notion that audiences have varying views and ways of looking at the same media text is critical when exploring how gender and cultural variances between viewers might impact the reading of a film or television production. As Lotz and Ross (2004, p. 189) observe, theories that revealed the audience "…as active meaning makers [were] particularly important to the assumptions and interests of feminist scholars." Further discussion of the ways in which feminist scholars have taken up and used encoding/decoding occurs in Chapter 3.

Morley's work, both alone and in collaboration with other researchers, has received praise for building on Hall's work, using methods drawn from "…the central 'cultural studies' category, approached from the social sciences end of the spectrum." (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005, p. 56) However, the work was considered weak in that the audience studied was not natural, but assembled specifically for the research, and viewing pleasure was not taken into consideration. These critiques were taken on board in Morley's subsequent research, although it continued to rely upon explanations given by participants rather than analysing researchers' observations, explaining that both methods had equal, but different, areas of weakness.

Although the original focus of this field of research was television, since the 1980s there have been important developments in film and cinema audience studies. The work found traction in feminist film theory and other fields interested in active viewers who were contextualised socially as well as cultural studies television research, as discussed (Biltereyst and Meers, 2018). Elements of this approach are incorporated in my analysis and thus, further discussion of active audiences and the encoding/decoding model, particularly in relation to girls, films

and feminist theory, is found in the Theoretical Framework. This chapter now investigates literature relating specifically to studies of girls within media effects, role models, cinema attendance and new media research.

2.5 Research Regarding Girls and Media Effects

Previous academic research has taken specific approaches to teen girl audiences. Mainstream film and television are considered to be important to teens, as the media can transport viewers to new places and show them experiences they may not yet have had (Coy, 2009). Ross and Nightingale (2003) suggest that audiences use what they view to rehearse their own life choices. However, Driscoll (2011) argues that the power of film is not as singular or dominant as in the past, suggesting that film may have lost its influence. Kitzinger (2014) posits that the media effects perspective is now viewed as old fashioned and naïve, with audiences being more creative and able to resist the power of the media. Kitzinger still finds that, within certain circumstances, media representations may have significant influence. This divergent understanding of media influence is present in research that considers whether portrayals of girls and women in film might feed ideas of gender, culture, sexuality and femininity, directly influencing girls and young women. These studies are relevant to my research questions about how older teen girls interact and negotiate with representations in film, and this thesis complicates and challenges established assumptions about how and why older teen girls interact with films.

Girl audiences are often considered to be easily misled by what they view (Driscoll, 1999; Galloway, Engstrom and Emmers-Sommer, 2015; Vares and Jackson, 2015) and not thought to be fully aware of the pressures exerted on them, or the cultural, political and marketing strategies employed within the media. At the same time, girls may not be given enough credit for recognising that what they are watching might be inferior quality (Bode, 2010). Girls are positioned as being particularly susceptible to media pressure, wishing to copy celebrities' appearances. In Gill's (2012) focus group and interview-based study of pre-teen girls from several countries, media content was shown to have an emotional impact even when girls were able to critique it. However, survey-based cultivation theory research with university students failed to find a significant link between

body dissatisfaction and exposure or comparison to media; life experiences and resonance of the viewing material determined the degree of impact (Van Vonderen and Kinnally, 2012) – suggesting that age may be a factor.

Jackson's (2016) research with pre-teen girls from New Zealand utilises thematic analysis of video diaries. Jackson concludes that the use of media effects and psychological frameworks disguises the complicated relationship girls have with media content. An earlier study by Bain (2003) finds that gauging the extent of influence on activities and behaviours is difficult, although this research did not undertake fieldwork. These views collectively support the claim that "…research with girls themselves to illuminate the ways they make sense of popular culture representations in relation to embodied self is sparse" (Jackson, 2016, p. 69). Therefore, research such as that presented within this thesis, particularly with the 16 to 18-year-old age group, is necessary to gain a more thorough understanding of girls' viewing habits.

There have been a variety of studies considering the potential range of effects from girls viewing films. These include studies with a focus on the representation of teenage characters (Oliver, 2013) and what girls might learn from films regarding sexual and romantic relationships (Brown *et al.*, 2006; ter Bogt *et al.*, 2010; Katsulis *et al.*, 2013; Luksza, 2015). There has been further work on how the on-screen portrayal of female bodies might influence girls' feelings and views of their own bodies (Coleman, 2008; Van Vonderen and Kinnally, 2012; Budgeon, 2015; Vares and Jackson, 2015; Daniels, 2016). Concern has been expressed over potential media threats and influences, or the actions that girls might take in response to these influences, such as victimisation (Pipher, 1994; Mitchell, 2016), vulnerability and endangerment (Duits and van Zoonen, 2009) or encouragement toward eating disorders (C. E. Martin, 2007; Park *et al.*, 2007; Carey, Donaghue and Broderick, 2010).

Researchers have posited that girls require feminist interventions (Gilligan, 1991) to direct them away from either becoming 'mean girls' or being bullied by them (Ringrose, 2006), and to educate them around conflicting ideologies regarding the social role of women (Gonick, 2007). This research often includes fieldwork using ethnographic qualitative methods which (although interesting and

informative in both practice and findings) focus on younger girls than those participating in this dissertation research. However, there is a small body of these studies which present girls as able to negotiate and assess media images as normative or inspirational. One such study is Retallack, Ringrose and Lawrence's (2016) work with 12 to 15-year-old participants; this considers the girls' feminist responses to body image at school and on social media. The limited number of studies, and the young ages of the participants, highlights the importance of research including fieldwork with older teen girls to understand what they view, why they view it, and any impact it might have.

Another useful branch of media effects is third-person effects, which describes the belief of audience members that other members viewing the same material will be more affected by it than themselves. Davidson (1983) explains that those who are 'expert' in a field, or believe themselves to have more relevant information and experience than other audience members, presume the media have a significant effect in general. It is also suggested that audiences shy away from admitting that they are influenced by media (particularly in research situations), wishing to appear independent, or believing that others are more vulnerable as they do not have the same level of knowledge (Perloff, 1999). Social differences also allow audience members to consider themselves less affected than those of a different social standing. Believing they are invulnerable to media influence allows viewing to occur without fear (Tal-Or, Tsfati and Gunther, 2009). Conversely, effects which may present audience members in a positive light are more easily admitted (Perloff, 1999; Tal-Or, Tsfati and Gunther, 2009).

Third-person effects has seen a revival in recent years within studies of social media (Tsay-Vogel, 2016) and I argue it remains relevant to girls studies, particularly when considered alongside the peer pressure and mutual monitoring that occurs in teen girls' lives (Carey, Donaghue and Broderick, 2010; Winch, 2015). Judgements of what may influence other audience members can colour girls' understandings of media influence between age groups and stages of maturity, as illustrated within Chapters 5 to 9. Third-person effects is used in the analysis to explain participants' judgements of film influence. It works in combination with U&G; active audience theories from a variety of fields; the

encoding/decoding model; and role model research (as discussed in the following section).

2.6 Role Model Research on Girls

Much of role model research with girls, both qualitative and quantitative, includes either participants under the age of 16 (for example Monnot, 2010; Jackson and Vares, 2015b; Jackson, Goddard and Cossens, 2016) or undergraduate students (for example Lockwood and Kunda, 1997; Quimby and DeSantis, 2006; Greenwood, 2007), entirely neglecting girls aged 16 to18. This omission is important and requires examination: girls within this age bracket are making choices about their futures and moving from the realm of the child towards emerging adulthood, as discussed in the Introduction. Budgeon's (2001) study, based on interviews with 33 16 to 20-year-old girls, stands out – not only for the age of the participants, but also in finding that character traits of role models swayed what girls considered to be ideal female qualities. The influence of specific traits was particularly effectual from female celebrities who were considered to be strong (evoking ideals of postfeminism and girl power, as discussed later in this chapter) and were not diverted from their ambitions. This understanding is central to role model influence as used within this research in combination with U&G. However, the field of role model research has been described as lacking consensus around what role models are and do, with no clear understanding of how they might be motivational (Morgenroth, Ryan and Peters, 2015).

Conversely, Signorelli's (1997) content analysis of depictions of girls in the media notes that girls studies role model investigations encompass both positive and negative media influence. Affirmative models reflect possibilities for overcoming limits on girls' achievements, while negative models reinforce damaging behaviours and stereotypes (see also Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007, who reflect on the development of girls studies). Research concerning girls' and women's role models has mainly focused on the subject of career. Studies of the on-screen representation of women in specific careers include that of Steinke (1997, 2005) employing textual analysis, as well as Steinke *et al*. (2007, 2009) utilising participant drawings and questionnaires on media portrayals of women in science.

Further career fields have been researched in Buck *et al.*'s (2008) thematic analysis and focus group research with young girls and female scientists; Johnston's (2010) content analysis work on women in public relations; and Everett Graham and Maschio's (1995) research on representations of female lawyers, also using content analysis. These studies explore whether how women appear, or do not appear, on-screen has any impact on girls' career decisions. They further suggest that career advice is a key area where films exert influence in teen girls' lives and that girls look to films for guidance and inspiration. However, as with media effects in general, studies focus on the impact of media in isolation from factors that might impact girls' abilities and opportunities to pursue fields of study or careers. Chapter 7 analyses whether film supplies career role modelling for older teen girls and what other aspects of their lives may influence their decisions.

Role model research highlights the wide-ranging inequality of female representation in screen media and suggests ways that this might impact and limit girls' and women's expectations and life trajectories. There is evidence that one must recognise oneself in a role model in order for influence to occur; this is discussed in terms of role model gender-matching, particularly in education, traditionally female-dominated careers or career areas where women are under-represented (Lockwood, 2006). Role model literature hypothesises that girls and women look to female role models for specific reasons, and Morgenroth, Ryan and Peters (2015) conclude that motivation is the central requirement of effective modelling. In order for modelling to influence behaviour or emotions, people must have a reason for seeking out the role model and have identified a goal or self-project. This meshes with social comparison theory, which posits that people compare themselves to those they think they are most similar (Kleemans *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, peers are believed to have more influence than celebrities on social skills, but celebrities and fashion models will be more influential with regard to physical appearance.

Role modelling is an active process as "…we not only choose but also create our role models… by selecting out those features that best suit our interests from our current points of view" (Fisher, 1988, p. 219). Therefore, for modelling to be a success, achievement must be thought possible. Role models seen as unattainable

are demoralising and discouraging rather than motivating (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997). This suggests that modelling is personal and reflexive, with role models changing depending on individual interests and focus. Mendick *at. al* (2018) present that celebrity allows young people to mediate thoughts about their futures and therefore actively negotiate with dominant discourses recognised as part of celebrity, although this is another under-studied area. Both U&G and media effects consider role models obtained from media, depending on how active the audience are within the process and whether they are intentionally seeking influence or guidance. It is particularly important to understand how role models might influence decisions in areas such as career planning with older teen girls as this is a period within which they are actively making decisions about future employment and, as discussed, they lack representation in role model studies. These theories inform the analysis when considering whether girls are seeking role modelling or other gratifications from films.

Having identified and discussed the literature relating to the effects of film on teen girls, this chapter now moves on to how girls are considered as a film audience, in the cinema and at home, to pinpoint theories which inform the analysis.

2.7 Research on Girls and Cinema

Scholarship on teen film focuses on films as texts to be analysed, while assuming specific viewing practices and reception by teenage girls (for example Kaveney, 2006; Driscoll, 2011; Karlyn, 2011; Projansky, 2014; Shary, 2014). Other fields of research focusing on teen girls' cinema attendance take a historical approach to girls audiences; for example, Anselmo-Sequeira (2015) discusses the movie fangirl in America from the early 1900s, providing a useful picture of negative attitudes towards girls' fandoms and their cinema attendance in that period. Kearney (2004) undertook research on the American production trend of films about teen girls between the 1930s and 1950s, importantly tracing early appropriation of teen girl culture by mass media. Both historically and contemporarily, the cinema is judged and studied as a venue for teen dating, being a social space away from the home and family (Richards, 2003; Langhamer, 2007; Jones, 2013). Although not expressly stated, this suggests that cinema usage

changes with age, with various meanings and practices attached to different age groups.

A prevalent academic view of teen girls' cinema attendance since the 1990s is summed up by Gateward and Pomerance (2002, p. 15) who state that: "…female youth tend to gravitate toward two activities – shopping and going to the movies. They attend in groups, often viewing the same films many times". This perspective has been recurrent in research (principally textual analysis) as proof of teen girl audiences' viewing habits and their influence on film production (for example Nash and Lahti, 1999; Gateward and Pomerance, 2002; Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007; Bode, 2010; Shary, 2014). Similar assessments are replicated within the limited literature on teen girl cinema audiences, although no fieldwork studies, reports or statistics (academic or film industry) can be found to support these ideas. The lack of data on teen girl film audiences makes this research and its fieldwork with older teen girls particularly important.

The characterisation of teen girls as fanatical fans extends to the belief that they are particularly interested in male film stars. Academic and mainstream analysis of the film *Titanic* (1997) attributed its success to repeat viewings by teen girl fans of the actor Leonardo DiCaprio. Karlyn's (2011, p. 21) textual analysis claims that *Titanic* "…valorised a model of unruly femininity which spoke to teen girls" through the female protagonist, and the film was judged to have made girls a sought-after demographic (Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007). Teen girls constituted a large percentage of the total audience for the film and were often repeat viewers (Nash and Lahti, 1999), although the articles did not supply ages for the girls discussed. After *Titanic*'s success, Hollywood attempted to capitalise on the perceived teen girl idolisation of male celebrities (Stevens Aubrey, Walus and Click, 2010). Fandoms were determined to be a way to make money from teen girls without investigation into whether physical attraction was their sole interest. Assumptions such as these require investigation to understand the true motivations for teen girls' film choices. In addition – although providing a much-needed focus specifically on the teen girl audience and offering perspectives of both cinema attendance habits and viewing motivations – the research on these fandoms did not include any fieldwork, further highlighting the need to hear directly from girls about their reactions and interactions with films. The analysis

discusses what motivates older teen girls to select specific films to watch and whether fandoms play any part.

The Twilight Saga[2] films are also notable in their popularity, with the box office gross for its five films reported to be 3.3 billion US dollars worldwide (*The Numbers*, n.d.). The many studies of the franchise's impact on film audiences, particularly teen girls, employ a variety of perspectives. Academic research on the series includes Franiuk and Scherr (2013) using cultivation theory to examine the effects on teens viewing sex and violence in vampire fiction; Fan (2012) using psychoanalysis to theorise a feminised form of spectatorship and the addictive nature of viewing actors; Guanio-Uluru (2016) examining representations of gender, drawing on Butler's (1993a) work on gender performance; and Bode (2010) investigating the critical reception of the first *Twilight* film and the teen audience. These studies often draw on media effects perspectives and suggest that this type of media content poses a risk to girls. While this work on *Titanic* and *The Twilight Saga* is dated, it still forms the basis for current understandings of girls' relationship with cinema and films. No contemporary studies considering teen girls' reactions and relationships to more current films were found in a search of the literature. These studies also employ a 'one film, one audience' approach (Biltereyst and Meers, 2018, p. 34), focusing on specific films intended for a teen girl audience and then presenting those findings as typical of girls of all ages. Significantly, older teen girls are presented as responding to films in the same way as younger teen and pre-teen girls. There appears to be an invisible divide between older teens' and adults' responses to, and interactions with, film with no indication of when teens become able to negotiate their readings in ways attributed to adults who may only be one or two years older.

Research on film reviews reveals other important ways in which female audiences are judged and influenced by opinions of film. Boyle (2014) exposes the gendered nature of film reviews, finding that the majority of those left on the Internet Movie Database (imdb.com) are written by male users, and that bad reviews impact the status of films, particularly those films aimed at female audiences. Reviews also appear on social media, either as promotions or viewer discussions,

[2] See Appendix N for references

in a more interactive manner than print or websites (Kuruca and Akyol, 2014). Suárez-Vázquez (2011) reveals, in findings from a laboratory experiment with undergraduate students, that while reviewers are highly influential in the promotion or downfall of films, audience views are critical to a film's popularity, outweighing even the importance of casting, which has previously been considered persuasive. Supporting the idea that girls are easily swayed toward particular genres and celebrities, Bode (2010, p. 713) surmises that reviews do not present girls "…as rational, mindful or critical". Steele (2001), however, challenges this view, stating that teens are selective of what they view. This area of study is important to the discussion of what teen girls choose to view; through fieldwork, there is an opportunity to better understand how girls are influenced by others' opinions, and the role of reviews in their decision making.

The social side of film, deemed highly important to girls, is discussed by Jones (2011), who uses a new cinema history approach in an analysis of the memories of American university-aged participants (gathered from essays submitted as part of a film course), recalling their film viewing as children in the early 2000s. The article surmises that, historically, the interactions and rituals of going to the cinema were as crucial to the experience as the film. The field of new cinema history investigates a range of external factors in cinema viewing, moving beyond reception theory, in literature reviews, interviews and surveys (for example Maltby, 2011; Aveyard, 2016; Van de Vijver, 2017; Grundström, 2018). It considers how physical place and life factors might influence audiences. For example, Kuhn (in Maltby, 2011) deduces that adults often only recall a portion of the film itself, but clearly remember details of the experience they had. Although the work undertaken in this field on teen girl audiences supplies useful historical background and expands into considering social elements which may influence film viewing, little is known about teen girl audiences' experiences in the 2010s. Further, beyond Jones' (2011) article, there is a dearth of research specifically regarding teens and family members attending the cinema together, and no research was located, either historical or present day, investigating older teen girls' cinema attendance with their families. This thesis uses qualitative and quantitative methods to advance and build on the limited knowledge of girls' cinema attendance habits, including with whom they go to the cinema and why, in

addition to factors which influence their choice of film, to begin to understand whether older teen girls differ from research findings with other age groups.

2.8 Research on Girls' Home Film Viewing

Academic research on television and girls' home viewing habits has far outweighed that on cinema and films. While Jancovich (2011) believes that teens show commitment to watching films in a variety of ways at home, suggesting there may be research to support this view, Aveyard (2016, p. 141) argues that "…viewing outside cinemas and the social practices related to it remains significantly under theorised". Sharing Aveyard's belief, this section investigates the two principal areas of research looking at girls' interactions with film at home and addresses the limitations in data on older teen girls as a film audience. Cultural studies audience research investigates the uses of television, viewing habits and how audiences might read what they view, as with encoding/decoding and Morley's research discussed previously. Bedroom studies, a sub-field of girls studies, also explores media use by girls within this personal space. This section outlines how those methods and findings are relevant to, and inform, this study.

The field of girls studies developed from cultural studies subcultures research in the late 1970s. The first subculture ethnographic work on girls was undertaken by McRobbie and Garber (1976 reprinted in 1993), questioning the absence of girls in the field. Further research came from ethnographic research with British families (Walkerdine and Melody, 1993; Walkerdine, 1998), which considered how family members relate to each other and to film characters, as well as who might control viewing within the home. Walkerdine reveals a fascinating picture of working-class families and their interactions with films and each other. However, the girls within the study were not teenagers, and the research used a psychoanalytic approach. Stacey (1994), when comparing the use of psychoanalysis in feminist film studies with cultural studies research, asserts that cultural studies utilises ethnographic methods to understand audience readings, seeing the viewer as actively creating conscious meaning. In contrast, psychoanalytic research positions the spectator through textual analysis; the text produces meaning and the passive viewer reacts unconsciously. Whilst Walkerdine's work advanced girls studies and girl audience research, particularly

in terms of centralising fieldwork with girls, the use of psychoanalysis may be seen as imposing interpretations of participants' unconscious reactions on that ethnography rather than allowing analysis to emerge from what is said by participants and observed by the researcher, as with thematic analysis.

Specific studies on girls and their lives have proliferated, from scarce in the 1970s to prolific in the 2000s. Harris (2003) determines that there is now little of young women's experiences which goes unscrutinised. Bedroom studies has continued to investigate how girls inhabit and use personal spaces, supplying new and valuable data on girls at home. While not a large field of study, it advanced in the 2010s, particularly through Lincoln's British fieldwork-based studies with boys and girls of various ages (2004, 2012, 2014a). Of particular relevance to this research, Lincoln (2004) distinguishes zones within the bedroom, each with a dedicated purpose (such as entertainment; beauty and clothing; or studying) and investigates how teens organise and use these spaces. Although bedroom studies "…acknowledge and examine the role of media in young people's private spaces" (Lincoln, 2014b, p. 43), existing research has failed to investigate girls' relationships and interactions with films in any detail. Enquiries focus on music (Baker, 2004; Lincoln, 2005; Monnot, 2010), using ethnographic and interview-based data, or on combinations of media including television and magazines (Brown *et al.*, 1994; Larson, 1995; Bovill and Livingstone, 2001; Lincoln, 2014b), with data gathered from surveys, journals and interviews and linking to ethnographic and interview-based work on girls' fandoms and subcultures (McRobbie and Garber, 1993; Monnot, 2010). Ethnographic research from the late 1980s (Griffiths in Kearney, 2007) found differences in how much time was spent in the bedroom by British girls aged 12 to 16, with older girls having more options to spend their leisure time away from home. To date, however, bedroom studies commonly presents girls as spending the majority of their time at home in their rooms, giving a picture of girls being disinterested in being with or watching film or television with their families (Larson, 1995; Livingstone, 2005b, 2007).

The ways in which girls view films within the home have been under-studied, particularly regarding with whom they do their viewing. The common assumption that teen girls prefer to be alone in their rooms rather than with their families contradicts the idea of television as a family event, whether the focus is on

viewing specific content or spending time together (Jancovich, 2011). Steele's (2001) focus group research with American male and female teens across the age range challenges this, concluding that film viewing, no matter where it occurs, is a social event. This seems to concur with Jones' (2011) study, wherein the American university-aged participants recalled watching films with their families. However, the implication of Steele's work is that friends share films, rather than family. With the advent of new media, and the varied range of viewing options it offers, previously private spaces, such as the bedroom, have become linked to the outside world in multiple ways, blurring the distinction between public and private (Abbott-Chapman and Robertson, 2009). The quickly changing media environment is both complex and global, transforming the ways families view as a group (Livingstone and Das, 2010). While bedroom studies also identifies cultural reasons for girls spending time in their bedrooms, the focus of this study is their reasons for using that space as a film viewing location, particularly in terms of with whom they might watch and how viewing occurs, as well as why the bedroom is chosen over other areas within the home. The analysis takes these studies into account while exploring how older teen girls manage their film viewing at home, both alone and with their families.

2.9 Research on Girls and New Media

As stated, media uses and availability are rapidly changing as new methods of viewing and levels of access and choice grow. This section investigates how these developments may be relevant to older teenage girls and their film viewing, identifying research with which to unpick the fieldwork data. Livingstone (2006, p. 243) notes that

> Encoding and decoding, uses and gratifications, models of media effects –each has been conceived for the age of mass media, and mass society, and each is now being rethought as the media and communication environment becomes increasingly diversified, globalized, individualized, and privatized.

Uses of media are developing and changing and, as Ross and Nightingale (2003) observe, audiences are now more interactive and active than in the past when engaging with media texts and the fundamental changes they have undergone. Not only are audiences more technologically savvy, but they have also adapted their

media literacy alongside developing technology and the ways it influences society and culture (Livingstone *et al.*, 2014). Methods of studying audiences have also developed, with new data sets available from social media sources and the tracking of online activity.

Bedroom studies has focused on the use of new media by girls within private spaces, using survey-based and ethnographic studies (for example Bovill and Livingstone, 2001; Livingstone, 2005b; Lincoln, 2014b). New media platforms and providers allow film viewing anywhere that there is an internet connection, and content is also downloadable for future viewing. Older teen girls have grown up in a world of rapidly developing technologies offering an expanding range of viewing options. Lack of constraints offers agency and flexibility as girls can choose the device, service and time of viewing to watch almost anything, almost anywhere. Lomborg and Mortensen (2017, p. 343) find that moving between different media platforms for a variety of uses means that mobile media devices with internet access converge differing forms of media into a single platform so "…media use, from television to telephones, is increasingly personalized, fragmented and connective…" It is therefore pertinent to enquire how these changes might impact girls' film viewing style. Statistics compiled by the British Film Institute showed that subscription video on demand (SVOD) services such as Netflix had changed audience viewing habits, with 24 per cent of SVOD viewings being films. Physical rentals and purchases of films fell as digital offerings rose dramatically, with young people being significant users of SVOD (British Film Institute, 2018). These trends have only accelerated, with digital viewing outpacing cinema attendance and physical media.

Asynchronous viewing of SVOD takes scheduling decisions away from broadcasters by allowing the audience to decide exactly when and for how long they will watch (Ruggiero, 2000; Pittman and Tefertiller, 2015). To narrow down the enormous number of choices available, viewers employ a variety of methods and information sources (reviews, trailers, fandoms, recommendations, popularity) to identify content that they are interested in viewing. Demassification, the narrowing down of media to suit personal tastes, allows viewers customisation and control over what and when they watch (Ruggiero, 2000; Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley, 2010). Cross-media perspectives within

audience studies recognise that diverse types of media are now entwined, with many fiction franchises having offerings in film, television, gaming and the internet (Schrøder *et al.*, 2003). This is exemplified by entities such as the Marvel and DC Comics stories and characters that inhabit fictional 'universes' across many media types, wherein knowledge acquired from one source aids meaning construction in related texts. Schrøder (2011, p. 6), in an article evaluating audience studies cross-media research, describes this meaning making as "...indebted to the intertextual web of meanings which we have previously harvested from those media forms, and from the whole mediatized world we live in." Finding, accessing and using available information from various media types requires orchestration by the audience (Lomborg and Mortensen, 2017) and the development of new skills as technology advancement continues.

SVOD providers use algorithms (Gomez-Uribe and Hunt, 2015), manipulating viewer data and statistics to suggest content to viewers which they hope will be of interest (Alexander, 2016; Arnold, 2016). As Valkenburg and Walther (2016, p. 332) identify in a review of media effects research "[n]ot only may our media use be more selective, another trend is that the media messages we receive are increasingly more selected for us." The extensive options available change the way audiences interact with films, and how these interactions are studied. While, as seen, there are a variety of studies around new technologies, tracing advances and what they might mean for audiences, none look explicitly at how older teen girls navigate films via new media, or at the influence of different platforms on the way they watch. The implications of ease of access, range of viewing platforms and material on girls' film viewing experiences are highly relevant to this thesis, particularly for understanding the practicalities of where, how and why they view films. The analysis thus engages with these new media questions, especially within the home.

Media technology has also changed viewing immersion levels. Second screening activity is highly associated with teenagers and describes the multi-tasking activity (Phalen and Ducey, 2012) of watching film or television on one screen while also interacting with another screen device, most often a mobile phone or tablet computer (Doughty, Rowland and Lawson, 2012). The second screen allows a variety of activities, such as discussing or searching for information

about what is viewed; communicating with friends or family; or checking social media and websites. Social activity undertaken on a second screen is also defined as connected viewing which "...essentially refers to the multiple ways viewers engage with media in a multiscreen, socially networked, digital entertainment experience (Holt, Steirer and Petruska, 2016, p. 342). A single handheld device now offers varied activities and opportunities to interact with media and other viewers, whether strangers or known. Lomborg and Mortensen (2017, p. 344) explain that "[p]eople 'doing' something with media are no longer necessarily defined by the specific form of media, but rather by the social role they perform doing so, be it as citizens, consumers, workers, private individuals and so on." This form of communication has not been found to cause negative feelings for teens, such as loneliness or dissatisfaction, but rather to facilitate friendships (Brown and Bobkowski, 2011). The availability and portability of media devices mean that the audience are no longer tied to specific viewing locations and that notions of how and where consumption occurs must be developed (Holt, Steirer and Petruska, 2016).

While Allen (2011) theorises a post-cinema world wherein cinema attendance will be usurped by new media access to films, Livingstone and Das (2013, p. 10) strongly disagree, stating that "…the Internet is no more killing off audiences than did television replace reading or cinema destroy the art of conversation". They go on to suggest that, rather than audiences, there are now users of media, and that networked media is more complicated than earlier forms of communication. Lomborg and Mortensen (2017) concur that user is an appropriate term, as it links more closely to the ways in which different media interact and usage habits are formed. Schrøder *et al*. (2003) further suggest that within the study of users it is hard to differentiate between mass-mediated and interpersonal communication. boyd (2007, 2010) employs the term 'networked publics' to describe communication (with strangers or friends) through the internet and mobile phone networks, often using social media platforms which provide frameworks for mediated interactions to take place. Young people are the main users of these networks and, as such, are no longer classed as a passive audience but as learning essential skills, both technological and social, that they will require to fully participate in society (Brown and Bobkowski, 2011). These networks facilitate

public communal spaces where girls can use or share information they have garnered to discuss or inform their viewing.

The extensive and ever-growing range of viewing options and styles available to girls may potentially be changing many areas of film viewing including location, timing, level of interaction and content watched. However, Carpentier, Schrøder and Hallett (2014) suggest that "...incessant and rapid changes in media technologies, production practices, content and audience behaviours tend to attract our attention, while a considerable number of stabilities can be found underneath these changes." Both the developments and stabilities in film viewing via new media demand further research, particularly in the under-studied older teen girl context, as girls within this age range may have more freedom, due to a reduction in parental monitoring of their viewing, than younger teens (Ofcom, 2019). The fieldwork analysis seeks to understand whether the changes and advances outlined within this section impact older teen girls' viewing habits and their interactions with film.

Having investigated the relevant literature relating directly to girls and film, this chapter now moves on to consider the influences of neoliberalism and postfeminism. While these at first may seem irrelevant to film viewing, they impact media content and the expected gratifications of viewing in a variety of ways.

2.10 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism, from a Western viewpoint, is an economic and political model within which deregulation and privatisation rise, the welfare state is rejected, and free markets are understood as the basis for decision making (Connell and Dados, 2014). This, in turn, leads to a cultural trend whereby individualism, self-reliance and entrepreneurship become requirements for citizens, who are expected to create personalised routes within free markets (Elias and Gill, 2018; Gill and Kanai, 2018; Gill and Scharff, 2019). Neoliberalism rose to prominence during the 1980s when competitive market freedom became engrained within right-wing politics (Chen, 2013), although its implementation and structure differ from nation to nation (Hall, 2011) and it is not confined to the right-wing alone (Gill and

Scharff, 2019). Neoliberalism "…argued for free markets as the basis of decision-making in every sphere…" (Connell and Dados, 2014, p. 119). Having links to the commodification of postfeminist and girl power ideas of choice and individualisation within personal decision making, it is often used to describe areas of feminist or postfeminist theory (Sullivan and Delaney, 2017; Gill and Scharff, 2019), as discussed later in this chapter. Neoliberalism's permeation of modern society is reflected by popular media, including films, through both characters and storylines. Thus, it is important to understand if, and how, neoliberal messages are read and decoded (Hall, 1980) by older teen girls and what impact they may have on their self-projects (Giddens, 1991) and expectations for their futures.

As individuals must be creative and reflexive to compose and sustain their identities, identity is no longer a given (Giddens, 1991). Although lives are limited and influenced by gender, race and class, neoliberalism posits that rather than these forces restricting life paths, hard work, self-improvement and ambition can overcome any perceived obstacles (Kanai, 2015). Alongside this is the presentation of authenticity as a moral duty, meaning that individuals must balance being both unique and normal (Allen and Mendick, 2013). Making the right choices can be viewed as a path to a meaningful existence, and a way to become oneself and achieve happiness (Rose, 1996). Processes leading to fulfilment must be followed, self-examination undertaken, and self-knowledge gained for the true self to be realised (Giddens, 1991). These directives and political environment, intermingled with postfeminism, must be navigated by teen girls and have almost certainly shaped the participants in this research and the ways in which they observe and relate to the world around them. This includes ideas about what they view in films, and how they choose, use and interact with what they watch. Thus, it is vital to understand the varied ways that neoliberalism may infiltrate and influence girls' lives.

A central characteristic of the neoliberal subject is the emphasis on autonomy and self-responsibility which holds the individuals accountable for their fate and minimises any acknowledgement of meaningful social or structural constraints on the self. To be a good citizen, individuals must become themselves and are obligated to be constantly self-determining, rather than relying on social standing

(Bauman, 2001). Women particularly are expected to continuously work on themselves to enhance their value (Rottenberg, 2018). As Gill and Scharff (2019) observe, neoliberalism is always gendered, placing women as ideal subjects who regulate and transform themselves while also presenting that activity as freely chosen (a position echoed in the postfeminist ideas discussed later in this chapter). Under neoliberalism, girls and women must also be reflexive; this is both a freedom and a burden, as the construction of identity is freed from many cultural and traditional boundaries, leaving the uncertainty of making choices from what are seen to be endless options (Adams, 2003). The older teen girls in this research were on the brink of leaving full-time school and entering emerging adulthood and, thus, decisions about what they wanted to achieve were made or refined within this climate of freedom. The analysis will discuss whether they subscribed to these neoliberal ideas or felt that they faced any constraints to their future planning.

Giddens' (1991) project of the self is often combined with the postfeminist rhetoric of empowerment and choice (Budgeon, 2015; Gerodetti and McNaught-Davis, 2017) to demonstrate how girls and women are expected to focus on the identity work required to take sole responsibility for their life trajectories (see Gonick, 2004b, 2004a; Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005; Duits, 2008a, 2010; Livingstone, 2008; Budgeon, 2011b, 2011a, 2015). Girls studies has critiqued neoliberalism, self-projects and Giddens' work while also incorporating the ideas into views of girlhood. The most relevant of these evaluations is Harris' widely discussed 'can do' girl (Harris, 2004a; Pham, 2013; Chatman, 2015; McRobbie, 2015). This discourse judges girls to be "…perfect candidates for a subjectivity built around self-invention, dynamism and capacity for change…" (Harris, 2004a, p. 44). The chance to place professional work above any family commitments is seen as offering up new routes for young women's lives. The can do girl also incorporates postfeminist ideas of agency, choice and empowerment, and these concepts are discussed in the following section.

This thesis utilises these ideas by recognising and investigating self-projects in older teen girls lives (whether created consciously or not), while also exploring how the agency, planning and execution of projects may be constrained by age and gender. It extends these understandings into the under-explored interactions

of older teen girls with films, questioning whether what they view, particularly in relation to female characters, might inform or relate to self-projects. Recognising that self-directed projects and achievements require planning and execution to achieve success, and that the realities of trying to combine parental and work roles can create contradictions and ambivalences (Harris, 2004a), older teen girls' ideas of motherhood and career are critiqued in Chapter 7.

The consumption of specific goods may be required by, and included within, self-projects and alleged to help, or be required, to present oneself in a particular way (Giddens, 1991). These goods can enhance or hinder potential life courses. As discussed, there is an understanding of girls as eager consumers who enjoy shopping for entertainment. Gender also impacts consumption, with the management of sexuality and appearance needing to meet appropriate societal standards of heteronormativity and youthful femininity. Films reflect this through stereotypical presentations of female characters (Daniels, 2016). As Taylor (2011 in Stuart and Donaghue, 2012) explains, within this ideological context women are invited to pursue self-making identity projects and focus on obtaining autonomy and confidence by exercising (often illusionary) choices. At the same time, the requirement to retain aspects of normative femininity, which continue to situate women as relatively disadvantaged, are obscured (McRobbie, 2007; Gill, 2008; Baker, 2010). Girls' and women's participation in these restricting but socially expected activities is presented as being playfully and freely chosen (Stuart and Donaghue, 2012). Gerodetti and McNaught-Davis (2017, p. 352) conclude that young women are expected "…to inhabit these values, not so much as 'feminists' but as liberated, self-made subjects", meaning that they are not seeking to break free from patriarchal expectations of femininity, but rather to choose what they allow into their lives and self-projects based on personal rather than political reasons. Ambitions viewed by society as being more masculine, such as career success, are thus mitigated by displays of traditionally feminine appearance (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008), as explored further during the discusion of double entanglement later in this chapter.

The popular culture rhetoric of girl power and its associated commercial directives (see following section) interplay within the notion that girls can be and do anything, with a wide range of media sources supplying inspiration and advice on

how to plan projects. Giddens (1991) concurs, including media and role models as influences in the reflexive creation of lifestyles. It has been suggested that observation of celebrities creating and following self-projects helps in the development and maintenance of viewers' own self-projects (Duits and van Romondt Vis, 2009). However, as Gauntlett (2002) stipulates, it is hard to prove the existence of this influence, because most people are unlikely to admit to such copying. The expectation of autonomy and individuality within self-projects and the lives created restricts the disclosure of inspirational sources, as explored in the prior role model discussion. This thesis explores these tensions, predicting that focus groups amongst peers might enable girls to discuss influences with each other more freely and in more depth than within other data collection methods.

The judgement and monitoring of choices, by the self or others, occurs almost continually in self-projects. Purchasing the 'right' things, going to the 'right' university and knowing the 'right' people not only situate girls within society, but also require appropriate knowledge and self-policing. Advertising and consumer industries offer products which claim to help with the production of individual selves, and tell consumers what they should buy in order to present themselves in the correct way. Media can also provide narratives of the self to which girls might aspire and identify, including the goods, lifestyle and advice needed to strive for and/or attain those versions of the self (Meijer, 1998). This exertion of pressure has increased as social media has become more pervasive (Winch, 2015; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Sokolova and Kefi, 2019). Girls and women must not only know what to consume, but *how* to appropriately consume (McRobbie, 2009), making marketised choices about their lives to determine which purchases, and their associated uses, will deliver the most value (Chen, 2013).

There are specific requirements to achieve and maintain this youthful feminine display: knowledge of expectations, attainment of skills and consumption of appropriate goods. Consumerism related to the construction of a feminine self is also presented as offering empowerment (Groeneveld, 2009; Winch, 2015) as is the associated required work (Rottenberg, 2018). However, as Sørensen (2017, p. 299) argues, within neoliberal culture "…gendered patterns have also come to be interpreted as merely the result of individual choice" meaning that self-projects

can be sexist, and that girls and women are expected to maintain and reflect societal gender roles. This is relevant to this thesis as it endeavours to understand whether neoliberal expectations, skills and ideas of what to be and consume are sought or gained from films. It incorporates these concepts with U&G and the active negotiation of meaning to uncover how this might impact older teen girls' ideas of femininity.

The requirement for teen girls to take full responsibility for creating themselves has added to existing pressures during puberty and adolescence (Press, 2011). Encouraged to succeed in education and career, find the right partner, have the correct type of family life and undertake multiple projects to maintain home, work, partnerships, friendships and social life requires resilience and confidence (Goodkind, 2009; Gill and Elias, 2014; Banet-Weiser, 2015; Gill and Orgad, 2017, 2018). The pressures and stresses of this work must then addionally balance with a project of self-care (Favaro, 2017). As McRobbie (2007) observes, a regular part of femininity is having a well-planned life, but this also requires ensuring that the correct life is chosen, remains up to date, and is recognisable by others as fulfilling these criteria (Bauman, 2001). This is portrayed as personal choice, with postfeminist discourses presenting women as autonomous and without inequalities (Gill, 2007b), despite unmistakable evidence that gender equality has not been reached. Scharff (2012) asserts that neoliberalism's requirement for self-determination and self-reliance presents gender inequality as avoidable simply through hard work. It is important to explore how far neoliberalism impacts girls' lives, and thus this thesis specifically enquires as to whether films communicate and enforce ideas of neoliberal self-creation in relevant ways to older teen girls, and if they use what they see in their self-projects.

2.11 Postfeminism and Girl Power

Postfeminism is a prevalent popular culture expression of neoliberal projects, reflecting ideas of choice, agency and the commercialisation of femininity. It actively presents girls and women who embrace these ideas as empowered and confident (Chen, 2013). While definitions of postfeminism are varied and contested (Wilkes, 2015), Gill (2007b) outlines three main uses of the term: 1, an

epistemological break with feminism, particularly the second wave; 2, a historical shift into a new period of feminism which deals with recent problems and concerns; and 3, a political or normative positioning which is a backlash against feminism. McRobbie (2009, p. 11) adds to these definitions that popular culture works toward an "…undoing of feminism, while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism". Therefore, postfeminism is understood to present feminism as having been successful in achieving its aims, so that it is no longer needed (McRobbie, 2009). Sørensen (2017) argues that discourses of empowerment are offered to women as a substitute for feminism. Choice is the understanding that individuals oversee their own lives and the creation of their personalised destinies, and the term is particularly prevalent in debates on the importance and positioning of careers and motherhood in women's lives (ibid.). These premises inform the thesis, specifically concerning how they are expressed within films and impact the lives of girls who have grown up within postfeminism. As neoliberal self-projects and postfeminism can hide disparities of gender and class (Colling, 2017), this research explores how far these ideas influence girls' negotiations of the representations of girls and women they view in films, and within their own lives in the areas of career, children, romance and femininity.

While postfeminism is thoroughly debated and highly contested in academic fields, its importance for this research is primarily the impact it has had on girls studies from the 1990s onwards, focusing on girls as consumers and producers of culture (Driscoll, 2008). Concepts from postfeminism are applied to the fieldwork data to understand and interpret participant responses. The rhetoric of girl power has directed postfeminist and third wave understandings of femininity for girls and young women. Riot Grrrl, the movement which evolved through girls sharing personal and political writings via self-published 'zines' (homemade magazines with writing, art and photographs distributed initially by post and later the internet) (Driscoll, 1999; Harris, 2003; Purvis, 2004; Marcus, 2010) has been molded into an important branch of postfeminism. Riot Grrrl expressed negative views of consumer culture (Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005; Gonick, 2006), utilising anti-capitalist and do it yourself methods. However, its ideas, style of dress and attitudes have been co-opted by companies and marketers who diluted and sold it back to teenage girls labelled as 'girl power'. Marketing continues to

use the phrase, encouraging female consumers to relate to the ideas of empowerment and strength that it projects. Mainstream music, via female artists – such as the British group Spice Girls – incorporated ideas of individuality, strength and girl power in their songs and interviews (Driscoll, 1999; Riordan, 2001; Ashby, 2005; Gonick, 2006; Duits, 2008b). As girl power evolved, there was further commodification of the power it promoted (Banet-Weiser, 2015) linked to the consumption of beauty products and clothing, focusing on feminine appearance as a mode of empowerment (Coy, 2009). The beauty element of girl power is notable in the planning and collection of knowledge associated with the skills of femininity, explored in the analysis. Empowerment is also well-researched in relation to girls through textual analysis, re-conceptions of prior literature and theoretical discussions between academics (Gavey, 2012; Gill, 2012; Lamb and Peterson, 2012; Banet-Weiser, 2015, 2017).

Media texts, including films, can be sources of inspiration as well as mediators of postfeminist sensibilities (Riley *et al.*, 2017) influencing and informing expectations and their achievement. Films incorporate and commercialise girl culture to profit from the teen girl audience (McRobbie, 2009). Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) see the presumption that girls can do anything and transform themselves reflected in popular culture representations of girl heroes sold to girl audiences, along with products to enable them to achieve the same look. However, the importance of choice, being yourself and being in control is also expounded by mainstream media (Gill, 2007b) and girl power can be seen as a promotional tool used by characters who are "…deemed to embody girl power because they are outspoken, not afraid to take power, believe in themselves and run their own lives" (Harris, 2004b, p. 17). Driscoll (1999) relates this assumed ease of influence on teen girl audiences to the understanding that girls, as an audience of mass culture, are gullible. The belief promoted by girl power, similarly to neoliberalism, is that by making correct choices and being confident, girls can achieve anything they want. This, however, ignores limitations arising from gender inequality inherent in girls' situated realities. This research looks to understand how the participants, who have grown up surrounded by the rhetoric of choice, relate to characters exhibiting girl power behaviours and ideas. Chapter 9 specifically analyses fieldwork data relating to two teen girl characters who exhibit girl power tropes.

There has been criticism that girl power appears non-political (Gonick, 2006) and that framing equality and power in this way – as simply a decision girls may undertake – does not recognise that women lack the same opportunities and privileges as men (Connors, 2014). Postfeminism within girl power conveys the belief that feminist politics are no longer needed, and that success is merely a matter of choice and determination (Gill, 2007b). This celebratory view of empowerment does not encourage girls to attempt to gain collective power economically or politically, instead focusing on individual success (Budgeon, 2011b). Referring to the disavowal of feminism, McRobbie (2007, p. 271) proposes that "[t]he production of girlhood now comprises a constant stream of incitements and enticements to engage in a range of specified practices which are understood to be progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine". Coining the term 'postfeminist masquerade', McRobbie argues that consumer-led sexual freedoms require girls and women to perform femininity. As Renold and Ringrose (2008, p. 314) interpret, this means that there is "…a new routine engagement and performance… in order for them to continue to signify as 'girls'".

Therefore, new expectations for girls and women have emerged whereby, to be deemed successfully feminine, they must display traditionally masculine character traits, such as confidence or assertiveness, but are required to moderate this masculine behaviour with a hyper-feminine appearance (Jackson, Vares and Gill, 2013). Thus, "[p]ractices that might have attracted critique from feminists are repackaged and enthusiastically embraced as the autonomous choices of empowered postfeminist subjects..." (Gill and Donaghue, 2013, p. 12) However, context and social constructions limit choice; consumerism related to the construction of a feminine self is understood to offer empowerment (Groeneveld, 2009). This thesis engages with these highly relevant debates, recognising that the participants have decided to remain in school and may have career plans in mind. Used in combination with role model theories, these debates inform the investigation of how, or whether, older teen girls interact with film characters, specifically those close to their age who represent these girl power ideas.

McRobbie (2007) further establishes that within the postfeminist masquerade, the relegation of women back into traditional gender roles is presented as freely

chosen. Gill (2007b) likewise casts doubt on the idea of free choice, asking why, if women are free agents and autonomous in their desires, their resulting physical appearance is often so similar. Driscoll (2012, p. 107) expresses a less pessimistic view, suggesting that girls have reflexivity because they are "…defined by and positioned within girl culture, [they are] always a critic-always taking up a position in a field of relative values and available girl styles and always aware of her subjection to judgement". Thus, in studies using interview data and thematic analysis, girls are understood as able to critique what they see, while also having the awareness of being critiqued (Carey, Donaghue and Broderick, 2010; Connors, 2014; Riley *et al.*, 2017). Harris (2003) understands girl power to have transformed girls into knowing and acting agents. However, Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) argue that the surveillance, monitoring and regulation of girls, by adults and other girls, suggests that they are controlled rather than empowered. Girls' choices are often seen as influenced by external forces rather than autonomous and are therefore not respected (Gill, 2007a). A discord exists here between girls holding power and making individual choices, and the idea that they are easily duped and require protection. This tension requires further unpicking which this research looks to address through fieldwork that investigates the influences on choices older teen girls make about their self-projects, including those of femininity.

The media girl power message of 'doing what you want' encourages girls to understand empowerment as celebratory (Jackson, Goddard and Cossens, 2016) but can also be individualising. Budgeon (2011b) includes personal responsibility for constructing an autonomous self as part of gendered reflexive modernisation in neoliberalism. Within neoliberalism, girls' and women's successes depend upon their knowledge of societal demands and traditional understandings of femininity, as well as skilful decision making, to manage the self in education, career and family life. Girl power is thus linked to neoliberalism through commercialisation and the mantle of choice (Gill, 2007b). Paradoxical girl power discourses exist alongside inequalities, new methods and experiences of power (Gill and Scharff, 2019), as well as the expectation for girls to plan and create their lives as autonomous individuals while simultaneously limited by context and culture (Gonick *et al.*, 2009). This thesis argues that girl power and neoliberalism influence girls' planning. These theories are therefore utilised in the analysis

chapters to understand what guides participants' ideas and expectations for their futures.

Girls are expected to invent themselves by making appropriate choices and exhibiting flexibility as they balance economic realities and feminist discourses (Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005). While not directly investigating feminism within girls' lives in this thesis, its impact is relevant to understanding why girls might negotiate films in particular ways and therefore forms the foundation of the methodology outlined in Chapter 4. Thomson, Henderson and Holland (2003) conclude that can do girl discourses silence existing limits on social mobility. Successes and gains of white, affluent women with privilege are framed as being a positive development for all women (Wilkes, 2015). However, choice, as discussed, is not boundless but limited by contexts which are socially constructed (Groeneveld, 2009), meaning that gender, race and life situation can be influential.

This section has shown girl power to interconnect with neoliberal ideas of self-creation and self-projects. The theories combine in multiple ways to disseminate what society expects girls to do with their lives, how they are meant to do it, and what their overall goals should be. Neoliberalism, postfeminism and girl power are co-opted and used by the media to sell the concepts of strength and independence, consolidating links to consumerism as a part of self-creation, as discussed in the fieldwork analysis.

2.12 Conclusion

This chapter has explored understandings of teen girls as a film audience, both in the cinema and at home, and has emphasised the lack of fieldwork (superseded by textual analysis and surveys), current research and discussion of older teen girls. The chapter has delineated existing research into practical elements such as where girls view films and with whom; how they view; what tools they use for demassification; and why they watch particular films. A lack of understanding of how film viewing is incorporated into older teen girls' lives has been detailed. Further, the lack of studies regarding the social side of film viewing via new-media-enabled forms of connected viewing has been shown. The existing literature understands family viewing as abhorrent to older teen girls, who are

believed to either want to watch with a group of friends in the cinema or alone in their bedrooms. This solo viewing has been theorised as leaving teen girls at risk of decoding content without the support of an adult, and thus as vulnerable to various media effects. Much of this research relies on small studies which lack participants in the 16 to18-year-old age group, relying instead on data from younger and older girls to extrapolate across the entire age range. These theories are applied in the analysis, where the specifics of older teen girls' viewing habits are examined.

Third-person effects theories are also utilised in the analysis when considering whether girls' media literacy develops through the teen years, as expressed in their discussions of who they feel might be influenced by film content. Further, role model research is used to unpick whether film influences older teen girls' ideas and decisions about career, motherhood, romance and femininity. Role modelling theories are also employed when investigating specific teen girl characters to evaluate both their impact on the participants, and how older teen girls negotiate their reading of these characters in conjunction with girl power and neoliberal understandings.

Concepts relating to neoliberalism, postfeminism and girl power are further applied individually and collectively throughout the analysis chapters to consider how the participants viewed films practically; whether films impacted self-projects; or the participants' decoding, sense of self, and relationships with teen girl characters. In particular, self-projects are employed as a tool for understanding older teen girls' life planning and whether there is any interaction between those plans and what is viewed in films. The participants' understandings of the tropes of strength, empowerment, independence and unlimited possibilities – as projected by postfeminism and girl power – is investigated to gauge the impact of such tropes and how they might be disseminated to girls specifically through film.

This chapter has supplied a wide picture of the academic literature relating to girls, both in terms of media use and societal expectations. The following chapter delves deeper into the key concepts – U&G, active audiences and encoding/decoding – which form the theoretical framework of the thesis. It shows

how the theories are applied in combination, as well as in collaboration with the methods discussed in Chapter 4, to answer the research questions and start to fill identified gaps.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the literature relating to the girl film audience and the methods used, as well as postfeminist and neoliberal theories. Establishing that not only has the older teen girl audience been neglected, with findings problematically extrapolated to encompass the entire teen age range, it also showed that studies have frequently refused girls agency over what they view, why they view it, and whether they allow it to impact their lives in any way. This chapter examines the theoretical framework used within the analysis of the fieldwork. It first evaluates research within the field of girls studies and girl culture, before moving on to appraise uses and gratifications theory (U&G); the media practice model (MPM; from Steele and Brown, 1995); and audience studies encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980), models which were introduced in the Literature Review.

This chapter begins with the understanding that

> [a]ll research into audiences is, to a greater or lesser extent, about effect, about how and in what ways (including if at all) the consumers of media messages react and relate to their content. But the particular interest of 'effects' researchers has been to identify specific behaviours resulting from watching, listening and reading specific kinds of mediated material. (Ross and Nightingale, 2003, p. 73)

It then traces how each of these academic fields developed from each other and critique media effects research. None of these theories specifically explain interactions with films, and MPM is the only one which has been specifically adapted to research focussed on teenage girls. However, this chapter shows that when used in combination with one other, as well as with focus group fieldwork and thematic analysis, they offer useful approaches to understanding research participants and the films they view.

3.2 Defining Girls and Girl Culture

This thesis is sited in girls studies, which evolved from the recognition that girls were excluded within cultural studies research on subcultures and that boys were privileged in both academic research and society (Mitchell, 2016). McRobbie and Garber's 1976 (in McRobbie and Garber, 1993) ethnographic work is understood to have launched the field (Harris, 2004b; Duits, 2008b), with their investigation of girls' behaviours in their bedrooms also creating the sub-field of bedroom studies. The research focused on external influences on girls with the intention of determining how their lives, choices and personalities might be impacted. The underlying conviction of the field was, and remains, the importance of undertaking research about and with girls, rather than regarding others' views concerning them as fact (Duits, 2008b). Girls studies runs alongside feminist enquiries into women's lived experiences and investigates how various issues impact and influence the lives of girls.

The studies forming the foundation of this thesis approach girls as neoliberal subjects, particularly in research undertaken by British scholars (Duits, 2008b) which highlights postfeminist ideas of choice and empowerment. As discussed in Chapter 2, the focus is on the commercialisation of choice and empowerment, a concern which extends into film and television research dealing with the lives of girls. In their research on girl cultures, Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) consider the creation of the self and how girls are perceived, explaining that ideal versions of girl heroes are being displayed and sold in popular culture. They further contend that girls are regulated and monitored by adults, by themselves, and by their peers. Teens have been viewed as inhabiting a life stage in which they pursue their identities through consumption of culture while attempting not to be identified as adults (Jancovich, 2011). However, Harris (1999) proposes the opposite, that girls attempt to discipline their bodies to show a more mature identity. Scholars have recognised the importance of body image and self-esteem in the ways in which cultural artefacts might negatively influence young girls. They have therefore investigated how sexism in mass media images has the potential to limit girls' ideas and aspirations (Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007). The understanding that girls can be corrupted by media, as feared by direct media effects theories, has prompted a wide range of studies, particularly regarding the

development of sexuality and how it might be influenced (for example Renold and Ringrose, 2008; Gill, 2012; Lamb and Peterson, 2012; Tolman, 2012).

The regulation of acceptable heteronormative femininity is often entwined in girls studies with the contradictory view of girls as successful and making autonomous choices (Renold and Ringrose, 2008). A preoccupation with young female sexuality has led to focusing on how girls' bodies and dress might be sexualised (Duits and van Zoonen, 2006, 2007). This presents girls as requiring protection from influences that are considered to be harmful or place them 'at risk' (Harris, 2004a). Choices made by girls relating to appearance are often framed in moral terms and understood to be subject to influence from external sources, rather than being freely or authentically made (Gill, 2007a).

A much referenced discussion of the societal framing of acceptable displays of sexuality in teen girls' attire, and conflicting views on their empowerment and agency, occurred in an exchange of academic articles between Duits and van Zoonen (2006, 2007) and Gill (2007a). The discussion focuses on the judgements made about girls' clothing choices, distilling differing viewpoints within feminist discourse surrounding girls' choices and autonomy. Using porno chic fashion and headscarves worn for religious expression as disparate cases in point, the articles debate societal judgements of girls' clothing choices in comparison to those of boys. Pinpointing distinctions in terms of gender and in relation to age, there is the suggestion that girls' clothing choices are influenced by the implied empowerment of bodily display promoted within postfeminism.

Gill suggests that girls' clothing choices deserve respect and should be understood as autonomous because they have ties to neoliberal discourses of individuality and thereby foreground agency and choice. Gill further stresses that girls are not solely subject to influences from their media viewing practices, suggesting that media influences girls' choices alongside societal and political pressures. These type of choices regarding media presentations of a particular feminine appearance and how older teen girls relate to and interact with these images will be discussed within the analysis in Chapter 8. Gill's views, however, do not allow for generational differences, and assume that girls receive media effects collectively rather than this being specific to a girl or woman's age, social position or lived

reality. This perspective assumes a universal feminine experience, whilst at the same time foregrounding only adult viewpoints as important and unproblematic (Duits and van Zoonen, 2007).

Duits and van Zoonen (2006) understand girls to be more media savvy than previous generations, having grown up in a media saturated world where cross-marketing is standard, particularly with products aimed at teen girls. They conclude that girls understand what is being sold to them and can decide for themselves whether to participate. Just as Gill's position disallows authentic autonomy or agency, there is also a failure to credit girls with a level of media literacy, instead assuming direct influence. Conversely, Duits and van Zoonen (2006) argue that girls themselves do not share the assessment that they have fallen for a commercialised sexualised appearance. Girls instead believe that they have agency, and that part of that agency is the ability to ignore outside influences. Duits and van Zoonen credit girls as capable of understanding what they see, as well as why, and find that they can contextualise what they view, having well-formed and oft-utilised tactics to deal with such outside forces. They therefore argue that choice is simply what girls decide to wear; autonomy is girls' free will to make decisions about what they wear; and agency is a purposeful action, whether undertaken with autonomy or not.

In contrast, Gill calls for the examination and situating of girls' experiences and statements, particularly in connection with the understanding that ideas of beauty and sexiness are internalised from outside sources by both girls and women. Duits and van Zoonen (2007) reply that, as well as examining societal pressures, it is important to investigate what girls are trying to communicate through their choice of attire. They stress again that girls are not asked by researchers about their experiences but, rather, are assumed to have been pushed toward problematic clothing choices either by consumer culture or religion. They further explain that they "… advocate listening to girls and understanding their choices as they themselves frame them, before articulating them with wider social forces." (ibid., p. 166). This reflects the belief underpinning this research: that girls should be listened to when they communicate their experiences and that their statements should be centralised in any analyses of their choices or attempts to understand the extent and limits of their agency. This thesis therefore looks to allow girls to

speak for themselves about their interactions with film and its role in their lives, including related dynamics concerning their lifestyle preferences and the constraints placed upon them. Rather than silencing them with the assumption that they are forced or manipulated by society, or influenced by what they view, it understands girls to be making choices within their individual lived realities. Thus, the choices, levels of autonomy, and agency displayed by the participants are central to the analysis.

Concerns over the content of films and their potential for influencing girls' ideas regarding sexualisation have been researched widely (for example Ward, 2003; Brown *et al.*, 2006; Hawk *et al.*, 2006; Smith, 2012). This unease has prompted research on eating disorders (for example N. K. Martin, 2007; Park *et al.*, 2007) and other work girls might feel pressured to undertake to manage their bodies, this physical management being viewed as a central task of female adolescence (Harris, 1999; Elias, Gill and Scharff, 2017). In response to these apprehensions, the idea of girls' empowerment has gained prominence, and scholars have tried to understand what constitutes empowered sexuality and how to encourage and help girls to become empowered. A study with 10 to 13-year-old girls from several countries discovered that media content did have an emotional effect and that

> …despite an extraordinarily sophisticated vocabulary of critique – media representations still got to them, still had the ability to hurt them, still – as they repeatedly told us – made them 'feel bad' or 'feel sad' and/or made them long to look a particular way or to own a particular product (Gill, 2012, p. 740).

This goes against the idea that if girls are empowered to make decisions and able to unpick the representations that media presents, then they should be able to both reject what they view and manage any negative emotional responses. However, advances in career and societal status for young women are still balanced with expectations of sexualised and overtly feminine appearances, which may create tension around empowerment and autonomy, supplying contradictory ideas about what girls should try to achieve. These tensions are described by McRobbie (2007) as a postfeminist masquerade and double entanglement (McRobbie, 2009). Within these explanations of the conflicts prevalent in girls' and women's lives, feminism is seen by McRobbie as being both taken into account and repudiated. The postfeminist expectation that girls should be empowered and have unlimited

choices encompasses the understanding that second-wave feminism (which preceded third-wave and postfeminism) took away pleasures associated with feminine appearance and behaviours (Riley *et al.*, 2017). In addition, entanglement occurs within studies of choice as a substitution for feminism within neoliberal and postfeminist discourses (Sørensen, 2017). As many of these perspectives have been formed on the understanding that media images are influencing girls, it seems reasonable to ask girls how they feel about what they view. There should also be enquiry into how they might negotiate their emotional response to what they view, particularly girls at ages that are excluded in earlier studies. Therefore, this thesis explores both career expectations and ideas of femininity within the participants' lives and the films they view, in order to ascertain what older teen girls understand as being feminine, and their attitude towards these ideas.

Discourses of choice, opportunity and empowerment have also influenced and guided girls studies research relating to girls' educational accomplishments. School achievement endeavours to lead girls to successful careers without limitation on employment sector or promotion opportunities. Neoliberal discourses present success as a personal responsibility by approaching educational and career success as entrepreneurial projects of the self (see Chapter 2). However, there is an uneven distribution of opportunity, making self-invention more easily attainable for some girls (Elias, Gill and Scharff, 2017). Scholars have also investigated backlashes against the educational achievements of girls. These successes are often portrayed as being at the expense of boys' attainment, seeing feminist interventions into schooling as having gone 'too far' (Ringrose, 2007; Paule, 2019). Further academic work around girls and education has considered appearance (Carey, Donaghue and Broderick, 2010; Retallack, Ringrose and Lawrence, 2016); sexuality (Steele, 1999; Fine and McClelland, 2006; Ringrose, 2013); class (Bettie, 2003; Thomson, Henderson and Holland, 2003; Gillies, 2006; Richards, 2018b); and media presentations of academic success (Paule, 2017). As the computerised survey and focus group fieldwork for this thesis was undertaken within schools, understanding how schoolgirls have been researched and theorised helps to frame the participants' lived situations. The analysis reveals the participants' career goals and the influence that the schools they attend have on

these. It also questions whether film has any influence on ideas of education through role modelling by female characters.

A final relevant area of focus within girls studies is agency and what it might mean in terms of girls' lives and achievements. Agency, which has been an important part of feminist theories, has become almost a preoccupation within girls studies (Gill and Donaghue, 2013) and studies of youth. Coffey and Farrugia (2014, p. 461) identify the conflict whereby " ... some researchers [are] accused of neglecting or ignoring agency, while others are accused of unjustifiably celebrating it and thereby neglecting the continued importance of structural issues such as class inequality or entrenched gender divisions". As with the notion of empowerment, the term 'agency', and its level of importance, is varied and contested. Agency is also linked to choice and individual responsibility and thus "…agency is structured by neoliberal discourses of individualism and responsibility" (Willett, 2008, p. 428) which exemplifies the ongoing sociological tension between social constraints (structure) and freedoms (agency). As Gill and Donaghue (2013, pp. 15–16) note

> Just as neoliberalism requires individuals to narrate their life story as if it were the outcome of deliberative choices so too does the turn to agency depict women as unconstrained and freely choosing, rationally calculating subjects, selecting their path through life.

This chimes with McRobbie's idea of the postfeminist masquerade, previously discussed. Meanwhile, as the Duits and van Zoonen/Gill debate above demonstrates, postfeminist theorisations and explanations of agency tend to disregard any outside influence within girls' lives that might also require negotiation alongside the media they engage with. While unwilling to view girls as passive victims, discussions within girls studies appear "… to have rejected any idea of victimisation, coercion or domination altogether." (Gill and Donaghue, 2013, p. 22).

The theories of choice, empowerment and agency are drawn on and critically assessed within my analysis to understand how girls view films and how their experiences of viewing are formed and expressed.

3.3 Uses and Gratifications Among Older Teen Girls

This research stemmed from a desire to understand not only the practicalities of older teen girls' film viewing (how they decide what, where, when and with whom to view), but how they interact with films and whether any impact or influence beyond entertainment is sought or occurs. These questions are not concerned with analysing in detail what the messages from film may be or how they are communicated, but rather, reflect McQuail's (1984, p. 183) definition of the U&G tradition by investigating "…the choice, reception and manner of response of the audience." As per the Literature Review, the U&G approach emphasises that the active audience make decisions about what they watch to gain something specific or to achieve a particular result. It approaches this undertaking starting with the audience and understanding that their activity is variable (Rubin, 2008). This places audiences in control, giving them agency over their motivations, choices and the impact of the media; emphasising that they can decide in advance what pleasures they look for; and recognising other life factors framing their interactions.

McQuail (1984, p. 180) reports that in the late 1950s U&G research was encouraged to combine with the study of popular culture and texts to offer an approach that gave "…people a voice in cultural matters much as surveys had done in relation to political and social issues." It was further felt that "[i]t might even offer a way of testing the proposition of some sociologists and critics of mass culture that mass media served to perpetuate capitalist society." However, at that time, no connections were made between U&G audience work and sociological studies of cultural texts. Since that time, sociological research has considered external influences on media viewing, and thus U&G, and has become an important part of the theory. The lived realities of the participants in this study influence their interactions and reactions to films, impacting not only what they view, but how they watch and what they take from each viewing. As Rubin (2009, p. 167) explains, audience expectations and desires direct the selection and participation in specific media and its messages and "[t]hese expectations and desires emanate from, and are constrained by, personal traits, social context, and interaction." Other factors making up the main elements of U&G

> …include our psychological and social environment, our needs and motives to communicate, the media, our attitudes and expectations about the media, functional alternatives to using the media, our communication behavior, and the outcomes or consequences of our behavior. (Rubin, 2008, p. 527)

This research considers these elements as it investigates the interactions with and impacts (whether chosen or not) of film viewing with 16 to 18-year-old girls, in order to begin to fill the identified gaps in knowledge regarding their viewing practices and relationships with films. It is therefore important to specifically identify which elements of U&G will be utilised within the fieldwork analysis to accommodate and address acknowledged issues.

As discussed in the previous chapter, U&G is a media effects approach which places the audience in a more active position than the previously theorised passive role (Rubin, 2009). It moved the research field from considering what media does to audiences to what audiences do with media, foregrounding audience motivation and consumption (Rubin, 2009). Research is undertaken with the assumption that audiences understand their desires and that their self-reporting is reliable and thus, "[s]cholars utilize U&G research to explore the dynamic relationship between attitudes, actions, and media effects." (Pittman and Sheehan, 2015, p. 3). It similarly recognises that other factors may impact the viewing process by outlining that "[p]ersonality, social context, motivation and availability – based on culture and economic, political and social structure – all affect the potential influence of media and their messages" (Rubin, 2009, p. 176). This approach understands media to be a part of people's lives, being both impactful and impacting upon other areas. This thesis, accordingly, investigates this with older teen girl participants.

McQuail (1984) states that throughout the development of U&G, the common strand has been understanding the function of media, in particular how motivation for media use is connected to other life experiences. He surmises that the outcome of media use is a combination of societal forces, personal biography and immediate circumstances. Levy and Windahl (1985, p. 110) explain that "[a]s commonly understood by gratifications researchers, the term 'audience activity' postulates a voluntaristic and selective orientation by audiences toward the communication process." This suggests that the audience's goals and needs are

self-identified and participating actively in communication can impact gratifications and effects. However, for new media such as the internet, activity is seen as an intrinsic part of its use rather than a decided-upon act (Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley, 2010). This critique, however, was made before the prevalence of social media whose use requires the application to be selected, but little action thereafter beyond scrolling or 'swiping'. In addition, as shown within the analysis, the audience may choose to purposefully be inactive and select media that does not require attention or interaction.

While the assumption of activity is found to some degree within all U&G approaches (Levy and Windahl, 1985), U&G has also been criticised as exaggerating commonality and shared identity among different study cohorts (McQuail, 1984). Schrøder (1999, p. 41) identifies the basis of the disparity as due to the fact that the list of gratificaitons used to determine results were limited by the imaginations of the researchers and what they judged to be relevant which was deemed to threaten the validity of U&G studies "…as we cannot be sure that the research results adequately reflect the real-life phenomena we wish to explore."

This study hopes to avoid the limitations of research that arise from the use of such assessment questionnaires by using focus groups and thematic analysis. The participants themselves supply definitions and explanations, rather than being asked to fit their behaviour into pre-defined categories. It also works with the suggestion that "…students of uses and gratifications could try to work backwards, as it were, from gratifications to needs." (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973, p. 513) By identifying themes around the locations and types of gratifications the participants gain from film, it is then possible to show from the fieldwork data why those gratifications were sought. This still does not fully resolve the issue of expecting participants to be able to recognise and reveal their motivations and reactions to films. However, the longform discussions do offer opportunities to observe consensus-building by participants, as well as glimpses of how films are discussed and understood collectively. These dynamics have been missing from research methods traditionally employed by U&G.

An early separation of the ways in which media might offer gratification was outlined by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) within the three categories of

media content, media exposure, and the social context. The combination of these attributes enables an understanding of how different media texts lend themselves to diverse kinds of gratifications. For example, media in general can be used to relax or pass the time, may make you feel like you are using your time well, and some media can be used to structure your time. Social situations were also seen to motivate gratifications sought from media, to fulfil a desire to spend time with family or friends; for example, by watching television or going to the cinema together. Gratifications studies also "…demonstrated that one and the same set of media materials is capable of serving a multiplicity of needs and audience functions." (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973, p. 517) This means that visiting the cinema with friends may offer simultaneous gratifications of being social; entertainment; social status; and the gathering or gaining of information or knowledge from the film itself. The U&G approach is a relevant theory for this research as it does not focus solely on behaviour but enables a study of the social uses of film for teen girls, uses which have been under-researched, particularly in relation to family viewing. Specifically "…its main emphasis is on the social origins of media gratifications and on the wider social functions of media, for instance in facilitating social contact and interaction or in reducing tension and anxiety." (McQuail, 1997, p. 18) However, despite the explanation that content, exposure and social context work in combination with social activity and with each other, there was little at this stage of U&G development to negate the critique that it lacked adequate clear theory.

McQuail (1984) expands upon this conceptual weakness, noting that individual studies create distinctions and labels for media content which are unable to be validated. This lack of cohesive terminology and descriptive language was further addressed by Levy and Windahl (1985) who "… proposed that audience activity has three dimensions: selectivity, involvement, and utility." (Perse, 1990, p. 18) The ninefold typology of active audiences (NTAA; Levy and Windahl, 1985) expanded those three dimensions into U&G of media use before, during and after exposure.

The following chart, compiled from Levy and Windahl's (1985, pp. 112–117) explanations, lays out the theorised activity undertaken by the audience at each stage.

Typology	Definition	Explanation
Selectivity before exposure.	Selective exposure seeking.	The decision to be exposed. Utilising knowledge and previous experience of media. Certain levels of gratification are expected.
Selectivity during exposure.	Selective perception.	Only paying attention to some messages or parts of messages while ignoring the rest.
Selectivity after exposure.	Selective recall.	What is chosen to recall about media viewed. Only a small percentage is remembered.
Involvement before exposure.	Anticipation of involvement.	Anticipation of seeing something, looking forward to it, becoming involved before being exposed. Thinking about what might happen in what are going to view.
Involvement during exposure.	Attention. Meaning Creation. Parasocial Interaction. Identification.	Processing of messages whether subconsciously or consciously. Can be attempt to find meaning in what are viewing.
Postexposure involvement.	Long-term identification. Fantasising.	Can continue to be involved with messages after viewing. Thinking about what saw.
Utility before exposure.	"Coin of exchange".	Social and intrapersonal utilities from media exposure – talking about watching something before it comes on (are you watching x tonight?), social conversations. Sharing opinions and information.
Utility during exposure.	Using the gratifications obtained.	Can use parts of what see to assure self of own opinions or ideas. "A related use occurs when what one learns about other people through media exposure is applied in one's own life and situation..." (Levy & Windahl, 1984, p.117). Also sharing of opinion on something with another person while viewing.
Postexposure utility.	Topic use. Opinion leadership.	Talking or reading about what have seen. Reflecting and/or integrating into own life.

Figure 1 - Ninefold Typology of Active Audiences (Levy and Windahl, 1985)

Separating media choice into selectivity, involvement and utility, and further breaking these aspects down based on whether the activity occurs prior to, during,

or after exposure to the media, allows a more precise examination of audience activity. The NTAA also shows that interaction with, and impacts from, media encompass a range of decisions, both cognitive and subconscious. The audience not only choose what to view but are then able to decide how involved, or immersed, they become in the viewing; which parts of the media interest them and will have their attention; and what, if any, part of what they have viewed will be integrated into their lives. The social aspects of media use, whereby each of the stages may influence, or be influenced by, social roles and status, are also allowed for in the NTAA. The typology is employed within the analysis to show how older teen girls interact with and use film in a more complex and knowledgeable way than earlier research into teen girls has acknowledged.

Importantly, not every audience member takes part in every step of the process, and the action may not repeat each time or to the same level. Levy and Windahl (1985, p. 119) argue "…that audience activity is best treated as a variable construct, that people are more or less active in their roles as members of the mass media audience, and that the kinds and amounts of activity displayed are likely to vary across time in the communication sequence." The typology influenced the bedroom studies development of the MPM, which is discussed in the following section, whereby interaction with media occurs not only during the time of interaction but in numerous and varying ways before and after and is always in relation to other elements of the audiences' lives. The terms have also been used in audience studies, as Livingstone (2000, p. 3) exemplifies when stating that "…effects do not simply result from the qualities of media texts but rather they depend both on selectivity in exposure and on interpretation or the construction of meanings." The NTAA therefore offers a useful shorthand for discussion of the fieldwork data and will be used within the analysis chapters when investigating the motives of older teen girls' film viewing.

As shown, gratifications research has tended to focus primarily on enjoyment sought and gained from media entertainment above other usages. (Oliver and Bartsch, 2010) The critique that U&G has been individualistic contains an assumption of bias towards psychological needs over social and relative needs in people's lives (Schrøder *et al.*, 2003). However, the NTAA supplies a contextualisation of U&G within people's lives which the analysis will utilise to

further contemplate what gratifications, if any, participants might be seeking from films. I will also discuss how the previously considered direct media effects presentation of teen girl audiences does not allow for the U&G understanding that "(p)eople initiate the selection and use of communication vehicles. Instead of being used by the media, people select and use media to satisfy their felt needs or desires…" (Rubin, 2008, p. 528) This satisfaction extends to new media and the constant development of new technologies (as previously discussed), which are often eagerly adopted by teen users, and open up new relationships with media. This means that, rather than employing media for a single specific purpose, constant immersion leads to us becoming "…continually and unavoidably audiences at the same time as being consumers, relatives, workers, and – fascinating to many – citizens and publics." (Livingstone, 2013, p. 22) These new developments and the gratifications they offer have revitalised the use of U&G theories in academic research and it is proposed that U&G will continue to remain important to increased understanding of the use and effects of new media (Pittman and Sheehan, 2015). The analysis will investigate why the participants chose to use more than one form of media at a time, particularly mobile phones for second screening, and how technology influences their viewing habits.

Further useful terminology to support an investigation of what girls want and actively seek from film viewing, and whether their needs are met, comes in the form of gratifications sought and gratifications obtained (Palmgreen and Rayburn, 1982). Gratifications sought and obtained are differing aspects of media use and need to be considered both independently and in relation to each other. Gratifications sought and obtained have been used in studies of social networking sites, including a focus group study of 12 to14-year-old Irish girls which demonstrates that "...not only can a qualitative methodology be employed to successfully identify gratifications sought and obtained but also that the link between gratifications sought and obtained can provide rich and interesting insights into the mindsets of young SNS users." (Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley, 2010, p. 54) These terms have also been used in studies of internet usage as "…distinction between gratifications sought and obtained is the result of recognizing the Internet's vast interactive potential: a user may go online for one gratification but end up with another…" (Pittman and Sheehan, 2015, p. 4) This

redirection of attention and unexpected gratifications obtained might also relate to subscription video on demand, whereby audience members might go seeking a specific gratification but be directed towards items they had not considered by the algorithms.

U&G foregrounds individual differences and choice to mitigate direct media effects, meaning that it understands mediated communication to be

> … socially and psychologically constrained. U&G underscores the role of audience initiative and subjective choice and interpretation in media effects. Personality and social context affect initiative, choice, and interpretation. This initiative mediates communication motivation, behavior, and outcomes. (Rubin, 1993, p. 99)

It is particularly suited to small, focused studies, such as this research; in contrast to patterns of demand which show predictable media usage, preferences and personal tastes are unable to be predicted or explained. It is only possible to "…broadly estimate demand for staple fare, but have still to regard cultural taste and preference… The best that can be done is to describe patterns as they appear at a given moment in time and in a particular cultural setting." (McQuail, 1997, p. 81) The analysis chapters thus investigate how 16 to18-year-old schoolgirls from the North East of England interact with and use films, in order to ascertain whether there are any commonalities and what those might mean when contrasted with previously held views of the teen girl film audience.

The creation of needs in relation to femininity and correct female behaviour has been discussed in relation to postfeminism and neoliberalism. The level to which older teen girls interact with these concepts through gratifications sought and obtained and the NTAA is explored throughout the analysis chapters. As reiterated throughout this section, the audience (specifically the older teen girl audience in this research) do not arrive at film viewing as a blank slate, but as part of communities, families and cultures. All these aspects influence the choice of what to view, as well as how what is viewed is interpreted (Arnett, 1995). These interactions between teen girls' lived realities and media are now considered further within the media practice model.

3.4 Media Practice Model

As stated in the previous section, gratifications research has tended to focus on the enjoyment sought and gained from media entertainment. The study of bedroom culture to explore types of media use by teen girls has seen an expansion of U&G, with the development of the MPM in relation to teenage girls by Steele and Brown (Steele and Brown, 1995; Steele, 1999; Brown, 2000) and their work is central to this thesis. Using the framework of the NTAA, the MPM was developed within research on bedroom culture and the ways in which teen girls interact with media in relation to their locale and lifestyles. Steele and Brown developed their MPM to investigate the sexualisation of girls, but it can be applied across all media that girls might interact with for whatever reason. Acknowledging that girls use a variety of media at the same time, it is an active method allowing for a variety of outcomes depending on decisions made and reasons for each specific media event. The model sees media use as holistic, investigating beyond what girls watch to include why and how media is chosen, and if anything is done with what has been viewed. The film/media itself is only one part of the viewing experience.

Brown (2000) describes the MPM as seeing the audience as acting in the selection, interaction, sense-making and application of individually chosen elements of what they view. The MPM proposes a reciprocal relationship between the use and effects of media, allowing for users to be a part of the effects process instead of being passive as in a linear model. The model assumes that media choice is influenced by the audience's current selves and who they wish to become, which "…is similar to the assumptions of media U&G theory, which suggests that media consumers come to the media with different needs and motives and that what they take away from the media will depend on why they came to it." (Brown, 2000, p. 35) And finally, the MPM "…suggests that especially for adolescents, even apparently habitual or ritualistic media use will be affected by the user's current and developing sense of self." (Brown, 2000, p. 35) Data collection for the MPM approach has been described as "just ask them" (Greenwood and Long, 2015, p. 626), and generally employs observations and interviews.

The MPM considers ways in which the 'why' of choosing media, and the way it is viewed, work together, determining whether there is anything girls want to take from what they view. Media does not exist or operate outside of daily life, and teens arrive at media interactions with an already formed view of the world which combines within each moment to determine what influence may occur (Steele and Brown, 1995). While accepting media potentially influences teens, Steele and Brown (1995, p. 572) observe that:

> The media's influence on adolescents' sense of themselves is complex and realized through every-day activities and routines, making effects extremely difficult to measure – not because the media are weak and the audience strong, but rather because they are intricately woven into the fabric of daily life.

Brown (2000) expands on this emphasis, first reiterating understandings of media use reflected in U&G studies of the ways girls filter what they see through their lived experiences, influenced by factors such as (but not limited to) gender, class, race and developmental stage. Importantly for this thesis, these influencing factors also include age, aspirations and sense of self. This corresponds with Hall's (1980) understanding of audiences' decoding of media texts through personal and social frameworks of knowledge. These theories are used in combination throughout the analysis chapters to explore and understand older teen girls' interactions with film.

To illustrate how various elements of girls' lives and the choices they make about what to view interact and influence each other, Steele and Brown (1995) developed an explanatory model of the process of teen girl audience's interactions with media, as shown in figure 2.

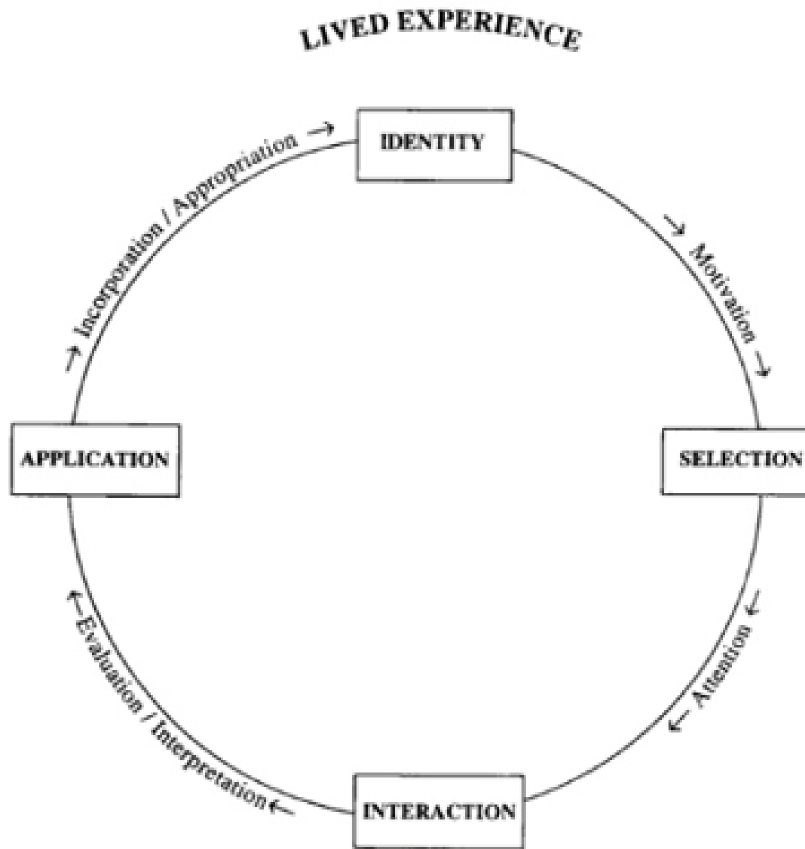

Figure 2 - Teen Girl Interactions with Media (Steele and Brown, 1995 in Beals and Bowden, 2014)

This model posits that audience choices may potentially occur at every stage of media interaction and that these choices collaborate with each other in determining influence and impacts. U&G assumes that the audience makes active choices about content and their interpretation of it, and the MPM exemplifies this by placing the viewer within a continuous circular relationship where actions and impacts may flow in either direction. The model also understands that "...media choice and media exposure are reciprocal; in that they influence each other." (Coyne, Callister and Robinson, 2010, p. 388) This contrasts with the emphasis on passive audiences within the media effects model outlined in the Literature Review. The MPM shows how, having grown up with broadcast mass media and interactive digital media, contemporary teen girls have developed media literacy which enables them to choose what they might want to incorporate into their identity. It also explains that media viewing does not occur in isolation from other areas of girls' lives but, instead, what a girl learns from media "…will be filtered

through what she already knows and the extent to which she can identify with or imagine herself as similar to the people she sees" (Brown, 2000, p. 36).

The MPM focuses on girls' interactions with media, recognising their control and emphasising their active role in the viewing and selection process as well as their power over media influence and what they might incorporate from films into their lives. Steele and Brown's (1995) study is seen to have

> …revealed that teens do not blindly incorporate media images and messages into their lives, but rather make any number of self-relevant, calculated decisions that inform selection, interpretation, and appropriation (or rejection) of particular media ideals… teen media use reflects both chronic interests and fleeting states. However, the model also leaves open the possibility that media-derived exemplars of success, romance, and conflict resolution may impact teens in ways they may not always be aware of, via more subtle processes such as priming, framing, or the cultivation of media norms through repeated and frequent exposure. (Greenwood and Long, 2015, pp. 626–627)

However, Brown (2000) stresses that it should not be assumed that adolescents will interpret media in ways that are similar to adults or to each other, due to cultural and developmental factors. Instead, it is predicted that the MPM will uncover non-uniform effects due to the individual nature of adolescents' lived realities, just as with the variable constructs of audience activity expected by the NTAA. This is of importance to this study which explores differences between teen girls at various stages of development and ages, as well as in a particular location, and challenges literature which has grouped teens into a single collective behaving in limited and predictable ways when interacting with films. It also seeks to understand whether "…media literacy skills affect young people's use, interpretation and application of media content" (ibid., p. 39) and, if so, how and to what extent.

The U&G, NTAA and MPM approaches are therefore of direct relevance to this study and combine effectively with one another to support a sensitive and nuanced analysis of older teen audiences. This thesis looks to contribute to understandings of older teen girls' film viewing by taking into consideration the wider cultural influences on their lives to recognise how their film choices, interactions and negotiations are made. The final theoretical approach of encoding/decoding,

which shares an understanding of audiences as active and life situation as influential to audience interaction, will now be discussed.

3.5 The Audience Reception Model of Encoding/Decoding

Developing U&G, ideas of active audiences and how audiences make use of what they view, audience reception research sought to rectify the lack of attention paid to audiences' sense-making (Schrøder, 2019). Hall's encoding/decoding model moved audience studies toward fieldwork-based enquiry and allowed for active audience interpretations of the media text through preferred, negotiated or oppositional readings. While a proportion of the audience might accept the preferred reading, other audience members could actively transform their reading through personal situations combined with the polysemic possibilities of texts to negotiate with or oppose the discourses (Hall, 1980; Thornham, 1997; Durham, 1999b). Ross and Nightingale (2003, p. 130) clarify this process further, explaining that

> The crucial point about the notion of the tertiary text or the reception/response model of the active audience, is that the viewer/reader is not expected to uncover a hidden truth but rather interprets and remixes the material she is watching in order to make it meaningful to her in the context of her own life circumstances. In other words, the viewer renders storylines and narratives meaningful by relating them to their own lives or the lives of people they know.

Therefore, a preferred reading occurs when the audience accept the hegemonic codes (Kellner and Durham, 2009) offered without question. An oppositional reading emerges when the viewer refuses these and instead interprets, or decodes, in a contrary way, even though they understand what is intended to be conveyed. This process is informed by the lived reality of the audience member which will impact how they view and interpret the media with which they interact.

Most importantly for this thesis is the understanding that a negotiated reading is possible. Hall (1980, p. 137) states that creating a negotiated reading:

> [c]ontains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it

> operates with exceptions to the rule. It accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to 'local conditions…'

What this means for older teen girls' reading of films is that they are likely to understand the dominant codes transmitted by films, such as those relating to femininity and expected behaviours. They will also have a familiarity with the presentation of girls and women across media, and the societal expectations arising from postfeminism and neoliberalism. However, girls interpret texts within their lived realities which involve a wide variety of personally situated experiences, beliefs and cultural understandings which enable them to mitigate the reading, negotiating it to fit with their current understandings and daily lives. This is seen to have altered the understanding of media effects, not by refuting their occurrence, but by making them dependent on how the audience interpret or think about what they have viewed (Alasuutari, 1999). This has similarities to gratifications sought and obtained, as the audience may search for media that will influence them in a particular way (motivation, education etc.). From a media effects perspective, it is predicted that the media the audience is particularly motivated to view will lead to greater effects (McQuail, 1984).
Encoding/decoding looks to understand how the active audience reads the messages encoded within media, and a greater understanding can be obtained when this is combined with U&G questions of why certain media is selected and what in particular the audience is looking to obtain from the viewing. In direct correlation to encoding, Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973, p. 521) state that "...we have raised the question of the extent to which the media create the needs that they satisfy. Even more fundamentally, we ask whether the media do actually satisfy their consumers…" These questions are considered within the analysis chapters when looking at what older teen girls are motivated to view, what motivates them and whether they receive any satisfaction or gratification from it.

Philo (2008, p. 537) explains that a new reading is not undertaken with each media encounter; rather, audiences are more likely to use a perspective they believe to be right to criticise encoded messages. Therefore, they are "…aware of the encoded meaning and the manner in which it has been constructed – they just do not agree with it." The interpretation process can be linked to U&G, whereby media content is read in particular ways to obtain specific gratifications which

may not be those intended. Buckingham (1987, p. 116) further asserts that "[r]eaders never come to texts without expectations about what they are likely to encounter..." and that there is no meaning within a media text awaiting discovery by the audience. Instead meaning is "…determined through a process of negotiation between the text and the viewer, in which viewers retain a considerable degree of autonomy to construct their own meanings and pleasures." (Buckingham, 1987, p. 154) In addition to this scholarship regarding how and why audiences read media texts, the influence of external life factors upon the creation of these readings means that "[t]he active audience perspective lends itself to the study of how audiences engage with film as a social practice." (Corbett and Wessels, 2017, p. 67). The first two analysis chapters discuss the reasons why older teen girls choose to watch specific films with different social groupings and in varying locations.

Livingstone (1998) offers a further critique of audience reception studies, claiming that the starting question – how audiences read a text – is both too wide and is based on problematically comparing a lay person's textual reading to a reading undertaken by an academic (or the difference between a popular and an elite reading). Morley (2006, p. 109) questions whether a preferred reading "... is a property of the text, of the analyst's imagination, or a form of prediction of audience behavior which is empirically falsifiable." If preferred reading is central to understanding encoding/decoding, then Morley believes that "…textual analysis still has a much more important place in audience work than many subsequent scholars have recognised." It is important to note though that open readings with complete freedom in interpreting texts are not actually possible, as research into audiences has "... established the shaping role of domestic and social contexts of media use." (Livingstone *et al.*, 2014, p. 212) These external influences can mean that "[t]here is therefore no necessary fit between the encoded and decoded meaning." (Schrøder *et al.*, 2003, p. 11) Consideration of these disparities, and the influence of the participants' lived realities on their interaction with films, occurs in the analysis chapters.

This study of older teen girls as a film audience does not employ close textual readings of media texts for comparison purposes, although I did undertake film viewings to ensure that I was able to discuss content with the participants. The

focus is instead singularly on how my participants read film texts and their related gratifications, as well as how these desires and pleasures are influenced by, and correspond with, their everyday lives. Moreover, by using focus group fieldwork in addition to a survey, this research aims to avoid the criticism of survey questionnaire methods utilised in U&G, instead using a data collection method preferred within audience studies, where there is agreement that "…more conversational encounters with respondents are superior to surveys in eliciting respondents' authentic, contextualised opinions, attitudes and meanings." (Schrøder, 1999, p. 42). In addition, thematic analysis does not assign categories to the data beforehand but draws them from the transcripts to find agreements and understandings that reflect what was said within the focus groups. This reflects the MPM strategy of directly asking participants and displays how U&G, the MPM and reception and audience studies have a consensus regarding methodology and can therefore be combined within fieldwork-based research.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed, identified and investigated aspects of a range of theories which are utilised in combination with each other in the fieldwork analysis. As Schrøder *et al*. (2003, p. 44) state "…we shall be able to better understand media audiences if we equip ourselves with a comprehensive toolbox based on interdisciplinary and methodological pluralism." The toolbox for this thesis is formed upon girls studies which incorporates neoliberal and postfeminist understandings of girls' and women's lived experiences. The concepts of empowerment, autonomy, choice and agency – including how these are encouraged within girls' lives and presented to them within films, predominantly in the form of girl power – are used to recognise the relevance of film content to the participant's lives and understandings. Incorporating the existing literature, the analysis seeks to understand what girls might be seeking from films regarding their current and future experiences, with the knowledge that 16 to 18-year-old girls are media literate and have access to an enormous range of media and ways to view it.

U&G meshes with these girls studies ideas to question how older teen girls might utilise films to provide gratifications not limited to pleasure; entertainment;

knowledge; role modelling; reassurance; social status; and family bonding. Consideration is given to how these gratifications are sought and gained. Language from the NTAA definitions (figure 1) is used to structure the analysis and highlight distinct stages of audience activity. The MPM and the terminology presented in figure 2 are also used to explain the interaction of film with other areas and aspects of girls' lives and reveal how media events are interdependent with other portions of the viewing experience. There is reciprocity between uses and effects of media and the audience being active within the process. Again, it allows for an understanding of what girls might want to take from what they view and how influence may occur while still acknowledging that media is only a small part of girls' daily lives and emphasising that they make choices and use their media literacy when interacting with films.

These concepts are further combined with encoding/decoding to show what the participants understand is being communicated and how they chose what, and whether, to incorporate what they watch into their self-projects. The understanding that audience activity is variable is reflected in the differences between prior research with younger teen girls and the data gathered from my A-Level student participants. Although Ross and Nightingale (2003, p. 36) note that U&G "…was based on an understanding of audiences as individuals…" and encoding/decoding "…considered audiences to be culturally formed and situated, significant as formations rather than as individuals", the above theoretical discussion highlights that individuals are also formed and situated by their culture and lived realities. Therefore, girls can be part of their age group, influenced by collective culture and shared surroundings, but still make individualised choices. Frame of reference, knowledge and skills, experiences, available scripts and lived experience also influence decisions and interpretation of media (Steele and Brown, 1995; Van Damme and Biltereyst, 2013) .

This thesis offers an original contribution by combining these theories with thematic analysis, outlined in Chapter 4, to form a synthesised analytical framework. The framework is used to construe insights from the fieldwork with 16 to 18-year-old rural A-Level student girls. It addresses the gaps, omissions and lack of current studies regarding older teen girls' relationship with film and how they might use, decode and seek varied gratifications from films.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 *Introduction*

This chapter outlines the methodological approach of the research, which aims to develop an understanding of how film is used by girls and what gratifications they may be seeking from film to inform perceptions of themselves and their lives. The methodology draws on the previously discussed literature as well as feminist approaches to fieldwork with girls and on thematic analysis of a computerised survey, focus groups and film texts. Beginning with an explanation of the research design and reasoning behind choices made, it then discusses the practicalities of participant recruitment and details of the schools that the participants attended. Subsequent sections turn to the analytical approach and data analysis methods utilised. The chapter maintains a reflexive examination of the research process, considering how, as a researcher, I may have had an impact. The validity and reliability of the data, along with ethical considerations encountered when working with girls, is considered throughout. The chapter concludes with a short reflection upon changes I would make were I to undertake the fieldwork again.

4.2 *Research Approach*

The term 'epistemology' describes a theory of knowledge (Harding, 1987) and feminist research incorporates a variety of political and partial viewpoints in the study of female experiences, meaning that no single feminist epistemology exists (Lykke, 2010b) in the same way, there is no single feminism (Budgeon, 2011a). Feminist epistemologies also understand that there are numerous ways to gain scientific knowledge and different ideas of what might be 'true' (Beckman, 2014), refuting the positivist idea of a single discoverable truth. The underlying tenet of my research is that, living with limited agency and power (Keller, 2012) within contemporary systems of neoliberalism and patriarchy, the experiences and opinions of older teen girls should be the foundation for research on their lives. As shown in the Literature Review, it is also imperative to inquire whether the assumed influence of films on teenage girls applies to the under-studied older teen age group, and to understand the ways in which they interact with films as a distinct audience group.

I undertook this research from a feminist standpoint wherein the authority of female experience is trusted and there is assumed to be less mediation and distortion within direct experiences (Walby, 2001). This epistemology supports the understanding of girls as experts in the ways they experience their lives and the world, including societal expectations and pressures (McCarry, 2005). Campbell and Wasco (2000, p. 775) state that "…feminist social science legitimates women's lived experiences as sources of knowledge. The ordinary and extraordinary events of women's lives are worthy of critical reflection as they can inform our understanding of the social world." Therefore, the fundamental method of finding out what older teen girls feel, experience and think is to ask, and treat their answers respectfully.

These feminist underpinnings are combined with a social constructivist viewpoint which recognises ideas, opinions and selves as formed by what is seen, heard and learned from the world. As Stanley and Wise (1993) explain, social constructions of the self are not experienced as complete or essential, but rather through the social and cultural working together to produce the self. Constructivism encompasses the understanding that "…human knowledge – whether it be the bodies of public knowledge known as the various disciplines or the cognitive structures of individual knowers or learners – are all constructed" (Phillips, 1995, p. 5). Most important for this thesis is the understanding that the construction of knowledge and the self is an active process, and also an individual project, which can involve both the social and political in both physical or mental ways, separately or in combination (ibid.). This viewpoint is recognised as having informed the thematic analysis utilised during the data analysis phase (Nowell *et al.*, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Societal beliefs about particular groups and ideas are spread and reinforced through repetition (Bourdieu, 1994). Ideas construct the world, whether by undetected reinforcements or drastic impacts. The neoliberal concept of self-projects, discussed in the Literature Review, meshes with these repetitions, placing the responsibility for the production of the self on the individual. This requires the juggling of various influences and projects to produce an acceptable 'self' (Giddens, 1991). The level of media influence exerted on young people has been widely debated and both public and academic concern has increased as

media consumption grows and viewing methods evolve (for example Van Vonderen and Kinnally, 2012; Coyne, Padilla-Walker and Howard, 2013; Allen, 2014; Dias and Jorge, 2016; Kleemans *et al.*, 2018). Combining elements and working across and against a range of epistemologies is common in feminist research (Fonow and Cook, 2005). Armed with these epistemological understandings, I set out to investigate the relationships and interactions older teen girls have with film.

Harding (1987, p. 23) describes research methods as simply "…a technique for gathering evidence" and Lykke (2010a, p. 144) as "…concrete approaches chosen to carry out a particular piece of research". Just as there is no single feminist epistemology, there is no single feminist research method. Rather, feminist research utilises a wide variety of data collection methods, combining them with feminist ideologies (Campbell and Wasco, 2000). There is no consensus of what a feminist method might be (Gelsthorpe, 1992); these attempt to go beyond the limitations and biases found in positivist research (Beckman, 2014). Beckman notes the general principles which underscore feminist research: (a) framing questions from a feminist perspective; (b) belief that knowledge is situated within political, cultural, historical and social contexts; emphasising diversity and intersectionality; (c) use of studies combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to reflect complex contexts of peoples' lives; (d) researchers being reflexive regarding their position within the research and guarding against power imbalances between researcher and participants by viewing participants as collaborators within the research rather than the subjects of it. It is therefore the perspective, manner and intention of the implementation which makes a research method 'feminist'. Intersectionality further foregrounds differing societal structures, both historical and current, to interconnect socio-economic and cultural factors and issues impacting and discriminating against women in differing and individual ways. It highlights multiple axes, such as race, class, age, sexuality and location, which intermingle with gender and therefore must also be considered in research (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Davis, 2008; Gill, 2009; Olesen, 2011).

4.3 Methods and Tools of Analysis

The fieldwork employed two methods: an anonymous computerised survey and focus groups. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, specifically surveys and focus groups, is a common strategy in audience studies (Kitzinger, 2004; Sundar and Limperos, 2013). Surveys can be an inexpensive way to ask a broad range of people a wide selection of questions. However, for surveys to supply the relevant information, appropriate participants need to take part and questions need to generate useful information. Surveys must be precise and focused as there is no follow-up on answers and no way to check whether data is honest and accurate (Berger, 1998). Data gained from quantitative methods can also contextualise findings from qualitative data (Kitzinger, 2004) and online surveys can collect data for statistical analysis (Lefever, Dal and Matthíasdóttir, 2007). A risk associated with asking for volunteers is that not enough data will be collected, either due to lack of participants or participants not completing the entire survey.

The aim of this research's survey was to collect preliminary data to inform the questions asked in the focus groups (Lefever, Dal and Matthíasdóttir, 2007). I wanted a comprehensive understanding of areas such as how often girls watched films, how often they visited the cinema, which films they enjoyed and if any actors or actresses[3] were of particular interest. I also collected demographic and socio-economic information including how far participants lived from the school and cinema; the type of work their parents undertook; with whom they lived; and what plans for university and career they might have. The intention of the survey was not for in-depth analysis. Rather, I was interested in collecting basic statistics on a variety of areas as a foundation for the main body of fieldwork and analysis. Questions were a combination of multiple choice and open-ended. Once completed and submitted, the survey data was collected on, and downloaded from, the survey website. As such, there was no need for any data entry and therefore, no chance of mistakes in transferring data (Granello and Wheaton, 2004).

[3] The participants all used the terms actor and actress rather than male or female actor throughout the fieldwork and is thus employed in the thesis.

As noted in the Literature Review, girls studies and feminist research often utilise qualitative methods, including focus groups. This thesis focuses on the ideas and experiences of an under-studied age group, so it was essential to offer the space and time for them to explain and expand upon their views. Focus groups have been shown to be an effective method of data collection when working with teen girls regarding the role of media in their lives (for example Steele, 2001; Jackson and Vares, 2015b; Retallack, Ringrose and Lawrence, 2016), particularly its everyday use (Cavalcante, Press and Sender, 2017). Context is another crucial factor of constructivism, and focus groups allow participants and researcher to co-construct meaning (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006) through conversation and clarification.

Focus groups allow for discussion not only between the researcher and participants but also amongst peers (Wilkinson, 1998; Steele, 1999). Having conversations amongst themselves can make focus group participants feel less intimidated and more comfortable than they might in individual interviews (Grogan and Wainwright, 1996). Facilitating discussion between participants differentiates focus groups from group interviews (Parker and Tritter, 2006). Conversation within focus groups is seen as naturalistic and similar to social interactions (Wilkinson, 1999), particularly amongst peer groups with pre-existing relationships (Van Damme and Biltereyst, 2013) and especially when discussing everyday topics or experiences. However, it is essential to remember that these discussions are not actually natural, as the groups have been convened to gain specific information (Wilkinson, 1999). As meaning is often constructed collectively in everyday life (Duits and van Romondt Vis, 2009), a final advantage of this method of data collection is watching groups process information collectively and viewing how interactions between group members help develop and reach agreement, meaning and understanding.

The reassurance of speaking with peers may also have a downside, as focus groups could potentially become side-tracked onto topics unrelated to the research. Should this occur, the group requires redirection to the subject the researcher wishes to discuss, which may not be as exciting to participants as the conversation they were having. It is necessary to maintain a balance between refocusing the discussion and letting it flow, as sometimes the conversation may

work back around to the question without intervention, or, alternatively, provide information which was not specifically being sought, but which enriches or widens the research. Judgements by the researcher therefore occur within focus groups as to when, or whether, to redirect. Sometimes these interjections within the focus groups worked favourably and the discussion returned to the desired subject area, and other times topics were abandoned and the conversation moved onto new subjects.

The possibility that participants might feel peer pressure can also influence answers (Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Valentine, 1999). Luckily this did not occur in any of my groups and differing opinions were accepted without issue. Some participants might be uncomfortable speaking within a group, while other members could be confident articulating their views (Jaffee *et al.*, 1999), meaning that they speak more often. I found the opposite to be true, however, with only a single participant in the larger groups remaining quiet. The smaller groups were less willing to explain or offer information, perhaps feeling that they were speaking directly to me rather than discussing amongst themselves like the larger groups. Participants may also read group dynamics and proclivities and either endeavour to influence the opinions of others or negotiate their own to fit in (Duits and van Romondt Vis, 2009). These potential issues were kept in mind while conducting the focus groups in order to allow all group members to participate equally and facilitate the collection of reliable data. However, I found that as the participants were practiced at taking part in group discussions within school and were used to expressing and explaining their opinions, they happily answered questions, meaning that I rarely had to focus on individual girls to get an answer.

I received ethical approval from Newcastle University before beginning my fieldwork and followed the University's Code of Good Practice in Research (Newcastle University, 2012) policies and ethics policy (Newcastle University, 2018) in the planning and execution of the fieldwork. As the focus groups and survey were not discussing sensitive subjects and research was taking place in school environments with older teens, the ethical approval classified the fieldwork as low risk. Information about sampling is found in the next section. I endeavoured to keep the language used in information provided to participants

clear and jargon-free. I decided, in addition to the schools' *in loco parentis* permission, to have the participants sign forms to ensure that their consent was as informed as possible. The girls were all over 16 years of age and able to understand the information provided, thus they were able to consent for themselves (Wiles *et al.*, 2007). Teachers at both schools also functioned as gatekeepers to ensure that good practice was maintained throughout my contact with the participants.

4.4 Sample

Due to the lack of research undertaken on older teen girls, as revealed in the Literature Review, and specifically on those living rurally, as discussed in the Introduction, participants within the 16 to 18-year-old age group were the focus of the recruitment for this research. The rural locality led to schools being the most logical avenue for participant recruitment. While this excluded girls who had left school, education became an important focus of the thesis (as seen in the Chapter 7 analysis of employment goals), along with girls' home and leisure lives. There is a distinct lack of research into, and official figures relating to, girls and A-Level study. A report by the Sutton Trust at Oxford University (Sammons, Toth and Sylva, 2015) included students from the North East of England in the sample. The report found that only 37 per cent of 18-year-olds (male and female) took A-Level exams in 2013 and that girls made up 54 per cent of A-Level exam entrants that year. The report also found that disadvantaged students were less likely to continue in education after GCSEs and that disadvantaged girls achieved significantly lower results at A-Level than those more advantaged. In relation to educational opportunities after A-Level, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2019) report that since 2014/2015, just under 6,000 students from the fieldwork region have entered university each year. The total figure for that period across England was approximately 250,000 girls, making up 55 per cent of the cohort. Due to limited academic research into girls of this age and their educational aspirations and achievements (applicable studies include Paule, 2017; Richards, 2018) there is still much to discover about this group.

Schools were chosen, in part because there was no research budget and a limit to the distances I was able to travel due to parental responsibilities. Schools have

proven to be a rich site for research involving girls as they offer a familiar location where participants spend time and would, therefore, be likely to feel comfortable. However, there is the chance of a power imbalance between an adult researcher and girl participants, reflecting and replicating teacher/student roles (Robinson and Kellett, 2004); discussion of this is developed in section 4.7. Beyond age range and gender, there were no further criteria for participation as the aim was to establish the relationship girls of these ages had with films, meaning girls who did not watch films would still be of significance for the findings. In October 2014, I selected and contacted five schools via letter (Appendix A) and then follow-up emails the next month, both directed to relevant members of staff identified via the schools' websites. Unfortunately, I did not receive any responses from these approaches. I gained access to the two schools I worked with via personal introduction to a gatekeeper at each institution. Once introduced, the gatekeepers and I discussed the research and the access they were willing to offer. The gatekeeper at each school then distributed information to recruit participants as well as organising and overseeing the focus groups. Maple Academy also invited me to a meeting with a senior member of staff to complete arrangements before the focus groups began.

Timing of the focus groups within the school calendar meant that the ages of participants covered the full spectrum available from A-Level students. The first groups met in the third and fourth terms of the school year (March and June), with the Year 13 girls being mainly 18 years of age and nearing their final exams, and the Year 12 girls being 17 years of age. Groups undertaken with Year 12 girls near the start of the following school year (November and December) included 16-year-old participants and the Year 13 Group participants were 17 years of age. Whilst I specified my preferences for numbers of participants, the schools decided how many groups were scheduled; from which year groups participants would come; and how many girls would attend. I undertook six groups at Maple Academy and three at Willow Academy (a scheduled fourth group was cancelled due to lack of participants). I offered no rewards for taking part in the research. The age distribution and the number of participants from each academy were not equal. It would have been preferable for both the survey and focus group sampling to be more evenly split between the schools, but in relying on the time and space the schools scheduled, and the willingness and availability of participants, this

was outside my control. However, the consensus within the Willow Academy groups meant the lower number of participants did not detrimentally impact the data collected. All the participants were white British, reflecting the lack of racial diversity within the schools and the county. Also, despite my requests for participants to come from a wide range of subject areas, both schools were keen to have their media studies students participate, and thus selected girls from this subject area, further limiting the hoped-for diversity.

Both schools are Academies receiving government funding but run by trusts. Although socioeconomic data was collected in the survey I was unfortunately unable, due to time constraints, to collect any reliable data of this type during the focus groups. The schools were assured anonymity and I therefore provided pseudonyms (Maple and Willow Academies) to place them on equal standing and avoid the possibility of assigning judgement through language. For the same purpose of anonymity, I supply only a snapshot of general information about the schools.

4.4.1 Maple Academy

Maple Academy comprises Year 9 to Year 13 students, ages 13 to 18. It has a large catchment area covering the market town where it is located: small villages and very rural areas. The most recent Ofsted report (Gov.uk, 2016) rates it 'outstanding' in all areas and the school is proud of its educational culture of high-achieving students, emphasising grades and university attendance successes online and in their literature. The school is non-denominational and above-average-sized with almost 1500 students, with just under 500 in Sixth Form. A small proportion of students from minority ethnic groups attend the school with most students being white British. The number of students eligible for Pupil Premium (those claiming free school meals and financial support) or having special educational needs is well below the national average. Ofsted (Gov.uk, 2016) also notes that the Sixth Form is outstanding and A-Level results are 'significantly above national averages', with almost 80 per cent of those gaining A-Levels going on to university. This educational context is apparent in the findings wherein every participant in the focus groups planned to attend university to pursue a specific career.

While this school is in a rapidly expanding middle-class market town within easy distance of a large city, many students travel from less affluent areas, as shown in the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index data provided by the school. The Government Indices of Depravation (Gov.uk, 2015) showed Maple Academy to be in an area less deprived than Willow Academy.

4.4.2 Willow Academy

Willow Academy also comprises Years 9 to 13 with students aged between 13 and 18. Ofsted (Gov.uk, 2016) describes the school[4] as being an above average sized secondary school with around 1100 students, with just under 140 in Sixth Form. The catchment area differs from Maple Academy in that it is slightly less rural, covering more built-up areas. The school received mainly 'requires improvement' ratings in its Ofsted report (Gov.uk, 2016). The report describes Willow Academy as having principally white British pupils with a typical number having special educational needs and a below average number receiving Pupil Premium. All grade averages for A-Levels are lower than those of Maple Academy and just under 75 per cent of students gaining A-Levels go on to university (ibid.). As with Maple Academy, this profile is reflected in the plans of the participants from this school in relation to attending University and in their talk of jobs rather than careers, as discussed in the analysis.

There was no notable difference in group dynamics between the focus groups. All the girls appeared to converse easily with each other, and no participant was excluded, ignored or argued with during the sessions. Although the make-up of students at each school is comparable, there are several substantial differences. The schools have similar numbers of students and offer almost the same number of Year 12 and 13 courses; however, the proportion undertaking A-Levels at Willow Academy is just under one-third of those who enrol at Maple Academy. This suggests that A-Level courses are not in as high demand; vocational training, rather than University placements, may be of more interest. In addition, while the percentages of those going on to university appears to be similar between the two

[4] Willow Academy underwent an Ofsted inspection in 2019, however the figures used here are from 2016 as this reflects the period during which participants attended.

schools (80 per cent and 75 per cent), the number of students enrolled means there is a significant difference in the actual figures. Using the information outlined above, this equates to 400 students from Maple Academy and 105 from Willow Academy obtaining university places. Again, this shows that university is not the primary goal for students attending Willow Academy, with favoured career options requiring different qualifications. The disparity in the number of students enrolled in A-Levels is also influential in terms of the physical spaces available to students within school, as discussed later in this chapter.

4.5 Data Collection

4.5.1 Computerised Survey

The survey was composed and hosted using a paid subscription to Survey Monkey online (surveymonkey.com, n.d.). I ran a short pilot of the draft survey with students within my department and online community, as well as friends and family. Once I had undertaken the necessary amendments and determined the length satisfactory, I emailed the URL to the two schools, requesting distribution to their female A-Level students. The survey was available for participants to complete either on school computers or at home. Unfortunately, the survey was distributed only at Maple Academy (where it was circulated twice), so no data was collected allowing me to compare the schools. Willow Academy did not reply to requests to run the survey and, as it was proving challenging to get a response from them to my communications in general, I did not feel confident in pushing, instead focusing on getting focus groups set up. However, after comparing the focus group data and noting the level of commonalities between the girls from each school, I believe that the survey data is meaningful, and it provides some useful detail to the analysis chapters. The survey can be viewed in Appendix B.

Once I had sent the website link to the schools, I had no control over distribution or response rates. A small possibility exists that it may have been completed by girls younger than the desired range. Similarly, there is a chance that some survey participants may have been male. Having received a much larger number of completed surveys from the second run at Maple Academy, I enquired about the distribution method to ensure the validity of the results. The staff member

organising this distribution held a higher position than his predecessor, and his request most likely held more weight with students than the original request, which was a forward of my own email. It is probable that the right range of participants completed the survey, however, there is no way to confirm this – a consequence of anonymous surveys. These kinds of problems are not atypical in the context of research in schools, with participation being dependent on good will, time available and interest in the survey subject. Completion of the survey indicated consent (along with the *in-locus parentis* consent from the school) with disclosure of the purpose and subject of the survey being contained in the distribution email. In total, the website logged 119 responses to the survey.

Survey Monkey presented the survey data as graphs, percentages and lists (see Appendix C). For open-ended questions, I coded the data by hand, assigning the same thematic categories used in the focus groups to find percentages and compare answers with the focus group data. The survey was, as a whole, successful: it provided necessary background information and informed me of which films to view before the focus groups. These data also add nuance and statistical information to the analysis.

4.5.2 Focus Groups

The focus group phase of the fieldwork ran from March to December 2015 with a total of nine focus groups and 38 participants. Group discussions ranged in length from 30 to 90 minutes, with the average being 45-60 minutes. Almost all the groups took place during the school lunch period. All groups were semi-structured with a list of intended questions used to guide the discussion (Appendix D). The schools set the focus group schedule and, due to limited access to participants, it was not possible to undertake pilot groups. Appendix E holds tables showing the dates, ages and number of participants in each focus group. Questions reflected the format of the survey, beginning with practical information about where and how often they viewed films and what type of films were enjoyed, then moving on to interactions with films as audience members. The information from the survey and earlier groups was used to guide and inform later groups, referring to films and characters discussed to draw out more detail and discover whether there was a consensus between the separate groups and schools. In addition to

recording, I also took notes during each session, noting film titles mentioned, subjects to revisit or general thoughts. I ensured, however, that I wrote only briefly so as not to appear, or become, distracted from the conversation. The notes were expanded as soon as possible after the conclusion of the groups to record as much as possible, adding reflections on both the data gathered and how the groups felt and worked.

Before beginning each session, I provided an information sheet (Appendix F) to each participant describing the research and explaining that sessions would be recorded and transcribed by myself, that data would be protected and that their comments would be anonymous. Each participant was then asked to sign a consent form (Appendix G) which I read through with them, advising that they were able to withdraw from participation at any point during or after the session. After collecting the consent forms, the recording started, and the first question was asked. At the end of each group, I handed out a debriefing sheet (Appendix H) thanking them for their participation, describing the research further, detailing how the discussions would be used and supplying contact details.

I hoped that informing the participants of the anonymity of their contributions would encourage honesty and candour and act as reassurance that their comments could not be traced back to them, thereby protecting them from any possible future effects from their participation (Lahman *et al.*, 2015). A group who had been critical of their school asked that I not tell the faculty what they had said. After reassurance of their anonymity, they continued with the discussion, which forms a prominent section within the analysis. Had they felt that I might report what they said in such a way that the school might identify them, or that I was not empathetic to their situation and feelings, I would not have collected this data.

Initial questions hoped to encourage the girls to be comfortable speaking within the group and to me, as well as conveying that I was genuinely interested in hearing their opinions. I endeavoured to avoid conducting focus groups like a class wherein participants were expected to provide the ‘correct’ answers, instead hoping for more spontaneous, informal and open discussion (Monnot, 2010), such as in the literature I had read (for example Duits and van Romondt Vis, 2009; Jackson and Vares, 2015b; Retallack, Ringrose and Lawrence, 2016). While

Barker (1997) believes a school environment to be authoritative, and therefore unconducive to free discussion between young people, I did not experience this. Almost every participant appeared confident in expressing their opinions. Although there were a few occasions where it seemed that groups might want to provide the 'correct' answer, discussion between participants usually encouraged them to expand on what they had said and to share their own views, especially as the sessions developed and they gained confidence. For example, sessions commenced by asking which films and actors and actresses that they liked most and least. Although many found these questions difficult, it had the desired effect of generating conversation as they responded to each other's likes and dislikes and expanded on or explained their answers. These questions would also occasionally be answered later in the discussions, when participants remembered a title or a name, which showed them to be considering their answers and wanting to contribute to the discussion.

The groups at Maple Academy took place in a modern purpose-built building exclusively for Sixth Form students. Sessions were held in a meeting room around a large oval table with chairs and the space was quiet and uninterrupted. It has been suggested that attempts to move away from the school environment by changing the seating arrangement so that participants face each other may work against confident participation, with participants likely to feel embarrassed to watch and be seen by each other (Nairn, Munro and Smith, 2005). At both schools, the girls sat around the opposite side of a table to me and at the start of the groups there would be some uncomfortable laughter and embarrassed silences. Once they settled into the environment and the discussion, however, they spoke directly to each other, and me, and appeared comfortable. The first two Maple Academy groups comprised of 18-year-old participants who would begin to take their final exams about two months later. These groups were made up of self-selected volunteers and consisted mainly of friendship groups. The third and fourth groups from this school contained students at the end of their first year of study after they had completed their mock exams. The final two groups at Maple Academy took place the following school year and held girls who had just begun their A-Levels and had volunteered to take part. These final groups were mainly studying Media Studies as one of their A-Level choices, having been recruited by the coordinating member of staff.

Groups at Willow Academy convened in a common room next door to a social space which was very noisy at lunchtimes. The building, room and furniture were somewhat worn, and the room was also a through-route, with doors at each end used to navigate from one side of the building to the other. The difference between this space and the purpose-built modern accommodation at Maple Academy highlighted a very noticeable disparity in the resources available for students at each school. Small tables were organised to form larger tables with chairs placed around (this appeared to be the permanent layout), allowing for everyone to face each other during the sessions. For the first group, signs were posted on the doors by a staff member requesting students not enter. However, as there was no sign placed for subsequent groups (and no staff member present to ask whether I was allowed to place a sign myself), there were regular interruptions by both staff and students. During part of one session, a trio of students were using computers at the side of the room and chatting amongst themselves. As it was not obvious whether the room had been booked explicitly for the focus group or if it remained a shared space, I felt unable to ask them to leave and the discussion remained slightly stilted until they vacated the room of their own accord.

Friendship groups can have both positive and negative effects on data collection in focus groups. The girls were comfortable to discuss most subjects freely and knowing each other well, they could give reminders of omissions or supply names of films they had watched together. A downside of friendship group participation is that the ‘group line’ may be followed and standard behaviour within the group, such as leaders and followers, may influence what happens. Two of the focus groups were composed of single large friendship groups. Fortunately, the positive attributes came through in these sessions. Other groups contained pairs or trios of friends along with other participants of the same year group. While the friends did more reminding and prompting of each other, this was not to the exclusion of other participants, and they were all comfortable speaking to each other. Participants were very polite and listened to each other speak without expressing negative comments seriously or aggressively. I did not find, as Duits and van Romondt Vis (2009) suggest, that girls were gauging what was happening in the groups and changing or retracting statements to fit in. Instead, girls explained their differences of opinion or expanded on what was said, and the rest of the group

happily accepted those explanations. Differences of opinion, when they did occur, usually took the form of joking arguments and ended with both sides keeping their original viewpoint.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) believe that researchers must suspend their assumptions when designing the research to ask for ideas and themes only from participants. However, the goal of the focus groups was twofold: first to uncover what, and how, the girls viewed, as well as what they thought about film; and second, to specifically ask questions relating to academic ideas. I particularly wanted to see if they interacted with films in the way the existing research described and, if not, why. It was not always possible (due to time constraints, length of time spent on other answers and the direction of discussions within each group) to ask every question in all sessions. Allowing the conversation to flow into areas which appear at first to be irrelevant often supplied insights which would not have otherwise arisen. Questions were not asked in the same order in each group but used to prompt or direct conversation and to follow up prior discussion. Within quieter groups, the list of questions proved particularly useful for keeping the discussion going, when asked in a conversational tone.

I was aware that the topics and ideas under discussion might not have been relevant to the ways that participants viewed or analysed their lives, or of any importance to them. Having intruded into their lunchtimes and directed them towards these topics, I appreciated that they were kind enough to respond. Some groups were happy to talk, running on beyond the lunch period with girls skipping, or attempting to skip, a class (similarly to Valentine, 1999) or using a free period to stay and talk further. Although, as stated, I would have preferred to have undertaken further groups at Willow Academy, I was satisfied at the end of the fieldwork that I had reached theoretical saturation, meaning that although there might be slightly differing opinions and examples within each group, there appeared to be sufficient corroboration across groups and sites on the central research topics (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Steele, 1999; Urquhart, 2013) to enable me to move onto the analysis stage.

4.6 Data Analysis

Initial analysis began during the focus group period as I considered data, compared it to survey data that had already been coded and updated the questions to ensure subjects and ideas raised by one group were discussed with later groups. This was particularly important when the focus of the research began to shift from its original understandings and showed films to impact girls' lives in ways I had not considered prior to the focus groups.

I transcribed eight focus group recordings, which totalled just under seven hours. As far as possible, I tried to include all answers as spoken, including utterances such as 'um' and 'like' and colloquialisms such as 'Mam' to reflect patterns of speech and the local dialect. Inevitably there was much talking over and frequent unintelligible sections which I tried to decipher to the best of my ability, not always successfully. In several recordings, it was difficult to distinguish between voices and I could not always recall who had made which statements. Within the transcripts I assigned a number to each girl so that participants' real names were never associated with the data (Valentine, 1999). I later created a list of pseudonyms, making sure none were the actual name of any girl from any of the groups. For groups where voices were hard to separate, I transcribed just the answers and returned to the recordings and transcripts several times to try to identify speakers. Where the conversation moved too quickly to ascertain participants, contributions are unattributed and quoted in context rather than as stand-alone statements. I refer to myself by my initials (ABH) in the transcripts.

The first step of the analysis was putting the transcriptions into NVIVO and undertaking a preliminary sorting process by placing relevant sections of the transcripts into broad subject categories or themes (Appendix I). There were 32 categories about which I then wrote brief memos, looking for patterns or interesting statements that might direct future coding, and thinking about how they were related to each other, my initial research questions and the literature. I also compiled lists of actresses, actors and films (Appendices J and K) discussed to see what this might reveal and to get a complete picture of what the participants liked and disliked. This section of the analysis was for general sorting and assessment of the data and, once completed, I did not use NVIVO further, finding

that I preferred to undertake the thematic analysis with paper copies of the transcripts.

Hermes (2006) judges transcripts to be pieces of a bigger picture, or clues to be followed, only showing their significance when the researcher becomes immersed in the practice. Within Hermes' research, the practice was reading magazines; for mine, it was viewing films. The analysis process required watching many films to obtain knowledge of plots, characters, actors and actresses so that participant statements could be understood more clearly. I also endeavoured to identify themes in the films which related to questions asked in the survey and focus groups and themes arising from the analysis, identifying how motherhood, careers, romantic relationships and feminine appearance were presented There was similarly some required reading undertaken on celebrities who had been discussed in order to decipher data, particularly where I had not managed to get a clear explanation at the time.

In my analysis of the data, I did not look only for themes and theories that had arisen from the Literature Review. Rather, I endeavoured to ascertain the 'right' questions that needed asking: what had not previously been discussed regarding older teenage girls and where my data might contradict what I had read or fill gaps. I also returned to the literature and did searches relating to the new areas that had arisen to see if any existing theories might help to explain the findings. Following the initial identification of 32 loose themes, I then listened to the recordings, checking the transcripts for accuracy; correcting any mistakes in the transcription; ensuring consistency; and filling in as many of the unintelligible gaps as possible. I then undertook a more detailed second coding, moving into thematic analysis having immersed myself in both the data and the films discussed by the participants and recent relevant literature I had found.

Thematic analysis is an active process, looking at the entire data set and identifying commonalities in the way themes are discussed by participants (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Nowell et al. (2017, p. 2) explain that thematic analysis is useful for showing similarities and differences in the data, as well as "generating unanticipated insights" which was particularly useful with my data as I had not found quite what the literature led me to expect. The main advantage of thematic

analysis as a method is in helping organise and describe the data for interpretation (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Six steps for thematic analysis are outlined by Braun and Clark: making yourself familiar with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing those themes; naming and defining the themes; and producing a report (Grundström, 2018). It is vital to remain consistent during the analysis, which can be difficult with such a flexible method (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Rather than 'discovering' themes within the data or waiting for them to emerge (Braun and Clarke, 2019), the researcher must be active and select what is of interest, acknowledging the decisions made along the way. No ties exist between thematic analysis and any specific theoretical framework, which means it can be used with a feminist constructivist epistemology as it "…works to both reflect reality and unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Previous research about girls' lives has been undertaken using thematic analysis (for example Johnson, 2010; Lamb, Graling and Wheeler, 2013; Jackson, Goddard and Cossens, 2016) which added to my confidence in its appropriateness for this research.

To uncover and understand the girls' relationship with film and their uses and interactions with it as an audience, I used inductive coding in which:

> …the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves and may bear little relation to the specific questions that were asked of the participants. Inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. (Nowell *et al.*, 2017, p. 8)

I identified the transcripts' content and then developed themes from the girls' conversations, starting with the preliminary 32 NVIVO themes and adding, removing or making the names of each theme more specific during the second coding in order to group the data into clearer categories and to see how these themes might be interrelated. To ensure that my coding was systematic and rigorous (Braun and Clarke, 2019), I undertook a third close thematic coding by hand, going line by line through the transcripts several times, and cross-checking and comparing my coding. Concurrently, I also created memos for each group by collecting statements I believed might be important later; discussing ideas arising from the transcripts; and comparing the data across the groups and schools.

The second and third coding were compiled into a final list (Appendix L). Several of these themes were identical to those of the NVIVO coding; however, there were additional, more specific, labels. I found, despite having the list of themes from each group in front of me, my coding was not always entirely consistent. To make the themes reliable, I therefore rechecked the coding and began to compile similar categories into broader, more descriptive, themes for future analysis (for example compiling themes labelled 'body size' and 'thin actresses' into the a 'bodies' theme). I also reallocated some themes; for example, placing the 'mothers' theme within 'family' and separating it from the 'motherhood' theme, which became about how the girls viewed and discussed future motherhood. I rearranged the themes and questions they created about into different orders to see which made the most sense to me utilising mind maps and tables (Appendix M) to give me a more comprehensive overview of the data. Forming the analysis into distinct chapters took several drafts and there were some themes which I wrote up and then discarded. In finding the structure, I pictured the analysis as a funnel, beginning with the broad questions of the girls' viewing – where, who, what and why – and narrowing down into areas where films may provide information and/or influence the girls about specific aspects of their lives. I then finished with the analysis of the two film characters discussed most often within the focus groups. Neoliberal self-projects and the formation of the self were conceptual issues that intersected with the themes and framed the analysis, along with U&G and encoding/decoding. These concepts work as threads throughout the thesis, drawing the themes together and providing theoretical backbone to the analysis.

Feminist researchers sometimes critique the media they are studying while at the same time trying to show how the audience might read and experience it (Hermes, 2006). When undertaking an analysis in this manner, it is possible for the researcher to use participant reactions to establish and illustrate their own position. I realised I was guilty of this to some extent in reviewing my initial analysis, and refocused on the participants. It was important to me to make sure that the participants were the centre of the analysis and, thus, I avoided using single lines from the transcripts. Instead, I included exchanges showing the co-creation of ideas, conversational flow and group dynamics (Wilkinson, 1998). Using extended quotes also supplies more context and prevents the data from becoming distorted by being taken out of context. I have endeavoured to ensure

that this thesis conveys the personalities of the girls and the intelligent, funny and insightful ways they shared their views and information regarding their lives and to represent what they said honestly. I believe it is essential that written analysis reflects the conversations and interaction between participants, particularly at times where there was a consensus or disagreement (Wilkinson, 1999). Nevertheless, the role of the researcher is to identify wider trends and tendencies by undertaking a nuanced and interpretive analysis, in this case of older teen girls' attitudes, values and practices.

4.7 Reflexivity

Maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process is vital in qualitative research of this type in order to identify whether any elements of my background, personality or beliefs may have influenced the interpersonal and knowledge-producing dynamics of the research (Olesen, 2011). A feminist standpoint (DeVault, 1990; Hekman, 1997; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002) throughout the research process kept me aware of my position within the research, as both an adult wanting to obtain information from girls and a scholar with strong feminist beliefs and understandings regarding the ways that girls and women are 'constructed' and treated by society. My status and identity were factors in the group dynamic and how the participants saw me no doubt influenced their reactions, likely in ways that I could not know or avoid. My age placed me on a par with their teachers; to differentiate myself, I dressed in a casual (but neat) way so as to look less like an authority figure. My accent also revealed me not to be from the North East, suggesting instead a Southern English middle-class background. Along with my sartorial choices, I also tried to connect with the girls in the discussions by showing knowledge, interest and enthusiasm about the films and actors/actresses that they mentioned. I introduced myself using just my first name to further differentiate myself from the female teachers.

I was excited to be moving into the fieldwork stage and to talk to girls about ideas and films to see how what I had been reading related to what they might think, feel and say. This enthusiasm worked well, and some groups responded, but unfortunately other groups were unable to view me only as an authority figure with whose opinions they could not disagree. It took a few sessions to learn how

to temper my enthusiasm and judge how much I could express ‘me’. My gender was most likely an asset in the research process as there were jokey ‘girls together’ moments where, although not being a friend or their age, my gender made it possible for me to interact as someone who understood how they felt and who may feel, or have felt, the same way. Conscious of my own biases, I endeavoured to allow my assumptions and ideas to be challenged and changed by what I heard, focusing on the girls and what they said rather than trying to prove or disprove myself or the literature.

While trying to show my enthusiasm for films, it was also important not to push my own opinions and tastes. I prepared for the groups by using the survey data to compile a list of films that girls from Maple Academy had seen and familiarising myself with them. I also continued to watch films mentioned in the groups during the fieldwork period. I tried to ensure that my comments were not leading or dismissive and I asked for the girls’ opinions in order to understand their points of view and reasoning. Hoping that by offering my opinion in a light-hearted and enthusiastic manner, I would help break down the potential student/teacher barrier, I attempted to behave in the manner Monnot (2010, p. 285) suggests “…as a friendly guest but never a judging adult…”. I wanted to show that I had watched, had knowledge of and often enjoyed the films they brought up; I did not want the participants to assume that, as an adult, I did not watch and like the same films or have similar cultural knowledge. I found this to work in most of the groups and the girls were happy to banter with me, as well as provide thoughtful answers to the questions. A possibility with this approach is that participants may speak more about subjects they feel the researcher approves of to try and impress or please, as discussed earlier in this chapter. I remained aware of this possibility and tried to mitigate any influence my opinions may have had

There were times during the groups where participants asked me questions regarding my own experiences with films, life, my studies and the purpose of the research. This interest in the research and myself was something I had not anticipated. Although I had expected to (and did) make brief mentions of my life, for example stating I had watched a film with my sons or liked a film when I was a teen, I had assumed I would be what Cotterill (1992, p. 596) describes as a ‘friendly stranger’ which is what generally occurred. Having been caught off

guard the first-time questions arose, I was thereafter careful during these questions not to influence the discussion with my experiences or ideas, instead trying to relate answers to comments and ideas they had shared. In several groups, girls enquired at the end of the sessions why we had discussed certain subjects. They were eager to understand the reason for, and background of, the research. Within groups where this occurred, participants would comment on what they had learnt in their studies and seemed reassured by the explanations and their ability to understand the research context.

While I gleaned a great deal of interesting information by letting discussions flow, I needed to balance this. To prevent the discussions from becoming chaotic, I strove to steer and maintain a focus on the subject matter. Although Wilkinson (1999) observes that focus groups can reduce the power and control of the researcher due to being outnumbered, I believe the girls respected that, as the person directing the activity, I had some authority, particularly within the school environment where adults hold power (Valentine, 1999). When I called them back to the subject or refocused the discussion, they followed my lead. However, this refocusing also worked negatively on occasion, when discussion of ideas became more monosyllabic rather than debated or discussed. In some groups, the girls would only respond to direct questions and not interact with one another, becomming more of a group interview situation (Parker and Tritter, 2006). It was a difficult and delicate balance; however, I learnt over time that conversation which flowed away from what I considered to be relevant often provided the richest data and some of these tangents delivered additional insights to explore – for example, investigating unanticipated areas of the girls' lives, such as discussions of motherhood and career not related to the questions on their portrayal in films.

Predictably, several times the girls made comments about life choices or beliefs and values which differed from my own. Members of one group held a discussion of their negative views of feminism, and another group expressed opinions about motherhood that I found challenging. Both discussions were emotive for me, and I was therefore especially careful not to comment in any way which disparaged what they were saying or conveyed disagreement. I instead encouraged them to explain where their ideas had come from and to expand on them, as these were

precisely the issues and topics I was seeking to uncover. The motherhood discussion and what it revealed about the girls' lives became a central theme, as addressed in Chapter 7.

I enjoyed the focus groups immensely and wished I could have carried on discussing films and the girls' experiences with more groups. It was a steep learning curve, more emotionally draining than I had expected, and the transcription of the groups' discussions not only provided fruitful and significant insights into the role of film in girls' lives but also helped me to develop as a researcher. Methodological areas that could have been improved include allowing the conversation to flow rather than being focused on getting to the questions (sometimes I did this very well, but not consistently). I also wish I had asked 'why' more often, allowing for fewer areas of discussion but with more depth. Sections of the transcripts often left me frustrated because of missed opportunities to dig deeper into fascinating topics. As Acker et al. (1983) state, feminist research should be objective and not impose the researcher's ideas of reality on the research subjects. Using focus groups, thematic analysis and inductive coding, this thesis reflects what the participants wanted to discuss regarding the role of film in their lives. The analysis explores this within the context of their situated realities. Respect for the girls' ideas and voices is intentionally centralised throughout the research process.

Chapter 5 Older Teen Girls’ Cinema Viewing Practices

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the first of two primary locations where older teen girls watch films, the cinema (the home location being the focus of Chapter 6). The discussion corresponds to themes identified during analysis of the fieldwork and thus examines cinema attendance habits and influencing factors; the social dynamics of the cinema for older teen girls; how the participants decided what to view at the cinema; and the reasons for viewing specific films in this particular location. Together, these themes reveal participants' film-viewing decisions, practices and experiences. It is crucial to understand how viewing location relates to media immersion and engagement in order to ascertain how different modes of viewing are associated with girls’ experiences and how they negotiate and interpret films as part of their everyday lives. This chapter explains that it is not location alone that determines how girls view and interpret films, but a variety of other life influences and experiences. It provides an analysis of the focus groups from both Willow and Maple Academies, complemented by the results of the survey conducted at Maple Academy.

The analysis draws on ideas and theories from U&G, in particular the ninefold typology of active audiences (NTAA Levy and Windahl, 1985); the media practice model (MPM Steele and Brown, 1995); and audience reception as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Terminology from Figures 1 and 2 in the previous chapter is used to frame different types of gratifications sought at different times (before, during and after viewing) – including pleasure, friendship, entertainment, fulfilment and immersion – and the interaction and influence of various stages. It also reveals how the participants planned their viewing to try and ensure they achieved specific gratifications, and their displeasure when they were unsuccessful.

This chapter seeks to make an original contribution through answering the research questions how do older teen girls in rural North East England select, navigate and interact with mainstream films and where, how, what and why do these older teen girls view films both individually and as groups? This

information has, as yet, not been seen in the literature. It includes identification and assessment of the impacts of disposable income; location; friends; family; media; the film industry; and taste on the girls' viewing motivations and decisions.

5.2 Cinema Viewing Practices

Most of the participants enjoyed going to the cinema. However, the regularity of visits varied depending on what was playing; how far they lived from the cinema; cost; and the intention of the visit (socialising or immersive viewing). Of 79 survey participants from Maple Academy responding to where they saw the last film they viewed, 31 watched it at the cinema. As discussed, it is difficult to find specific information on older teen girl film audience behaviour in Britain to gauge whether the participants are typical of their age group. Driscoll (2011) determines that the age range considered 'teen' may cover 12 to 24-years-old and the emerging adult age classification starts with 18-year-olds. Going to the cinema was an activity that these older teen girls were attracted to, and they made efforts to interact with films as regularly as possible. The study of their film-viewing experiences and habits is therefore an essential area of research to correct the omission of this age group from research on film viewing audiences.

Asked how often they attended the cinema, responses from the focus groups varied from 'all the time' to 'hardly ever'. The survey figures reflected this, with 45 per cent going to the cinema every 3-6 months; 30 per cent, every one or two months; 11 per cent at least monthly; and less than 1 per cent never attending. However, these figures differ significantly from American research that presents the influence of films on teen girls according to regularity; their spending power; frequency of visits; and frequency of repeat cinema visits (for example Gateward and Pomerance, 2002; Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007; Shary, 2014). This may indicate differences in the cultural significance of cinema; available funds; number of cinemas and their locations; transport options; or other variables between America and England. Repeat viewing in the cinema was not common for any of the focus group participants. A total of 47 of 110 survey responses confirmed that, although girls may occasionally repeat view films at the cinema, it is not to the extent suggested by the American research.

5.2.1 Cinema Attendance and Influencing Factors

Participants had specific reasons for not attending the cinema as regularly as they wished, as shown by these participants from Willow Academy.

ABH	And how often do you go to the cinema?
Michelle	Once a month maybe
ABH	About once a month
	[interruption]
ABH	And do you go?
Donna	Not very often
ABH	Not very often like once or twice a year or, if that?
Donna	I hardly ever go
ABH	Hardly ever. Why do you not go?
Donna	It's expensive
ABH	That's what puts me off as well the expense of it, if it wasn't so expensive would you go more?
Donna	Probably yeah

There is either a difference in terms of available funds or in the prioritising of those funds by these girls. This is shown by Michelle who stated that she 'maybe' went once a month and by Donna who related that she hardly ever went to the cinema due to it being expensive. Girls are heavily targeted as consumers and considered eager to spend readily available funds on a wide variety of products and activities (Dyhouse, 2014). However, participants related that limited funds restricted their ability to attend the cinema and that they had to make choices regarding how to spend their money. An evening ticket to the cinema mentioned by participants ranges between £6.70 and £8.50 (in 2019). A participant from Willow Academy commented on price when she said "it's gotten so expensive now… £10 for like popcorn and a drink…" This suggests that there is more than just the expense of a ticket to be considered and that the cost of these additional items desired for the experience was also off-putting (Van de Vijver, 2017). Three survey respondents further confirmed this, independently stating that the high expense was a deterrent to attendance when answering the open question of whether there was anything that had not been asked about cinema upon which they would like to comment, showing that price was a limiting factor.

The girls found ways to lower costs through special offers and membership cards in order to go more frequently. A midweek offer reduced the ticket price to £5.50 for teens and another chain offered a 10 per cent discount and loyalty points for a

membership fee. Ellie and Rae from Maple Academy explained how this influenced them to attend the cinema on specific days

ABH	So you go just if there's something on that you want to see, so what every couple of months maybe?
Group	Yeah
Rae	It's hard because like I work on a Saturday and a Sunday
Ellie	Yeah same
Rae	So if I'm gonna go it'd have to be a Saturday night and sometimes when I get in from work on a Saturday, I just can't be bothered to like make the effort to then go back out again
Ellie	Yeah, if we go, we usually just go through the week
Group	Yeah
Ellie	On like a Tuesday
Rae	The offer
Ellie	Two for one offer

Due to working schedules, mid-week cinema trips happened more often but it was also the cheaper ticket prices which made those days enticing for the girls. Using special offers can limit which films are available to be viewed and weekday viewing for schoolgirls involves further considerations such as homework, transport and getting up for school the following day. A Willow Academy group similarly planned their visits according to special offers, as exemplified by the following comments:

Joanna	Yeah, if there's anything on, we go normally once a week, like on two for one days only
Carol	I hardly ever go to the cinema
Joanna	Yeah
Carol	It's expensive
Samantha	I would it's just 'cause it's far from me
Joanna	Unless it's a cheap Tuesday in town
Violet	Yeah, we only go two for ones, we'll take a tenner
Group	Yeah
Samantha	That's not bad
Violet	The [cinema] have two things for 10 pounds so we go then

The distance Samantha lived from the cinema prevented her from attending; thus, the 'not bad' ten-pound offer is irrelevant for her, and the impact of the rural locality is discussed later in this section. Carol stated here that she hardly ever went because of the expense, but later commented there were occasions she did attend, finding the funds to share the experience with friends. Karen, also from

Willow Academy, said that she used a membership card to reduce costs, making more frequent visits possible. There was a consensus that the cinema was expensive and all discussions regarding special offers were matter of fact, with no negative judgement being passed for not being able to afford to go without a discount. Participants from both school's knowledge and regular use of special offers suggest that cinema attendance was worth researching ways to be able to see films in the cinema. The expense of cinema and travel further impacted decisions about what to watch, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Willow Academy girls who spoke about special offers also discussed how they attended the cinema more often at particular times of year:

ABH	How often do you go to the cinema?
Violet	Quite a lot
Joanna	Like there's, it depends on the season really.
Group	Yeah
Violet	Yeah, sometimes once a week
Joanna	Sometimes there's a lot, sometimes there'll be like loads out, so I go loads and then I won't for a few months.
Group	Yeah
Joanna	Like I know [unintelligible] in October I went twice every week for all the whole of October, like average like once a week…
Violet	I think from like the summer to the start of winter is quite often in there, this time [November] it's not often.

Joanna and Violet had an awareness of film distribution schedules and were willing to use deals and spend their money to attend more often at times when a larger number of films they wanted to watch were released. The impact of scheduling on frequency of attendance was discussed further by Karen from Willow Academy who explained: "…you have to generally wait for when films come out so it's not like you could go every weekend or anything like that". Even if money were not a concern, there were limited films available that they wished to view, which impacted their trips. Summer provides the year's most significant percentage of ticket sales, with film companies releasing films they expect to excel during this period (Einav, 2007). Summer break meant that the girls were able to attend the cinema more often and could therefore benefit from cheaper weekday ticket prices. The reason for the dip in viewing in November, mentioned

by Violet, is likely due to film companies waiting for the Christmas period to release their final blockbusters of the year, another highly profitable period (ibid.). Scheduling of films further influenced viewing selection because the girls wished to view ‘blockbusters’ in the cinema, such as the James Bond film *Spectre* (2015) and the Marvel film *Thor* (2011) and were therefore motivated to attend more often for these types of films.

The proximity to a city provided three multiplex cinemas for the participants to choose from, broader than that of many rural areas (Collins, Hand and Ryder, 2005). However, travel options were often a restriction, with almost every participant relying on family or public transport. The only exceptions were one Maple Academy girl who drove herself, and one girl from each school whose boyfriends drove. Most girls in the focus groups and 75 per cent of those surveyed lived at least 20 minutes by vehicle from a cinema, even those living in built-up areas. Rural locations often suffer from infrequent bus services with limited routes, and trains were only available to those living near the single line in the area. Travel constraints meant that it was often quicker and cheaper for girls to travel further to the city than to attend local cinemas. Rose and Kate from Maple Academy travelled to the city to attend the cinema due to lack of direct routes. As Kate explained; “…well, where I live, I can’t get a bus direct [to closer cinema], so I have to get a few buses, so [city] is usually the easiest and the cheapest”. Girls who could access train services sometimes travelled 40 minutes on the direct route to a large shopping centre with a multiplex. These findings corroborate Corbett and Wessels (2017, p. 68) statement that “[p]eople have some choice in how they experience film, but the extent of that choice depends on what opportunities they have to participate in film.” Cost was a limiter for the girls, especially when combined with travel restrictions caused by the rural location, indicating that travel time, cost and ease of access significantly impacted cinema attendance. This information adds to the body of literature relating to teen girls and the cinema which, as discussed in the Literature Review, has understood girls to be able to access the cinema largely without issue (for example Nash and Lahti, 1999; Gateward and Pomerance, 2002).

5.2.2 The Social Dynamics of Older Teen Girls' Cinema Attendance

In addition to the frequency of cinema attendance, it is necessary to investigate who accompanies girls to discover any impacts on attendance, what is viewed and how the types of films chosen fit into their social lives. As discussed in Chapter 2, for American teen girls (in the limited and dated research available), attending the cinema in large friendship groups is presented as the norm (Nash and Lahti, 1999; Bode, 2010). This presumption arose from teen girl audience reactions to blockbuster films such as *Titanic* (1997) and *Twilight* (2008). The reactions of the teen girl audience in the American research, which included adoration of the lead actors[5], repeat viewings and purchasing of merchandise related to the films, were considered to be extreme but were also taken to be the typical American teen girl response across the entire age range. However, no similar studies of British girls are available. In my study, no participant said that they went to the cinema alone but attending in large groups was far less familiar to them than suggested by the literature. As discussed below, cinema-going does appear to be a social activity for older teen girls. However, the typical groupings for cinema attendance were more often family, boyfriends or small groups/pairs of close friends. This section explores the reasons for groupings, why they were considered preferable and what influences, inclinations or lived realities might have impacted these choices.

Participants attended the cinema with their families, describing it as a quintessentially social activity. This may also be a way of circumnavigating cost and travel issues, with parents paying and providing transport. Three groups from each school said that they attended with their families and these trips occurred with some regularity, intimating that money was available. However, it is also possible that girls who did not speak of family cinema trips did not want to share within their group that their family could not afford it or to openly discuss other reasons for not socialising as a family in this way.

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[5] As per Chapter 4, focus groups referred to 'actors' and 'actresses' rather than male/female actor, this terminology is therefore employed throughout the analysis.

While the family groups always remained together to view the same film, the make-up of these groups differed and sometimes included extended family members. Angie from Maple Academy spoke of which family members were in attendance.

ABH	Me and do you go with friends or?
Angie	It depends, I sometimes go with family, I sometimes go with friends
ABH	Who in your family, your parents or siblings?
Angie	Um, my dad my cousins, my mum, it just depends on who's around

Half the girls from another Willow Academy group attended the cinema with just their mothers.

ABH	Right, and who do you go with?
Violet	My boyfriend
Me	just..
Violet	Or sometimes friends like rarely
Joanna	Same again, but my parents, as well I go with my Mam the most
ABH	Right
Samantha	I mainly go with my friends more
Carol	Yeah same
Samantha	Sometimes I might go with my Mum if I've got nothing to do
Joanna	I go with my Mam like once a week
Violet	Yeah if there's anything on we go normally once a week, like on two for one days only

Jones (2013) argues that films can be a relational tool for families and may become a type of ritual, creating shared experiences and memories while also strengthening familial bonds. Therefore, regular mother/daughter cinema trips may help facilitate and support that relationship. Discounts on cinema tickets were used for these occasions, enabling cinema attendance to become a regular social event. However, despite attending the cinema regularly with their mothers, this did not always extend beyond the cinema, with there being different individualised rules for home viewing. Among the Willow Academy girls, for instance, Violet's experience was unique:

ABH	So always, you never watch anything with your family?
Carol	Mmmm no to be fair

Joanna	I watch like family films with my family
Carol	[unintelligible] My dad likes them
Violet	Not with my Mum I don’t ever watch things with my Mum in the house
ABH	You never do?
Violet	No that’s a bit weird though since we go to the cinema together

Although not clear herself why film viewing with her mother was limited to the cinema, Violet seemed very firm in her rule. However, no other girl who went to the cinema with her mother restricted location in this manner. This again highlights the variability of audience activity (Levy and Windahl, 1985) and the importance of not assuming that all viewing rules are followed in all locations or that older teen girls all view with the same companions in the same locations and manner.

Another impact on film selection when viewing with family, in addition to Joanna’s above comment that she will watch family films with her family, is expressed by Rose from Maple when talking about whether she ever checked the rating of a film. She said that she only took notice of 18 ratings because “… if I go and my Mam’s taken with, I’d be like I don’t want to go and see that”. Bragg and Buckingham’s (2004) interviews with parents and 9 to 17-year-olds regarding family television viewing found that girls experienced embarrassment when encountering mature material (such as depictions of sexual behaviour, drug use or swearing) while viewing with parents, with both children and parents describing feelings of discomfort. Correspondingly, Rose self-censored to avoid awkwardness rather than having viewing restrictions placed upon her by her mother or the age regulations. Again, this reflects an individual choice rather than applying to all participants.

Friendship group cinema visits varied in size from two or three to larger groups, depending upon the film. These outings were social occasions and occurred regularly enough to be considered ordinary. The choice of whom to include was part of the cinema experience, as echoed by Aveyard (2016). Karen from Willow Academy described cinema visits as “…not a treat, because I’d say, in your friendship groups, one of the main things you can do as a group would be to go to the cinema”, exposing the social element as considered worth the expense.

Samantha and her group from Willow Academy discussed group formations for different films they had gone to see.

ABH	So do you go with a lot of friends or a small group?
Group	Small, depends
Samantha	Depending on the film, like when I went to see *Jurassic World* there was three or four, but we went to see
Joanna	*Woman in Black*
Samantha	*Straight Outta Compton*
Joanna	Oh yeah
Samantha	There was like 11 of us
Joanna	Went to see *The Woman in Black*
Samantha	*The Woman in Black* there was like 20

Why these films in particular gathered such large groups at the cinema can unfortunately only be speculated, as conversation then moved on. As Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath (2001, p. 54) state, entertainment from the cinema may come from both the social side and the genre of film, therefore "[t]he extent to which a film can enhance or detract from these social pleasures is an important criteria of evaluation." Research undertaken by online survey with youths in Belgium suggests that "…different genres of film demand different levels of social engagement" (Van de Vijver, 2017, p. 137) and the genre of these films appears to have encouraged large groups to attend. *Straight Outta Compton* (2015) is a biopic about 1980's Hip Hop group N.W.A. and was the seventh highest grossing 15 rated film of 2015, making £8.2 million pounds in Britain (British Film Institute, 2016). This film may have been popular for a variety of reasons, including the music or the political or social elements (the group and its members having experienced racial, police and gang violence and having had a major influence on Hip Hop). This audience grouping potentially gained social status from having been part of the crowd attending this film and through knowing who N.W.A. were or sharing musical tastes.

The Woman in Black (2012) is a ghost story/horror/thriller rated 12A and was actor Daniel Radcliffe's first film after playing the titular character in the *Harry Potter* series. It was the sixteenth most popular film of 2012 grossing £21.3 million in Britain (British Film Institute, 2013). Horror films were popular with the girls and, as discussed later, were a top choice for viewing in the cinema. Even

so, it is unclear why this film was able to gather a crowd of 20. The girls may have been fans of Radcliffe, *Harry Potter* or both. Two 16-year-old groups from Maple Academy mentioned this film in passing, the first using it as an example of an excellent performance by Radcliffe when a participant explained her admiration for him as an actor. The other reference came during an explanation of why films were best viewed in specific locations, confirming this was a film that they felt required viewing on the big screen. Thus, although there was no explanation provided as to why these certain films merited a large group to attend, it is clear that, at least on occasion, older teen girls did visit the cinema as part of a larger crowd. Therefore, genre seems to intersect with sociability when it comes to older teen girls deciding which films to attend in groups. In my findings it is horror and a musical biopic which garnered group visits rather than the teen films of earlier research (see Nash and Lahti, 1999; Bode, 2010), suggesting that film tastes across this age group are not universal.

A Maple Academy group showed that there were further permutations of groups attending the cinema.

ABH	So who do you go with? You go together [with members of the focus group], but do you go with other friends as well, a big group of you or?
Rose	It's usually us [me] and five other people
Naomi	I would usually just go with my boyfriend.
ABH	Right
Naomi	To see stuff
ABH	Does that affect what you see, a lot?
Naomi	No
ABH	No
Naomi	Not really
ABH	You sort of take it in turns to decide?
Naomi	We like the same kind of films so…

So, in addition to a location for medium-sized friendship groups to visit together, cinema-going also provided a location for socialising with boyfriends. In Naomi's case, the choice of film was not a key issue as she and her boyfriend enjoyed the same films. Jancovich (2011, p. 90) proposes that teens use cinemas for dating "…because it is a place of relative warmth and comfort that is outside the home and away from the surveillance of parents…" and historically the cinema has been seen as a site for courtship (Richards, 2003; Langhamer, 2007). However, only

two out of 38 focus group participants (one from each school) stated that they went to the cinema with their boyfriends. No other focus group or survey participants spoke of attending the cinema with partners or on dates. This suggests, then, that the cinema did not act as a primary site for romantic relationships for these girls, corresponding with Van de Vijver's (2017) finding that youth dating at the cinema is less prominent than it has been historically. Alternatively, dating was not a regular occurrence. This may reflect the low priority these girls placed on romantic relationships, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Intended immersion in the film also determined the size of cinema groups. In terms of gratification, the MPM motivation for selecting the film was to become fully immersed in the film, rather than using it as a reason for a social event. This shows a NTAA degree of selectivity before exposure, which is acknowledged by the girls. They utilised information about the film to judge whether it was something that required immersion. Karen, from Maple Academy, explained her preference to attend the cinema with a single friend:

Karen	…I usually go with like my friends
ABH	A group of friends?
Karen	I usually with probably like, I usually only go with one person, because like if we go in a group then it's kind of becomes, like, kind of a group outing. I kind of want to go and see the film, not be with my friends. I know that sounds a bit rude
Group	[laughter]
Karen	I'm there to see the film

This contradicts existing academic literature suggesting that the social aspect of cinema is one of the most meaningful for young audiences (Jones, 2013). Karen sought the pleasure of becoming immersed in the film, preferring other locations for socialising. Additionally, she wanted to spend her money well. Her desire for immersive viewing without social distractions is, however, reflected by Finnish adult research participants who stated they preferred to view films in the cinema alone to entirely focus on what they were watching (Grundström, 2018). It might be suggested then that cinema attendance is considered a significant social activity for younger teens but as girls mature their preferences and objectives for attending the cinema change and develop. However, although Karen did not consider the cinema a social space, she still did not attend on her own. Perhaps her age and/or

the distance she lived from the cinema meant that she was not allowed, or did not want, to make the journey on her own. Alternatively, McQuail (1997, p. 33) explains that:

> Being a "member" of the audience for film, for instance, involves learning some elements of a role, certain habits as well as particular understandings and perceptions of a medium and its genres. These are things that develop in social interaction in a particular cultural setting. The full meaning of a particular medium audience varies from place to place and time to time.

This understanding of the role of audience could mean that Karen accepted the cinema to be a location with the expectation of being part of a group, which she accepted but she intentionally limited the number of people within her group to allow for the desired level of immersion and entertainment. This suggests that different viewing styles, as well as film genres, depend on with whom participants attend the cinema.

Another intrusion on immersion commented on and disliked by participants was noisy audience members, either within their family or friendship groups, as they were distracting from the film. Karen was not alone in preferring an immersive viewing experience, as shown in the following discussion between a different 16-year-old group from the same school.

ABH	So do you watch films with your families as well or do you just always watch alone?
Group	Yeah
Lizzie	No
Group	Yeah, sometimes, sometimes yeah
ABH	So there's a no and the rest of you yes. [to Lizzie] Why don't you?
Lizzie	'Cause I hate like sitting with people because they just like talk and like you know if you eat in like a cinema and you hear people chew, I cannot concentrate
Nora	I hate that
Lizzie	When you're completely silent
Nora	I hate it when people talk through the film
Lizzie	But it just it's my pet peeve hearing people talk during a film
Ellie	Yeah there are certain friends and like family that I can sit and watch a film with but like [a friend] I can't sit and watch and watch a film with her because she

	just talks the entire way through, and it gets really like?
Group	[laughter]
Lizzie	I literally cannot I just can't even concentrate she'll ask me questions
Ellie	Yeah 'cause she doesn't follow along with it

Even friends chosen to share the cinema visit were thought to be irritating if they interrupted concentration. A participant from Maple Academy spoke of family causing annoyance: "I'll go to the cinema with my parents, and they'll whisper in my ear and I'm like 'shut up'". Her displeasure reflects the experiences of Jones' (2013) participants regarding parental distractions when they were of a similar age. Another member of this group likewise stated that "We never watch films as a family, mainly because parents talk just all the time." While, for some girls, cinema was used to support a family bond, for others such as Laura and Ellie, family presence and behaviour in the cinema caused frustration and was avoided. Van de Vijver (2017) argues that cinema allows for immersed viewing which audiences appreciate, but that being unable to control the environment leads to criticism of the experience. Cohen and Lancaster (2014, p. 513) support this understanding stating that "… some viewers may appreciate the presence of others as a supplementation to the overall viewing experience, while others may find the emotional expressions of others annoying, distracting, or even distressing." As displayed, there were a variety of opinions about acceptable levels of socialising within the cinema and whether it enhanced or ruined the experience and prevented the gratification(s) of entertainment, immersion and friendship looked for. This refutes literature suggesting that teen girls of all ages only attend the cinema in large groups as a social occasion (for example Nash and Lahti, 1999; Bode, 2010), instead showing that factors such as levels of immersion, family relationships and a desire to be part of a social group for particular films are all taken into consideration by older teen girls. These focus group findings therefore add to the limited knowledge of decision making within this audience group.

These findings confirm that cost, travel and viewing companions all have an impact on the type of film selected by the participants. Living in a rural location, lack of funds and entertainment options made cinema one of a few activities available to these girls outside their homes. Collecting knowledge about film release dates and visiting cinemas despite various social and geographical

constraints indicate that cinema-going was seen as important enough to dedicate time and money. It was a location in which both friends and family were able to immerse themselves in what was on the screen, supplying a shared experience. However, there were social rules, and attendants were often chosen by their understanding and adherence to these rules and the type of experience sought. Strangers' behaviour in the cinema also affected the girls' viewing decisions, mostly in negative ways when interrupting immersed experiences for which they had paid. This suggests that, although the practice of attending the cinema may have been social, the viewing of the film itself was not, as Karen expressed. Her desire was to focus on the film itself rather than the social event or collective emotions prompted by it. The films and the experience of viewing them in the cinema appear to have been the main draw rather than the potential socialising. Therefore, these older teen girls' uses, and reasonings refute much of the academic research about how and why teen girls attend the cinema. Having seen how these factors impact cinema visits, the following section will investigate how they may influence the film selection process.

5.3 Deciding Which Films to View at the Cinema

The majority of focus group participants had firm opinions regarding what was 'worth' going to the cinema to view. Selection involved externally influenced motivations and gratifications sought, such as the level of immersion desired or wanting to be part of a group. Information was gathered from trailers, reviews, ratings, casting and film genre, all of which impacted decision making. As Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath (2001, p. 52) explain

> Most people go to the cinema to be entertained. This statement is true, but it conceals as much as it reveals. A wide range of genre films are available at the local multiplex to cater for variations in taste, which signal through their genre a characteristic use of textual conventions with their associated audience pleasures. At a more general level, mainstream cinema is premised on a broader set of expectations about storytelling, and emotional engagements that have been established through the global dominance of Hollywood films. These mean that for many people films are assessed against these criteria…

To determine whether films would offer the engagement and entertainment they desired, the participants required a range of information from a variety of sources.

They displayed a NTAA selectivity and involvement before exposure wherein they decided that cinema-going was something that they enjoyed and wanted to continue doing and tried to select a film that they happily anticipated viewing. As discussed and explained by Grundström (2018, p. 17), making the correct decision was important "…because with the current price of cinema admission, one can't run the risk of going to see a film without any prior knowledge of it". Within the vast amount of information available on films across all types of media, there were sources, such as trailers and reviews, which were actively sought out by study participants to inform an evaluation of a film.

Obtaining knowledge of film releases was the first step for planning a cinema visit by these older teen girls. Trailers were viewed by focus group participants, mainly via online sources such as Internet Movie Database (IMDb), Facebook, YouTube or cinema websites. Although trailers were viewed on YouTube, there was no mention of watching films on this website; rather, its use was information gathering. The girls' dependence on trailers and the range of locations for viewing them supports the suggestion that trailers are currently prevalent due to the internet and social media, although remaining under-researched (Johnston, Vollans and Greene, 2016). This also concurs with Steele's (2001) evaluation that teens are selective in what they choose to watch and often make decisions based on viewing trailers. The impact of trailers was furthermore found in this study to be a source of conversation. Ellie from Maple Academy stated that "I'll say to someone oh did you see that trailer it looks really good" and Rae agreed that she also spoke to friends about trailers. This indicates NTAA involvement and utility before exposure but in a collective manner: as a group they anticipated and looked forward to what they might view, discussing and sharing information about films with each other.

As trailers are themselves media texts, the discussion of their content can also be classified as postexposure utility, whereby reflection and conversation incorporate the media further into their lives as part of a collective history. Engagement with trailers also works in combination with the reading of reviews, as discussed in the next section. The survey further confirmed the influence of trailers, with 83 per cent of respondents watching them online and 53 per cent also viewing them on television. Members of a Willow Academy group were fans of the horror genre

and discussed a list of films due to be released the following year, leading one of the girls to state, "I'm going to Google the trailers in my next free [lesson]". There was a clear desire not only to find out about specific films, but also to be able to join in the conversation. Trailers are thus information sources girls can use "…within interpersonal interaction, or to continue or enhance conversations" (Johnston, Vollans and Greene, 2016, p. 66), as well as to gain or maintain social status.

Reviews were also used by participants in both NTAA selectivity before exposure and post-exposure utility. However, these were not as influential as trailers in determining whether particular films would provide the desired entertainment value and immersion, with only three focus groups (two from Maple Academy and one from Willow Academy) and 11 per cent of those surveyed confirming that they read them, usually online. It has been proposed that film reviews can influence ideas of what is worth watching: (Bode, 2010) and Suárez-Vázquez's (2011) research with undergraduates revealed that bad reviews can prevent films from doing well, even if featuring popular actors or actresses. Joanna from Willow Academy differed from other members of her group who denied any influence from reviews.

Violet	I like just watch any film
Carol	I'll watch anything
ABH	You don't let other people's opinions
Carol	No
Violet	Uh uhh
Joanna	I do I really badly, I always read reviews and if it's bad I just say ugh I'll not watch it
Violet	Because everybody when I watched *The Expendables 3* and like everybody was always like that's awful that's awful, but I liked it
ABH	I like *The Expendables*
Violet	Oh I loved *Expendables*!

Joanna openly admitted the sway of reviews over her viewing. However, this was not reflected by any other girls; Violet was more typical in her claims that her own opinion or selection of a film was not contingent on reviews or the opinions of others. Rose from Maple Academy sought out reviews after she had viewed a film, which could be classified as postexposure utility within the NTAA, as she reflected on what she had seen and her opinion of it in comparison with other

people's. Written film reviews have been understood to convey the reviewer's opinion to a specific section of the audience (those who read or view where the review is published); however, the reviewer's opinion is only impactful if the reader "…feels that the reviewer belongs broadly to the same cultural universe as they do." (Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath, 2001, p. 11). Study participants sought reviews in limited places, IMDb, Sky Television and Netflix being the most popular. They did not watch reviews on television or YouTube. Sky and Netflix reviews were used to decide what to watch on those platforms. Although not specified, it seems logical that IMDb reviews would have been used for platforms that did not publish their own and for films the girls might consider viewing in the cinema.

Reviews on IMDb have been shown to be biased towards male reviewers who prefer male-oriented films (Boyle, 2014), which may explain, at least in part, why these older teen girls did not base their film choices on what they read on this website. In addition, professional reviewers have been shown to judge audiences as much as films, often making negative comments about girl audiences (Bode, 2010). These biases might reveal why trailers and friends' views carried more weight for participants. In addition, the ability to view parts of the films in trailers would allow the girls to judge special effects and actors' and actress's performances. It is entirely possible, however, that the influence of reviews was more considerable than admitted. Outside influences could be seen to take away from the girls' desired autonomy, but the proliferation of information from a variety of sources, providing constant exposure to information, can also make it challenging to identify where knowledge about a film has been obtained (Grundström, 2018).

Casting is potentially another factor motivating older teen girls to watch particular films. However, as discussed in the Literature Review

> …celebrity has received little attention from youth scholars relative to other aspects of popular culture. The majority of research on celebrity takes place in media and film studies and largely provides textual analyses of celebrity rather than analyses of how (young) people engage with celebrity. (Allen *et al.*, 2017, p. 230)

Hollywood places faith in 'bankable' lead actors (and less frequently, actresses), believing their appearance and reputation will motivate audiences to view and purchase films (Gunter, 2018). Textual, fieldwork and ethnographic studies have presented teen girls as highly interested in celebrity culture (for example Karniol, 2001; Engle and Kasser, 2005; Stever, 2011; Anselmo-Sequeira, 2015). Fandom has also been assumed to motivate teenage girls' viewing and spending habits (Nash and Lahti, 1999; Stevens Aubrey, Walus and Click, 2010; Stever, 2011). However, no age range is specified in academic studies which describe girls as eager and able to spend money to view attractive male film stars. Within the focus groups, fandom was not discussed as a significant motivator for film choice and participants did not appear to be seeking any pleasure from viewing particular actors or actresses. As with Mendick *et. al*'s (2018, p. 166) 14 to 8-year-old male and female participants "[w]hile some were highly invested in particular celebrities, the vast majority rejected the position of fan." They may, of course, have not wanted to admit an interest in front of their peers as "…distancing self from celebrity is performative and constitutive of their and others' social positions." (ibid., p. 167) Although enjoying viewing attractive characters on screen (as discussed later), they perhaps had moved from the type of 'crush' described in the above literature to a more general appreciation of actors' appearances and were unwilling to foreground appearance over plot. Participants showed a broad knowledge of celebrity culture, reading, watching and clicking on social media about celebrities of interest as part of their NTAA selectivity and involvement before exposure. However, very few girls indicated that they actively searched for information on any specific actors or actresses. The few who did used Google searches or YouTube to find interviews, career news, ages and relationship status of (predominantly male) actors. Survey respondents also refuted the idea of teen celebrity fascination, denying any interest. Around 24 per cent reported that they actively searched for information on actors and actresses adding magazines, Wikipedia, Twitter, Instagram, TV shows and Tumblr to the list of places where celebrity information was sought.

There was some talk within all age groups of heteronormative physical attraction to actors, with comments such as: "[Chris Pratt] he's not ugly", "I really like Chris Hemsworth who plays Thor, because I just do", "*Captain America*, that's my favourite film…that's mainly for Chris Evans" and the following description of

actor Tom Hardy by 16-year-old Belinda from Maple Academy who stated that she liked him a lot:

Belinda	He's in like loads of different types of films like he's in some like blockbusters like *Inception*, he also did like a couple of Indie type films and there was this one where he played like this MMA fighter, so he was shirtless the entire film
Group	Oooooohhhh!
Belinda	Just sayin'
Group	[laughter]

Belinda assumed that other members of the group would also be interested in viewing films featuring a shirtless Hardy (which proved to be correct), illustrating that the physical appearance of some male actors can influence film choice. This displays the NTAA utility of a practice before exposure to media, whereby the girls talk about what they have watched or will watch and share information and opinions. Physical attraction did not always lead to following an actor's career or watching films in which they appeared. However, although not specifically seeking enjoyment from viewing a body they found attractive, they were happy to engage in viewing and interacting with the image, should it be present within the film. This type of discussion may have involved participants performing the expected social role of heterosexuality, and although actresses were described as beautiful it was never in a sexualised way. Alison from Willow Academy explained the influence actors had on her film selection:

ABH	…do you go looking for films with these particular people in them? Do you look it up on IMDb and find out what they've been in?
Laura	Not really, no, like I mean sometimes if they're in it you think, if they're in it, oh I might enjoy it because I like them as an actor, but I don't really kind of, like sought them out to see what they've been in to watch it
Alison	Also like when you go and see a film, you feel like, you only generally go and see a film if you're interested in like, the concept of the film or if there's actors that, you know, you recognise from other things
Group	Yeah
Alison	And you think, oh, well, they were good in that, I'll watch it; I'll watch this movie and see how they are

Plot is equally, if not more, influential as casting; Alison did not expect that a specific actor would make viewing worthwhile, rather she would 'see how they are. thus, Alison is speaking here of male influence. It appears that, at least in terms of catching attention, actors held more interest for the focus group participants. Knowing that these actors were in the films they chose to view would sometimes supply NTAA involvement before exposure as the girls anticipated seeing them.

Participants made judgement calls regarding whether a film was worth paying to view and would offer specific gratifications using information gathered from trailers regarding plot and cast. Genre, and whether they felt it necessary to watch a particular film in the cinema, also influenced their decisions. As Fiske (1988, p. 91) explains, "[g]enre spells out to the audience the range of pleasures it might expect and thus regulates and activates memory of similar texts and the expectations of this one." Girls said that they would go to the cinema only "if it's something, like, I actually want to watch" or "if it's, like, a really good movie". This reflects research with adult participants who also made value-based judgements of whether a film would give them their money's worth in the cinema (Grundström, 2018), showing that price and travel are considerations not exclusive to older teen girls. It also again exemplifies selectivity before exposure within the NTAA, as they choose films based on what they might expect from the genre, and involvement before exposure, as they look forward to the film based on previous viewing experiences.

Girls from a Maple Academy group worked together enthusiastically to explain what it was about their favoured horror genre which made cinema viewing necessary:

Nora	I think like some films are better when you see them in the cinema compared to watching them [unintelligible]
Group	Yeah
Rae	Yeah, some films you want to be like, tucked up like cosy, watching them in bed
Group	Yeah
Rae	And other films it's like the thrill of like, it being –
Group	Yeah
Rae	Built up and going to watch it at the cinema

Group	Yeah
Lizzie	Like *The Woman in Black*, that was so much better at the cinema than it was at home
Rae	Uh-huh
Lizzie	I don't know why it was scary at the cinema, 'cause you can't really, you can't look away at the cinema can you, because it's so big
Rae	Yeah, you could turn it off if you're at home
Lizzie	But in your home, you can just turn it off
Ellie	And you don't really know what's in the cinema but at home you know what's in the room, yeah, and that nothing's going to like, get you
Group	[laughter]

Rae explains that some films require an ambience created by location: either 'tucked up in bed' as a solitary experience watching on a small screen, or with tension created by sitting in a dark, open space with strangers, the large screen and surround sound creating an immersive viewing experience. The cinema could make the girls feel as if there was risk as the film could not be stopped and 'you can't look away'. Public spaces contain the unknown, as Ellie humorously describes at the end of the excerpt. Choice of venue for viewing is thereby dependent on how the girls plan to interact with the film and what type of emotional and physical experience they are hoping to prompt, showing a NTAA involvement before exposure as they anticipate their involvement. They also showed selectivity before exposure in film and venue choice as they wanted to ensure that the horror film had their full attention to provide the intended, and desired, result of scaring them. Grundström (2018) identifies a large screen and surround sound as important factors for watching particular films at the cinema, although the type of film thought to make best use of these varies between audience members. In terms of the MPM, the girls' motivation for the selection of a horror film was to have a particular experience and to be able to give the film their full attention and interact with it in a manner that they considered appropriate for that type of film based on their previous viewing experiences. The girls understood what they wanted from the film – to be afraid – and how to obtain this thrill, by attending as a group in a public space and viewing on a large screen, and they planned accordingly.

Participants similarly enjoyed and anticipated viewing action films in the cinema as this was another genre they expected to provide a gratifying experience worth

spending money (Grundström, 2018). The survey asked for the name of the most recent film the respondents had seen in the cinema; the most popular titles included *The Hunger Games Mockingjay Part 2* (2015), *Spectre* (2015) and *Jurassic World* (2015). These films contain action and suspense, along with a high level of visual effects, making full use of the larger screen and surround sound. For romance, comedy, drama or romantic comedy genres, the girls would wait for a DVD or other release and watch at home. Academic writing on teen girl audiences, with fieldwork or textual analysis, has tended to focus on girls viewing teen films or genres such as 'chick flicks', which are marketed to the female audience (Gateward and Pomerance, 2002; Kaveney, 2006; Thompson, 2007; Karlyn, 2011; Driesmans, Vandenbosch and Eggermont, 2016). Assumptions regarding film genres appealing to different genders are also often made within academic research and mainstream media. For example, Kramer (1999a, p. 94) states, in a study which analyses film texts, industry statistics and print media articles, that "…women appeared to be primarily interested in characters and emotions, whereas men demanded violent action and excitement". Kramer also asserts that comedy is a preferred genre for female audiences. As McQuail (1984) notes, however, these gender differences are cultural, with girls steered towards romantic films while adventure genres are made less accessible to them from an early age. These understandings were contradicted by both the focus group and survey participants' responses, as Rose from Maple Academy explained.

ABH	You don't go that often, how often would you go Kate?
Kate	A couple of times a month, it depends what films have come out, like, I usually just go to see horrors at the cinema, or like action films because of like the big screen and surround sound, I'm not really bothered if like a like rom-com or something comes out [others: yeah] I can wait for that
Me	Mmm
Rose	I don't like wasting my money on stuff like comedies because half the time they're not funny
Group	[laughter]
Rose	I'd rather go and see something like an action film

Numerous participants preferred action rather than romantic plots. As the girls were not motivated to watch romantic films, this genre was not judged to provide enough entertainment value for cinema viewing. The absence of interest in

romantic films corresponds with the lack of importance placed on romance in their current lives and future plans as discussed in Chapter 8.

Another gap between the focus group findings and previous studies highlights assumptions regarding teens' disposable income – assumptions which, when combined with the idea of teen audiences not being as discerning as adults (Bode, 2010), paint girls as watching any film assumed to appeal to their age and gender. In fact, as the participants were limited in what they could afford to see at the cinema, they selected films that they evaluated would allow them to obtain several gratifications, including value for money, thus preferring to watch films incorporating action sequences and special effects. The cinema environment allowed for planned immersed viewing. The fact they chose to watch 'blockbuster' films in the cinema also confirms their wish to see the 'right' films to be able to discuss them. This social use of film knowledge and viewing experience is both a post-exposure utility within the NTAA and an application within the MPM, whereby films are evaluated, interpreted and then incorporated and appropriated into the girls' lives to form part of their social identity. The findings also reject the notion that all teen girls, regardless of age, watch the same films and genres. Despite judging the genres largely unworthy of cinema viewing did not mean the girls never viewed comedy and romance, only that they did not consider these films worth the time, effort and cost of a cinema visit. As discussed in Chapter 4, the consensus generated in the focus groups might have silenced girls that did go to the cinema to view 'unworthy' films or may have encouraged them to agree with what was being said. Blockbusters are released at specific times of year and, while these may have been the only films some group members were able to attend, there were several girls who went to the cinema more regularly, which indicates that they probably viewed a wider selection of genres. What can be understood, and is important, is that both the regularity of cinema-going and the content viewed by this age group have been misrepresented in academic literature relating to the teen girl audience. Life factors such as school schedules, available money, friendship groups, family socialising and rural locality all play important roles in accessibility and content viewed. Although the social elements of film viewing are sometimes important, they are not the central gratification sought from viewing films in the cinema; older teen girls have been

shown to be discerning and have specific motivations for choosing what they wish to view.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated what McQuail (1984, p. 183) explains is an

> …impossibility of artificially separating the question of audience experience from the sources of that experience in content itself. Nor can it be separated from aspects of the context in which the experience takes place—where, with whom, under what circumstances, through which channel.

U&G and the NTAA can be used to demonstrate that each part of a film viewing experience and each decision regarding seeking and obtaining, or not obtaining, specific gratifications by these older teenage girls is connected to the totality of the experience. No major differences were found between the schools. Although residing in rural locations, there was a range of cinemas available to participants. Considerations including travel distance, cost and release schedules were all a part of cinema visits; however, the participants managed to negotiate these challenges using membership cards and special offers, in order to make the cinema accessible. The girls were therefore shown to differ significantly from the image of teens attending the cinema repeatedly in large fan groups (Bode, 2010), revealing instead previously unstudied and complex decision making processes about how to spend their limited funds and attention, with fandom playing a negligible role. These decisions also included NTAA levels of selectivity, involvement and utility. A personal and variable viewing experience was created according to what extent and how each girl wished to fulfil her desired gratifications.

To make the most of their time and money, the girls used demassification (Ruggiero, 2000), narrowing down the numerous films available to those they wished to view. This process involved resources such as reviews, peer recommendations, and the viewing of online trailers. Films the girls wished to view in an immersed fashion were watched in the cinema, making the best use of the large screen (action and horror being popular genres). The cinema setting made it easier for the girls to become engrossed in what they were watching, and

they found interruptions, whether from friends, family or strangers, an annoyance. Cinema trips were often social events and it was revealed that family viewing was a regular occurrence for this age group. However, frequency and levels of engagement and enjoyment of family viewing varied. Peer groups and family groups at the cinema differed in size depending on the film. Some girls had rules as to what, where and with whom they would watch, sometimes without being able to explain why.

The importance of social interactions relating to the knowledge and viewing of films differed from that posited in previous studies of teen girls. Having seen the most recent trailers was as important as having watched particular films, as it allowed the girls to take part in discussions. There was further social status available from being part of a group who attended a specific film at the cinema, showing that social relationships can be a motivation for selecting certain films to view; having seen them, either alone or with a particular group, can form part of older teen girls' identities.

The following chapter moves the analysis from cinema viewing to home viewing of films and considers how this is impacted by a similar range of factors.

Chapter 6 Older Teen Girls' Home Film Viewing Practices

6.1 Introduction

More fieldwork-based academic research has been undertaken around girls' home viewing than cinema viewing (e.g., Walkerdine, 1990; Livingstone, 2007). However, most of the studies considered audiences younger than my participants and are dated, especially when considering the dramatic developments in home viewing technology and accessibility since the last century (Lister *et al.*, 2009; Aveyard, 2016; Cavalcante, Press and Sender, 2017). Home film viewing can differ considerably from cinema viewing for older teen girls in many ways, including different gratifications. There were primarily two locations within the home where films were watched by focus group and survey participants: the living room and the bedroom. These locations were further differentiated by whether the girls watched with others or alone, which impacted the type of films watched and levels of immersion and interaction.

The previous chapter established that, although the participants enjoyed visiting the cinema, they were limited by a variety of factors which required judgements and choices to be made. This chapter again investigates themes arising from analysis of the fieldwork, survey data and research questions to consider how girls watch films in their homes. Using the ninefold typology of audience activity (NTAA, Levy and Windahl, 1985), media practice model (MPM, Steele and Brown, 1995) and encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980) it examines where, how, why and what participants viewed and whether these choices impacted their engagement with films.

6.2 Accessing and Interacting with Films at Home

As discussed, cost, locality and release dates influenced and often limited cinema visits for participants. Home viewing, therefore, made up the more significant proportion of film viewing for girls. The wide range of material, providers, available devices and ever-increasing viewing styles make home film viewing more varied than it might at first appear. Reasons for home viewing may include

"…personal comfort, the range of film choice, spontaneity, convenience and control" (Van de Vijver, 2017, p. 136), and all these reasons were discussed by the participants. Netflix and Sky Television were the most popular providers of films for all focus group and survey respondents, corresponding to Netflix's position as the most popular streaming service in Britain (Ofcom, 2014), accessed in around 40 per cent of British households (Ofcom, 2018)[6]. Traditional television broadcasting also offered an extensive range of channels and the survey recorded 57 per cent of respondents watching films on 'free' television channels, although Ofcom (2014, 2018) reported a fall in 16 to 24-year-olds viewing broadcast television, with a 12 per cent loss in 2017. Other regular, but less frequent, viewing options included Amazon Prime and DVDs. Subscription video on demand (SVOD) services like Netflix rely on internet access and charge a monthly fee, presumably paid by the participants' parents. SVOD and free channels make films almost endlessly available with no financial cost to the girls to hinder accessibility (Van de Vijver, 2017). The British Film Institute (2018) reported that in 2017 SVOD viewers spent 24 per cent of their viewing time watching films. Between 2009 and 2017 combined, television and online SVOD markets rose from £159 million to £681 million (UK Film Council, 2010; British Film Institute, 2018).

SVOD, set-top boxes, smart televisions and replay television services allow for time- shifting of content (Lee and Andrejevic, 2014). Audiences no longer have to watch films when they are broadcast and can easily download something to view when they have time; they can also record and pause viewing. Ofcom (2014) reported that 14 per cent of the material viewed by the 16 to 24-year-old age group was time-shifted. New services and an increased volume of film and television media have been accompanied by technological advances in playback devices (Livingstone, 2007; Phalen and Ducey, 2012; Sundar and Limperos, 2013; Elias and Gill, 2018). Participants used a range of viewing devices at home, including laptops, tablets, mobile phones and televisions (with connections to Xbox or Wi-Fi). The location and ownership – shared with family or belonging to the girls themselves – of devices and the availability of internet or other

[6] Figures used are contemporary to the date of the fieldwork.

connections influenced where films could be viewed, depending on the service used and the type of experience desired. Of the survey respondents, 90 per cent had a way to watch films in their bedrooms, a laptop or computer being the most common. Focus groups reflected similar availability and variety, corroborating the view of bedrooms becoming more media-centred in the late twentieth century (Chambers, 2016). The availability of devices and services shows that viewing for adolescents "…has become individualized to a point where a considerable part of their TV diet does not have to be negotiated with other household members." (Schrøder *et al.*, 2003, p. 10) These advancements set the participants' viewing apart from that of earlier generations and has required them to learn and employ new skills to facilitate and satisfy their screen media viewing, as discussed later in this chapter.

Planned viewing has usually been found to take place on larger screens (Phalen and Ducey, 2012), suggesting that films watched on smaller screens by the participants may have been spontaneous distracted viewing, as opposed to immersive planned viewing. Access and opportunity to view on small screens in the bedroom also allows for viewing that might evade monitoring by parents. Screen size differences may help explain why focus groups said that their concentration was better at the cinema than at home, with larger screens believed to lead to higher engagement (Rigby *et al.*, 2016). Desired levels of engagement by the girls related to the interaction and fulfilment they hoped for and the amount of attention they wished, or were able, to devote to viewing (Steele and Brown, 1995) and their reason for it. The decision to view something without intending to give it full attention shows that their NTAA selectivity before exposure incorporated knowledge and judgements regarding the engagement that particular films might demand or inspire. It also shows that gratifications sought and obtained do not always rely upon or relate to level of immersion. Different locations impacted engagement and the girls' ability to pay attention, as described by a group from Maple Academy who were asked if they specifically chose films to watch depending on the level of attention required.

Sarah	…I can't pay attention if I'm like watching a film at home I'm much worse at paying attention than if I'm in the cinema
Jenny	You can never pay attention

Group	Yeah [laughter]
Sarah	Because I'm on my phone or I get distracted so, um, yeah

While preferring not to be distracted in the cinema, many of the focus group participants actively chose distracted viewing at home, using mobile phones. Specific levels of immersion were chosen depending where in the home they viewed; with whom they viewed; what was viewed; and when they viewed it. The terms 'connected' viewing and 'co-connected' viewing describe audience members who use a mobile phone or other device while viewing as a second screen to connect with those not physically present (Pittman and Tefertiller, 2015). Even when alone the girls could be in constant touch with others, through texting, chatting, messaging, emailing, social media use and – to a lesser extent – phone calls. Ofcom (2018) data from 16-55+-year-olds reported this type of distracted viewing as more common with younger viewers and found the 18 to 24-year-old age group was the least likely to find use of a mobile device during home viewing unacceptable. Livingstone (2005a) notes that young people use media to take part in peer culture. The potential for connection with friends via various applications and services allows adolescents to choose how best to augment their friendships while apart. Although there is a demand to remain connected constantly to keep up to date – both personally with friends and culturally with news and entertainment information –there are also many opportunities for young people to develop their identities through new media (Brown and Bobkowski, 2011). Online communication may strengthen social networks as youth remain 'in the loop' and part of their network even when not physically together (Lincoln, 2012). This can be particularly important for teenagers, such as the girls in this study, who are separated physically by living in rural locations. This use of social media while viewing at home is a way of commuting solo viewing into social viewing, or being "alone together" (Chambers, 2016, p. 121). Second screening activity was almost universally undertaken by participants when watching at home, the only exceptions being when viewing with friends (or boyfriends) or during planned immersed viewing. Lack of focus is not limited to teen girls, however; adult participants in Grundström's (2018) research discuss a variety of devices and regular distractions from what they viewed within the household. For the participants of Grundström's study, viewing a film in the cinema, similarly to the girls in this research, was a way to ensure immersion as their NTAA

selectivity before exposure would gauge the level of gratification expected from a film and inform the decision of where to view it.

Co-viewing and discussion of content via social media are encouraged by media producers and social media through the use of hashtags (a digital method of categorising content) for films, enabling audiences to post and follow discussions during or after viewing (Doughty, Rowland and Lawson, 2012). Films and characters regularly have social media accounts and hashtags created by production companies or film studios on various platforms. Actors and actresses may also have social media accounts posting information regarding their roles, with some also posting personal content about their daily lives. Viewers can participate in connected viewing with friends or strangers interested in the same content. These interactions and connections between online and film media reflect that the experience of modern audiences "…is becoming increasingly multi-dimensional and multiply interactive." (Schrøder *et al.*, 2003) boyd (2010) categorises these interactions as networked publics, whereby social networks create environments within which people interact, shaping their engagement and linking users through shared connections. Networks are further maintained through online conversations; replicating information through re-posting; and sending messages to or at (@) other users.

This new type of communication around film-viewing enables the girls to enact NTAA selectivity, involvement and utility as they learn about, discuss, form and revise opinions about past and future viewing. They gain both social and cultural knowledge and status, and maintain participation within social groups, by publicly displaying that they are viewing particular material (Matrix, 2014). This is particularly significant for girls in rural locations who are not able to easily access joint viewing opportunities. The variety of devices now commonly available allows flexibility, multiple viewing opportunities and ways to view; along with second-screening, this can enrich viewing time shared within the home while simultaneously extending it beyond (Chambers, 2019). As Lomborg and Mortensen (2017) explain, this constant connectedness and ability to use devices for more than one purpose also combines and links forms of media, meaning that 'doing something' on a mobile phone can be a performance of social roles. An

ability to orchestrate the avilable media and to know what to do with it (take action, share, view) is necessary.

Facebook and Instagram were regularly mentioned in focus groups, and presumably these were some applications being used while watching films. This complex and synchronised usage corresponds to Ofcom's (2014) statistic that 75 per cent of 16 to 24-year-olds access social media and that usage of these sites and applications on mobile phones is on the rise[7]. Growth has continued since the fieldwork was undertaken, with 62 per cent of online activities now taking place on a smartphone and 72 per cent of 16 to 34-year-olds naming their smartphone as an essential device (Ofcom, 2018). Although Ofcom (2014) did not provide statistics for Instagram use in their 2014 report, this platform was favoured by the girls. However, in their 2018 report, Ofcom showed Instagram to be used by 51 per cent of the British population, alongside a decrease in the number of 16 to 24-year-olds using Facebook. YouTube maintained its position as one of the most popular sites accessed in Britain (Ofcom, 2014, 2018). The lack of verbal emphasis on specific platforms indicates the normality of social media use for these girls, the assumption being that everyone knew what being 'on my phone' meant. However, it is also possible that they considered online activity to be private so did not share details (Paule, 2017). Research indicates that girls' connected viewing through mediated spaces can duplicate the experience of co-viewing in the same physical space (Cohen and Lancaster, 2014). For example, one participant sent text messages to her friend while viewing a film, asking questions concerning the plot. Social networking can "…extend and amplify school-based relationships…" (Ringrose, 2010, p. 170), suggesting that the girls were able to stay in contact and up to date on what they and their friends were doing and watching. Although often physically watching films alone in their rooms, the girls were in no way cut off from others or from media information.

[7] Again, these are contemporary statistics to reflect the participants' experience.

6.3 Where Older Teen Girls Watch Films at Home and With Whom They Watch

Most focus group participants undertook at least some of their film viewing at home in the living room, with siblings sharing the most screen time. Watching in a communal space occurred for a variety of reasons; SVOD only being accessible there; availability of equipment during certain times (for example after school), shared taste in films; or a social family event. Getting a clear understanding of with whom girls viewed, however, was not always straightforward. An example of family viewing habits was drawn out during this Willow Academy interaction.

ABH	Do you watch on your own or do you watch with your family?
Laura	Generally on my own, because people are busy
Group	[laughter]
Laura	But um, no, if someone is, if I watch them the most in the house, it would be my brother would watch them with us
ABH	Yeah and do you watch, do you have any way of watching them in your room or do you watch them in the living room?
Laura	Um I've got a telly in my room, but it doesn't work
Group	[laughter]
ABH	You don't watch them on a laptop or anything like that?
Laura	Yeah, if I watch things on the laptop it's either a programme but if, erm, I watch films on the laptop if I've not got downstairs available, like the big telly

Laura shifted from saying that she views alone because her family were busy to say that she did watch with them. Although it did not seem as if the group members were laughing at her, but rather because they found her answer amusing, she felt the need to clarify that her family were not busy all the time and that there were other devices available. Family viewing can encourage a feeling of connectedness (Jancovich, 2011) but it does not occur as regularly or easily as has been portrayed (Chambers, 2016), usually requiring advance organisation (Jones, 2013). The broken television in Laura's bedroom could indicate a lack of funds or that Laura was not concerned about that screen, preferring to watch elsewhere or on a different device. Laura's inclination was to view films on the 'big telly', using an available laptop if the television was not accessible to her, presumably

because another family member was using it to view something she was not interested in watching. Laura seemed to favour watching films on the largest screen available, suggesting that she intended to have a planned and immersive viewing experience. However, whether she hoped to view alone is not entirely clear.

This revision of answers regarding family viewing also occurred in a Maple Academy group. Once Maggie shared that she watched with her sibling, other girls began to do the same.

ABH	Do you watch with your families as well?
Jenny	I tend to just watch them by myself
Caitlin	Yeah yeah, by myself
Sarah	Tend to watch them by myself
ABH	In your room?
Group	Yeah
Maggie	With my brother, I watch quite a bit, yes
Jenny	Yes, yeah, with my brother
Caitlin	With my sister

In comparison, Emma and Andrea from Maple Academy replied openly when asked where and with whom they viewed.

ABH	Do you watch with your families, or do you watch in your rooms?
Andrea	I watch it with my family normally
Emma	I watch it with my family if it's at home
ABH	You don't watch anything alone in your room on a laptop or an iPad or?
Emma	No, not really

Karen from Willow Academy, did not have a television in her bedroom and although she had access to a laptop, preferred to view in the family room, often with her twin sister. Alison, also from Willow Academy, went to the cinema very regularly with her family and they also watched together at home, as she explained:

> …we don't usually watch them that often at home unless it's something that we didn't get a chance to see it in cinemas… but if we do watch them then it's usually we kind of sit as a family and we sort of like make a night of it. Like on Friday or Saturday night we might try to make a night and then we all sit as a family and kind of

> watch the films. But yeah, we usually like watch one and that's kind of it, like later on at night, it's like straight after the film everyone's like right I'm going to bed.

For Alison's family, film was an event used to spend time together inside and outside the home (Chambers, 2016; Grundström, 2018) and Alison happily participated.

For some of the girls, planned family viewing appeared to be less favoured and was often tempered by second screen use of a mobile phone, as explained by Maple Academy girls Rose and Sally:

ABH	…so, how do you watch films, do you watch them in your rooms on iPads or computers, do you have tellies in your rooms or?
Sally	If I'm watching downstairs I'll be on my phone sometimes but if I'm upstairs I'll just watch the film
ABH	Why is that? Why do you watch, pay attention, in one place and be distracted in another place do you think?
Sally	Because usually the living room is like the family room, and it'll have, like, everyone will have it on so it's not really something that I really want to watch
Rose	And usually if it's in the living room I've seen it about 25 times beforehand so…
ABH	You don't have to pay attention
Rose	Yeah

Lack of control over channel selection is not unusual for girls within their families. Television audience research has shown fathers (or other male family members) tend to be the primary operator of the remote control (Morley, 1986; Walkerdine, 1990; Gauntlett and Hill, 1999; Livingstone and Das, 2010). Despite not wanting to view what was on the television and despite using their mobile phones, the girls still described their presence in the living room where the television was on as 'watching', choosing to remain in the room. Home viewing is understood to be a distracted viewing activity (Morley, 1986; Aveyard, 2016; Jenner, 2016), particularly as "...selectivity is lower in group viewing of television than when an individual watches alone." (Levy and Windahl, 1985, p. 120) However, while not giving their full attention to the screen, the girls' choice to spend time in the same room with their family shows that these types of family gatherings are primarily about being together rather than watching something (Livingstone, 2007; Jancovich, 2011; Chambers, 2016, 2019). As such, this

sociable activity can be understood as a family bonding experience (Livingstone and Das, 2010). The gratification sought was not solely entertainment, but the social experience of sharing space with their family members, the television giving them reason to gather. These family viewing practices are not unusual. Ofcom (2017) stated that while 45 per cent of people watched television or film alone every day, 30 per cent also still collectively watched the same material with members as their household. The Ofcom findings, along with the data gathered in this study, contradict earlier research suggesting that teenage girls prefer to watch alone. However, although the girls willingly spent time viewing with their family members, such distracted viewing experiences were not always described as enjoyable.

Having to share physical space with others while viewing was one reason the girls were unhappy watching in family spaces. Many found family members talking or interrupting viewing irritating since it prevented immersed viewing, echoing the discussion of audience disruptions in the cinema. As Livingstone (2007, p. 5) states, "'[f]amily television' encapsulates a site of both conviviality and power plays, in which the family share interests, pleasures and conflicts". Interruptions were a source of irritation and watching alone allowed space from family life (Larson, 1995; Livingstone, 2007). Livingstone (2005b) further evaluates youth media use as a way to create distance from families and move closer to peers. However, although there were irritations associated with family viewing, the participants did not appear to want to avoid their families by always viewing in their bedrooms. The form and content of a viewing experience were, however, dictated by whether it was shared, with whom, and where it occurred. As shown, it was entirely possible to view film in an immersed fashion with a family group, but lack of immersion did not prevent the event from being 'family time' or providing a form of enjoyment.

Rules the girls set for what they would watch with their families could be quite convoluted, as with the cinema.

ABH	You don't ever watch films with your family?
Jessica	I do, I watch them with my dad
	…

Jessica	Me and my dad have the same sense of humour so we kind of laugh at everyone
ABH	So do you watch different films with your dad than you watch on your own or the same kind of films?
Jessica	In a way I watch different films with my dad than I would with my Mum, and I watch different films by myself than I would with my dad…It's kind of, like a, it's confusing

Whether Jessica or her parents dictated what they viewed together was unclear. However, watching films with her father seems to be an experience which reinforces the bond through their similar sense of humour. There is a NTAA utility at least before and during exposure as they chose what to watch and share the enjoyment of the viewing and obtain enjoyment from it. Films Jessica selects to watch on her own do not need to give these utilities and films watched with her mother are chosen to fulfil a different gratification and socialising goal, which displays a variety of influences and knowledges within her selectivity before exposure. From a MPM perspective, Jessica's identity as daughter, and those child-parent relationships, are part of the motivations that guide her film selection and interaction. These kinds of decisions show a far greater interaction with films than have been previously attributed to teen girls' viewing decisions. A further example is seen in Donna (Willow Academy), who engaged in family viewing only for particular genres.

ABH	And do you ever watch with your families, or do you just watch on your own all the time or with friends or?
Donna	Um, I do watch it with the family sometimes if it's like a like a like a *James Bond* type thing downstairs
ABH	But not very often?
Donna	No, no
ABH	[to Michelle] And you don't watch at all with your family?
Michelle	Not really

For Donna and her family, viewing together appeared to be only for a single genre of film, which subsequently limited how often it occurred. Donna's irregular family viewing and Michelle's lack of family viewing show that family viewing can be restricted to particular content, specific people, certain times or not occur at all. Ofcom (2017) data collaborates these restrictions, stating that 70 per cent of families sit together watching the same film or programme once a week. 85 per cent of teens taking part in this Ofcom survey agreed that watching collectively

brought the family together. While trips to the cinema with just their mothers occurred regularly for some girls, home viewing with mothers did not appear to occur as regularly (or was not mentioned). Although many of the girls complained about not liking what was watched by the family, or about being interrupted, they still participated. These explanations of family viewing often took some drawing out within the focus groups. This was perhaps due to embarrassment which dissipated once other group members volunteered information of their family viewing experiences. This could suggest that the girls felt that family viewing was 'uncool' and might lead others to think badly of them. Alternatively, it might suggest that they were renegotiating the regularity and personal guidelines for the type of family viewing they were willing to undertake, exemplified by Jessica's 'confusing' rules.

Although Steele (2001) contends that watching films is a social activity for teens, rarely undertaken alone in their bedrooms, this was the most common film viewing experience of my participants. The majority of the girls had access to a laptop, television, tablet or mobile phone on which to watch in privacy. 90 per cent of the survey respondents watched films in their bedrooms. Screen size influences and impacts viewing styles and immersion levels (Rigby *et al.*, 2016) and it has been suggested that if girls plan their viewing in advance a larger screen will usually be chosen (Phalen and Ducey, 2012). However, while perhaps true for cinema viewing, where the girls decided what was 'worth' seeing on the big screen, viewing within the home was determined more by location and screen availability. Having 'something on' occurred more often than listening to music for the majority of focus group participants, and they spoke of either films or television programmes playing in their rooms almost constantly. Their bedrooms gave these girls total control over what and when they watched, providing privacy to enjoy favourite films or genres; undertake repeat viewing; 'cosy up' with planned viewing; or providing background noise while undertaking homework. These decisions, or NTAA modes of selectivity impacted interaction, involvement and utility. Audience engagement is usually measured through the length of time spent viewing and responding to media and seeking out information on, or communicating about, media (Phalen and Ducey, 2012). Engagement has been directly linked to media effects, particularly those deemed to be harmful such as negative effects on body image (Jackson, 2016). However, participants screening

a film in the bedroom were not necessarily engaged in the sense of ‘immersion’, echoing the co-viewing experience in shared spaces. Information seeking and discussion of films in real-time, known as meshing (Phalen and Ducey, 2012; Chambers, 2019), occurred while viewing the film, thereby leading to a distracted form of screen engagement. These viewing practices do not determine how engaged the girls were but can reveal how their viewing choices reflected engagement levels.

In this extended excerpt from a Willow Academy group, the girls discussed how a screen in their bedroom impacted mood and behaviour.

ABH	And you always have something on in your rooms while you’re working
Group	[speaking over] Yeah, most of the time, no
Rae	Between that and I usually have Spotify on if I don’t have Netflix on
Ellie	Yeah, I dunno
Rae	I always have, like, some sort of, like, I can’t sit in my room and work with no background
Group	No
Ellie	It feels empty, I don’t like it
Rae	Yeah and I can’t focus because I get distracted easier when there’s things to, like, different things, like if I know that the TV’s on I know that I can turn around and see it whereas if the TV isn’t on I find something else to do that might take, like, longer and mean that…
Ellie	I procrastinate more
	…
Ellie	No, I have to have, like, the TV on so I can, like, I’m either concentrated on my work or the TV, otherwise I just sit and stare into space and don’t do anything
ABH	I just stop and watch the TV…
Group	[laughter]
Ellie	It depends how loud it is though
Rae	It also depends on my focus, mood as well, like
Group	Yeah
Rae	If I get really focused. And it depends how good the film is
Group	Yeah
ABH	So in general when you have a film on you’re doing something else at the same time?
Rae	Unless I’m specifically sitting down to watch a film
ABH	How often do you specifically watch?
Ellie	I don’t really
Nora	Not very much

Rae	Sundays. Mine’s usually every Saturday or Sunday
Group	Yeah
Ellie	Friday or Saturday night or Sunday afternoon
Lizzie	See mine is after school, I get bored after school from like five ‘til seven I just get really bored, I don’t know why
ABH	So you do your homework later than that?
Lizzie	Which is probably not a good thing but
ABH	Well you need a break between learning and learning more about it
Lizzie	Exactly
Rae	I sometimes wish I had, like, the motivation to get in from school and just, like, carry on with like my, like, focus mode and like just bang out my homework there and then and then I’d have so much more time later, but you get in from school and you just wanna have, like, at least like an hour and a half to
Ellie	You’re so tired
Rae	Just like relax and unwind but then by the time it gets to that the end of the hour and a half you can’t be bothered to do anything afterwards
Lizzie	Yeah so then you don’t actually do anything
Rae	You don’t actually do anything you just, like, I get like really annoyed at myself because I’m like I wish I just came in and did that 20-minute task that’s now taking me
Ellie	An hour because I’ve got a TV on
Rae	An hour

In these interactions, film or television was used by the girls in both restorative and diversionary ways. A restorative experience can provide a way of moving away from their usual world into one that is different (Pittman and Sheehan, 2015). The motivation for this may be an attempt to be “…removed either physically or psychologically from their obligations and daily life. The environment must be accessible but provide the opportunity to engage in thoughts and activities distinct from the every day.” (ibid., p. 15) Thus the entertainment that the girls choose for this particular time of day is hoped to provide a way of “…diverting themselves from personal concerns with passive, distracting, undemanding entertainment.” (Arnett, 1995, p. 522) However, if the entertainment is successful, it can move the girls too far away from their obligations and goals. Some participants found that although their actual viewing, rather than just noise provision, might begin as a break for a designated period, it often exceeded the intended time limit. Rae, Lizzie and Ellie seem almost disappointed in themselves for not being able to stop watching when planned.

This lack of self-discipline fails the neoliberal emphasis of determination and hard work necessary to complete projects and create a successful life (Rottenberg, 2018). Thus, even though the girls obtained the gratifications they sought, it was not as rewarding as they envisaged or hoped.

The girls described how screens in their bedrooms were used to alleviate boredom; provide breaks as they moved from school to home; aid focus and yet also procrastination; provide company; and prevent the loneliness which can be associated with doing homework (Seal-Wanner, 2007). It could be suggested that as the girls spent their days in a busy large school surrounded by friends and other students, being alone in their bedrooms without distractions led to feelings of loneliness. To mitigate this, they used film (and television) to supply the background noise to which they were accustomed. The lack of mobility and socialising options available within their rural localities may also have contributed to feelings of loneliness. A greater reliance on the media has been theorised to occur and become ritualised when mobility and loneliness are factors (Rubin, 2009). From the MPM perspective, these elements of girls' lived experience provide motivation for the screen media selected and also influence the level of attention and interaction that they plan and give to what they have chosen to view. The expectation is that viewing specific media in a particular manner will allow them to obtain the gratifications sought, whether this is alone, taking part in co-connected viewing, or through family viewing where communality is more important than film choice.

This fluid use of television in combination with schoolwork is not unusual for teens (Gauntlett and Hill, 1999; Seal-Wanner, 2007). Having the television on 'behind them' while doing schoolwork reflects Lincoln's (2004, 2012) zones theory, in that different areas of the bedroom are utilised for particular activities (see also Livingstone, 2007). Here, the bedrooms had separate study and entertainment zones, arranged so that while working the girls' backs were towards the screen. The screen was also visible from the bed, as confirmed in earlier comments, combining sleeping and entertainment zones. Even though they understood that film viewing could lead to extended periods of procrastination, it did not stop the girls from watching during planned breaks or from having it in the background. Willow Academy girls also saw viewing films (or television) as a

reward or break from homework rather than a waste of their time. Rewarding themselves speaks again to NTAA selectivity and involvement before exposure whereby the girls decide when to watch and what type of gratification they want (for example distraction or entertainment) and look forward to and become involved with the experience before it happens. It is also a part of planning for self-projects where breaks or rewards are taken to ‘relax and unwind’ between tasks requiring ‘focus mode’. These planned breaks can also be seen as self-care, which has become another neoliberal requirement with planning and maintenance as a counter-balance to self-improvement (see Budgeon, 2011b; Favaro, 2017; Riley *et al.*, 2019).

The planning of film viewing described in the excerpt from Willow Academy also includes planned distracted viewing, periods of viewing where the girls knew in advance that they would not be paying full attention. There were times within the bedroom where planned, focused viewing occurred and they chose something with the intention of watching as the sole activity for immersed viewing and entertainment. These viewing practice fluctuations correspond with differing social interactions, with immersion occurring during periods where they did not, and did not intend to, speak or interact with others. For Lizzie, focused viewing happened right after school as a planned break, whereas for Rae and Ellie, planned immersion took place on weekends or Friday nights. Viewing of films may, therefore, be seen as part of the girls’ daily routines (Jancovich, 2011), pre-planned to allow time for viewing to be undertaken. Working around constraints such as homework and screen availability shows both selectivity and involvement before exposure in the NTAA. Participants used weekends for planned immersed viewing, as the 18-year-old group from Maple Academy explained:

ABH	So how do you watch films? Do you watch, you like watching things you don’t have to pay attention to, is that generally how you view?
Sarah	Depends
Caitlin	Um, no, I think it depends, I like history films, so I like them, but I can’t watch it if I, like, come home from school
Maggie	Over-tired
Sarah	Yeah, I think
Caitlin	Like after school I just watch something to watch
Sarah	Like this, yeah
Caitlin	I watch stuff that’s easy to watch

Group	Yeah
Caitlin	Like at the weekends and in the holidays I, like, like watching new stuff

These responses support Lin's (1993, p. 46) finding that "…intentional media use is purposive and planned, while less intentional or diffusive use is more passive and habitual." It also, again, shows immersive viewing as a planned break. The type of film selected for periods where immersion is not desired or possible reflects the wish not to have to overthink. Avoiding immersion was an attempt to evade being unable to return or get on with other tasks.

Having a film or television programme on for background noise while working, although popular, was not universal. A Willow Academy group explain:

Violet	Like I can't do my homework in the sitting room because I'm busy watching what my Mam and Dad are watching on the telly
ABH	You see quite a few people that I've interviewed have said that they have it on in the background while they're doing their homework
Carol	No
Joanna	Not when I'm
Samantha	No
ABH	No? None of you?
Samantha	I'll just put music on if I do that
ABH	Yeah, I stop
Carol	I'll put something on like the *Big Bang Theory* or something that I'm not like totally interested in just so I have like something in the background
Violet	Noise
Samantha	But I can put like music on, but I couldn't like put something on that you have to watch
Carol	I would put something like the *Big Bang Theory* on, so you don't feel alone
Group	[laughter]

Again, the use of media to avoid loneliness was expressed. The laughter of the other participants in this group confirms the understanding that "[m]edia use is itself a ubiquitous form of normal social behaviour and an acceptable substitute for actual social interaction." (McQuail, 1997, p. 98) These girls understood and accepted that they all had noise in the background, whether from music or screen media, to fill the space, but their differing levels of concentration influenced their choices.

However, the following excerpt, which occurred later in the same focus group when they were more open and relaxed, contradicts earlier claims.

ABH	...so how often are you watching stuff in your rooms then?
Samantha	Like always
Carol	All the time
Violet	All the time
ABH	All the time?
Joanna	All the time
ABH	All the time, every day?
Group	Mmmhhhmmm, yeah
Carol	It's always on in the background
Samantha	Like, get in from school
Carol	Are you talking about TV serieses (sic)?
ABH	Sorry?
Carol	Are you counting like TV series?
ABH	Mainly films but
Carol	Um 'cause TV series are always on [all talking over]
ABH	There's a TV series always on, how often would you watch a film then?
Violet	I watch, like, I watched one last night when I go to bed
Carol	Last night
Group	Yeah
Violet	'Cause I fall asleep with them on
	Mmm
Violet	Because I just go to sleep easier, so I'll just put like a funny film on or something and just go to bed
Samantha	Yeah once a night or once every other night
Group	Yeah

It seems then that the girls might have had films or television programmes almost always playing in their bedrooms except when undertaking homework. Ofcom (2019) found that 63 per cent of children aged 12 to 15-years-old felt that they maintained the right balance between media use and other activities, although 27 per cent also said they found it difficult to control screen time. Although concern has been expressed regarding the amount of time teens might spend viewing media in their bedrooms, and the parental monitoring that might constrain this (Chambers, 2019), it is interesting that not a single participant spoke of their parents endeavouring to limit, or commenting on, what they viewed or how long they viewed for. Parental monitoring and limiting of media usage might have been occurring, or have occurred at a younger age, but was not discussed. This may suggest that rules had been established and boundaries for media use were less contested at their age. However, all consternation regarding the distraction of

viewing from homework was self-directed. This shows an awareness that media interference could prevent the girls from working to their full ability, as well as a desire to reach their goals which they recognised as requiring time and effort.

The Willow Academy girls in the last three excerpts reflect this self-monitoring, as, to a slightly lesser extent, do the girls at Maple Academy, who spoke of struggling to limit time spent viewing media while completing their homework. Although gratifications were looked for in numerous ways from films and other media, these were monitored to prevent them interfering with other ambitions. This can also be viewed as the early stages of girls being expected to maintain a neoliberal work-life balance as a personal responsibility (Sørensen, 2017) in preparation for future employment and family responsibility. Further discussion of the girls' expectations for this work-life balance are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

6.4 Deciding Which Films to View at Home

Films are easily accessible for older teen girls, with minimal effort required to locate them on multiple media platforms. SVOD and streaming services mean that viewers are no longer tied to television schedules and can time-shift viewing, choosing from almost unlimited offerings whenever and wherever they wish to watch. In selecting what to watch at home, the girls used demassification (Ruggiero, 2000) from information sources, including publicity stills, blurbs, reviews and ratings, to judge whether films would provide the gratifications they were seeking.

Some of the girls stated that they would not 'click on' any film that did not have publicity stills that attracted their attention. In the following discussion, Rae and Ellie from Willow Academy show how important these images are in their decision-making process.

ABH	So do you watch films for entertainment then or do you try to watch them for more than that?
Ellie	For entertainment I guess just, so, I dunno, but you've got to be interested
Nora	Yeah
Ellie	In like what you watch

Rae	Like I wouldn't click on a film if it's not something that I'd usually watch
Ellie	Yeah but it all depends really on like the appearance of it as well, like whether
Rae	Like what the cover looks like
Ellie	What the cover [publicity still] looks like
Rae	'Cause if the cover doesn't look very good I just skip past it
Ellie	Yeah, I don't even read it
ABH	And what, would it be the person who's in it or?
Rae	I don't really look at that 'cause I don't really know anybody, I just. If it doesn't look very good I'll not, I'll just skip past it and then if it looks quite good then I'll read the little thing like on Netflix it has the little thing
Group	Yeah

Rae's searching for items like those she had already viewed reflects the premise of the Netflix algorithm which recommends content to users and promotes titles for commercial reasons. The algorithm takes into account not only what the viewer has previously watched, but also when they watched it, and what other viewers who watched the same things went on to view (Alexander, 2016).

As Valkenburg, Peter and Walther (2016, p. 332) observe, "[n]ot only may our media use be more selective, another trend is that the media messages we receive are increasingly more selected for us." Algorithms placed items selected for the girls onto the home page, making it easier for them to find films like those they had already viewed. Although understanding the influence of ratings and publicity stills provided by SVOD companies on their choices, none of the participants spoke of being aware that they were being guided toward certain content. However, the strict rules that many of the girls had for determining what was worth viewing suggests that these personal guidelines were more of a factor in demassification than algorithms. They relied on personal views and demassification techniques in their NTAA selectivity before exposure to predict that films would provide the levels and types of immersion and gratifications they were seeking.

As with cinema viewing, reviews and ratings also influenced home viewing choices, with ratings being a deciding factor for SVOD content alongside the blurb and publicity still. Some girls would not watch a film that received below a particular rating, as discussed by Willow Academy participants who used ratings

to keep up to date with what was popular and to plan their viewing. Another Willow Academy group showed an understanding of the variances of rating systems when they discussed how their selections were influenced. This displays media literacy in judging the reputation of the sources they looked at and how that information tallied with their personal viewing expectations and tastes.

Samantha	If it's under 5 on IMDb I probably won't watch it
Joanna	Yeah, I always look at like
Samantha	5 stars
Joanna	Like on Sky just started putting star ratings on the films and if it's like, below like
Samantha	Two
Joanna	Two and a half because Sky's really harsh
Samantha	The same with Netflix it's really harsh

Other participants stated that they preferred to make up their own minds and thus did not look at ratings or were not influenced by them. There were similar distinctions over film reviews, with some girls relying on them to learn about upcoming films and others having no interest in reviewers' opinions. This kind of external influence may sometimes relate to fear of missing out (FOMO) (Matrix, 2014; Gill, 2016), with girls wanting to know what others are watching and enjoying so they can keep up to date. As with cinema viewing, having watched the appropriate, new or most popular films and being able to discuss them helps girls to fit in socially, and influences utility in film viewing whereby the social side of film viewing occurs prior to and after viewing. Peers and siblings also influenced decisions of what to view, providing further motivation for watching particular films. The survey confirmed this influence with 63 per cent of participants saying that they chose films through friend recommendations. An example of this was viewing films in person as a group to prepare for the next instalment of a series which they planned to view in the cinema. For instance, a Maple Academy group watched the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003) together to prepare for the start of *The Hobbit* trilogy (2012, 2013, 2014). Maggie from this group was not a fan of the films but watched with her friendship group anyway to share the experience.

Friends also gave advice about specific films. Sarah from Maple Academy referenced the re-make of the horror film *Carrie* (2013) and, when asked for

further information by another group member, said: “It’s a rubbish film, don’t do it to yourself!” Similarly, Willow Academy girls jokingly offered advice to their group:

Laura	I’ve never seen *Twilight*
Group	[laughter]
Karen	You don’t wanna
Alison	It’s not worth watching
Group	[laughter]

Emma from Maple Academy said that she had not seen *Magic Mike* (2012) – a film about a troupe of male strippers – in this short discussion:

Andrea	*Magic Mike*
ABH	What? Sorry, *Magic Mike*?
Andrea	Yeah I’ve seen that one
ABH	Both of them or just the first one?
Andrea	I’ve seen both of them
ABH	You’ve seen both of them, I haven’t seen the second one yet
Emma	I haven’t seen any
Andrea	That’s good, you shouldn’t watch it

Andrea did not explain why Emma should not watch the film or its sequel (*Magic Mike XXL*, 2015) and Emma did not question her. Willow Academy girls offered positive reviews of the film *Heathers* (1988) – a black comedy revolving around a trio of girls named Heather – telling another group member who had not seen the film that she should watch it.

Participant	What is she called, she’s like “I’m not a Heather I’m a…”?
ABH	Veronica
Participant	A Veronica
Participant	Veronica, yeah
Participant	“God damn Veronica” [quoting film]
ABH	“There’s a new sheriff in town” [quoting film], it was one of my favourites
Participant	Love it
Participant	She pulls Heather number three’s scrunchie out
Participant	I wanna watch it now
Participant	You should watch it, it’s good
Participant	Yeah, it’s really good

A more involved example of peer influence was seen in a group from Maple Academy who, during a discussion of the film *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), showed

clearly the various ways in which peer influence works. This excerpt also provides further confirmation that discussions of films were influential and, as with the other excerpts regarding girls advising each other what to watch, displays the interpersonal nature of utility before and after exposure. Recommendations of this sort may also provide reassurance that specific gratifications will be fulfilled through viewing films that peers obtained similar gratification from.

Ellie	I didn't really come away from that feeling anything, I just
Lizzie	No, me neither
ABH	It was a bit lacking
Ellie	I think that it was a film that you need to watch but you wouldn't watch out of choice if you had the choice between two
Rae	Like on in the background
Ellie	You just watch it to say that you've watched it
Group	Yeah
Rae	I think I've looked at the thing on Netflix and I just scroll past it
Group	No, yeah
Ellie	I only watched it because my friend told me that I should watch
Rae	It only had like one star, I might watch it now
Group	[laughter]
Ellie	I don't think I would have picked to watch it if I'd read like a synopsis of it
ABH	Did she like it, your friend?
Ellie	Um, yeah, it was its one of her favourites, but I think it's just because it's got Angelina Jolie in it

Ellie began by saying that it is a film 'you need to watch', likely as it concerns issues of teen girl mental health and stars several well-known actresses. However, being able to say she had seen it was another motivation for her choice to view it. The film had not appealed to Rae when she saw its star rating, reviews and blurb, but despite this she stated that she might watch it, perhaps as she heard that she 'should'. The recommendation from Ellie's friend did not come from an admiration for the plot, however, but her fandom for a starring actress. Therefore, Ellie watched a film she did not find appealing because of her friend's fandom, which then influenced Rae to wish to view it too.

Valkenburg, Peter and Walther (2016, p. 322) agree that "[s]ocial influences can also occur more covertly, through an individual's perception of the prevailing norms in the groups to which they belong (e.g., family, peer clique, subcultures)"

and that "[t]his more subtle influence has received relatively little attention in the literature." This new information regarding peer influence on film viewing for older teen girls begins to fill this gap and unpick how influential this may be on what they view. As different films were discussed at each school, it is not possible to ascertain whether these opinions were shared. However, peer influence, and FOMO, can be seen to influence what the girls viewed, even with the advance knowledge the film in question was considered low quality. This also reflects that films can provide NTAA utility at all levels even if they are not entertaining. The gratification fulfilled by this kind of viewing is social, enabling girls to join in conversations about the film and maintain their social status through viewing appropriate films.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided new data from under-studied 16 to 18-year-old girls offering new insights into how they interact with films within the home. Participant attention to home viewing varied from full immersion to complete distraction, with frequent use of a second screen, whether viewing alone or with others. Home viewing supplied a range of gratifications and was enmeshed within these older teen girls' lived experience. There was no single way girls viewed films within the home. Often film selection was based on the level of attention the participants planned to give and the time of viewing. Many girls would have a screen on in their bedroom entertainment zone while they focused on homework in their study zone (Lincoln, 2012, 2016). However, despite planning for a specified length of viewing, this often proved to be a distraction, and intentions to use it for a self-care break from homework resulted instead in procrastination and self-recrimination. Film viewing in the bedroom was also used for intentional procrastination; relaxation; background noise hoped to prevent loneliness; planned immersed entertainment; and aiding sleep.

Home viewing was affected by a range of limiting factors including access to viewing equipment and services; family; and reasons for viewing. Peer viewing at home did not occur very often, due to rural living locations and lack of public transportation. However, for special viewings, girls did manage to get together. Second screening enabled connected and co-connected viewing, which allowed

the girls to engage in conversation without needing to be in the same space, thereby viewing alone together (Chambers, 2016). Further information could be gathered about films through networked publics (boyd, 2010) created and facilitated by social media. This social media co-viewing need not always occur with friends, and it has been suggested that some users may enjoy this type of interaction "... because it gives viewers the opportunity to observe, feel part of, and share experiences with a much larger community without necessitating any direct socializing." (Cohen and Lancaster, 2014, p. 512) This NTAA utility during and post exposure allows older teen girls to see what those both within and outside their friendship groups are viewing, and to participate in viewing what they feel to be necessary or appropriate. Family viewing occurred more often than presented in the literature, similarly to cinema viewing, with effort made to spend time together, either to view a certain film or just to be together in the same room while participants were distracted and using their mobile phones.

SVOD advances dramatically widened home viewing choices and options through time-shifting and downloading opportunities and resulted in the formation of demassification skills by the participants. A range of information sources were used to aid in decision making including blurbs, trailers, reviews, publicity stills and ratings. The only significant difference between the school groups' information seeking was that Willow Academy students were swayed more by ratings than those from Maple Academy. Algorithms employed by SVOD service providers guided girls toward content similar to that previously viewed and towards what was most popular, meaning that these items were easily 'clicked' on and watched. The girls were seen to be significantly guided by recommendations from friends on what, and what not, to view. Trailers were a source of conversation and future planning.

The following chapter moves onto further themes identified within the analysis of the fieldwork data. It investigates what older teen girls might be seeking from films in terms of role models, advice and information in order to consider the impact of film content on the participants' viewing and plans for career and motherhood.

Chapter 7 Films and Older Teen Girls' Self-Projects of Career and Motherhood

7.1 Introduction

This chapter moves from practical questions of where, what, why and how the participants watched films, to consider the intellectual and emotional interactions with the films they chose to view. It specifically focuses on the areas of career and motherhood to examine how films may be "…constitutive of people's sense-making processes and exchanges of experience in their everyday lives." (Schrøder *et al.*, 2003, p. 63). Using thematic analysis of focus group data, this chapter investigates how the 16 to18-year-old participants might have sought and gained diverse types of gratification from films – including, but not limited to, role modelling; pleasure; knowledge collection; and entertainment. It further considers the types of decoding necessary for them to undertake to achieve these aims. The analysis makes use of uses and gratifications (U&G); the ninefold typology of audience activity (NTAA, Levy and Windahl, 1985); Steele and Brown's (1995) media practice model (MPM); and encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980). It is important to question what participants might actively be seeking from their film viewing because, as Greenwood and Long (2015, p. 628) surmise, "…it is critical to understand how and why young adults draw meaning from particular movie characters and themes". This is particularly true of older teen girls who have been historically omitted from this type of research. The chapter also incorporates the notion of neoliberal postfeminism to consider how concepts of choice, role models and self-projects impacted participants' meaning making and relationships with films.

7.2 Career Aspirations

As discussed in the Chapter 2, research on screen media and girls has proposed that female characters holding a wide variety of occupations may directly influence girls' life aspirations, particularly as role models. 'Possible selves' research based on questionnaires and focus groups with older girls has shown a gender gap in projections of academic and occupational fields where women are employed (Curry *et al.*, 1994; Lips, 2004, 2007; Chalk *et al.*, 2005). However,

neoliberal expectations of career success understand girls to be actively seeking role models to inform their career self-projects (for example Grey, 1994; Lockwood, 2006; Quimby and DeSantis, 2006; Sanders and Munford, 2008; Morgenroth, Ryan and Peters, 2015). Prior research has, however, failed to address whether this desire for role models holds true for older teen girls, with the 16 to 18-year age group being overlooked in studies. What is sought from specific media impacts its application (Steele, 1999), meaning that if girls are not selecting films for career advice or inspiration, it is unlikely that they will find any utility (such as an advantage, gain or help) during or after exposure, as defined by the NTAA (see figure 1). Schrøder *et al.* argue that

> "[t]he way individuals use and make sense of media material is determined by the identities and communicative repertoires they are socialized into as a result of their membership of these groups in the course of their life history." (2003, p. 5)

Accordingly, the analysis chapters show that older teen girls' lived experience is a central influence on gratifications, decoding and meaning making from films. The girls' identities, life stages and lived realities influenced the characters the girls enjoyed watching; the manner in which they interacted with those characters; and what use they made of what they saw. All the girls in this study were considering their future employment, whether that involved attending university or searching for employment directly after A-Levels. The following sections investigate whether films offered information or had any influence on the girls' plans for their future careers.

7.2.1 Depictions of Women's Careers in Films

Reasons given by participants for their film selections included entertainment value; relaxation; pleasure; and a desire to escape from the stresses of school. None of the girls mentioned seeking information or role models. Focus groups also showed that most of the girls found it difficult to name female film characters or jobs that they held, and actors were spoken of far more often than actresses. When asked who their favourite characters were, participants quickly and easily named male characters and actors, only adding female characters and actresses when specifically asked. Research with university students on wishful identification with television characters found a similar trend (Hoffner and

Buchanan, 2005). Although there were 130 female and 78 male participants in Hoffner and Buchanan's study, characters named as favourites were 75 males to 65 females, with female participants more likely to name male characters as favourites than vice versa. Hoffner and Buchanan also found that favoured characters were eight to nine years older than their study participants; this is a smaller age difference than found in this research, where the average age of actors discussed was 43 and actresses' average age was 38 (see Appendix J). As noted by the participants, very few roles are portrayed by actors or actresses who are of the same age as the character. This, along with the impact of this casting on the participants' ideas of femininity, is discussed in Chapter 8.

When asked to name jobs held by female film characters, Michelle, from Willow Academy, replied "I actually can't". Michelle's group spoke about eight actors but did not mention a single actress by name during the entire discussion. Reasons for the higher rates of actors mentioned were not, however, the desire for romantic plots or simply an attraction to actors, as shown in Chapter 5. The gender breakdown of favourite characters may, in part, have been due to the lower numbers of female characters in films (Lauzen, 2016, 2017, 2019) or the girls' disinterest in viewing stereotypical and limited representations (Daniels, 2016). Upon investigating the type of characters that participants did enjoy viewing, it was the character's actions rather than lifestyle or appearance which drew the participants to the film and held their attention. This departs from Pasquier's (1996)combined methods study of 10 to 18-year-old French participants who preferred male characters for their personality traits over their actions. My participants particularly enjoyed female characters who acted with strength and focus, reflecting postfeminist and girl power ideas, and recalling Budgeon's (2001) interview-based study of 16 to 20-year-old participants, an exception to the general absence of data on this age group, examining identity construction in relation to feminism and postfeminism.

The most popular character types for these girls were spies, superheroes/heroines and action heroes/heroines. Girls from Maple Academy commented that men got all the "cool jobs" on screen.

ABH	Do you, can you think, you've named mainly male characters, but can you think for a minute about female characters and can you think of what jobs female characters that you've seen on screen have had, or if you've only watched films where they're young and still at school, that's fine too
Naomi	*Horrible Bosses*, she's a dentist, isn't she?
Kate	A dentist
Rose	They're usually like secretaries working in offices
Kate	Or don't work
Rose	Yeah, or don't work
Naomi	Or like in *Dear John* where she's like helping out
Rose	And she does the autistic thing [becomes a carer for a child with autism]
Naomi	Yeah
Rose	They never really have important roles
ABH	What do you think about that, have you ever thought about it?
Naomi	No
ABH	No?
Sally	Noticed it, they all seem to be, like, lower down
Rose	I think it's a bit unfair that men get all the
Kate	Cool jobs

This group wanted a 'flipping of the script', with women playing traditionally male roles, as shown by the following discussion later in the session.

Naomi	…women should stay strong and independent, and they should be the people with all the action, like, that sounded just really weird the way I just said that, but I mean like fighting and stuff, they should be the ones with the guns and all the superpowers, not always men, or men should start off independent and become the needy ones, flip it around
Sally	Women never seem to be the killer in films
ABH	So the villains?
Sally	Yeah, like they never seem to be the bad guys
Kate	More psycho
Naomi	Or if they are the villains, they're like really psychopathic, like not, like –
Sally	Mental
Naomi	Yeah
ABH	It hasn't been for a while they haven't really had female villains: they did in the eighties in sort of *Basic Instinct* and the one who boiled the bunny, can't remember the title
Naomi	The bunny boiler
Group	[laughter]
ABH	Yeah, but they were insane, obsessed and insane?
Naomi	Or they're supposed, they're portrayed as really like seductive and, like, a bit slutty? But you never see a man being portrayed in that way

Kate	It’s because they’re always meant to be muscle villains
Naomi	And like dominant and like nasty, not like seductive and psychopathic, I dunno
ABH	So you want sort of more in-depth characters that aren’t just there to look nice?
Naomi	mmmhhh [affirmative noise]

They wanted films which would show that women in these roles could be equally as exciting as the male portrayals on offer. They were unhappy with depictions of women whose mental health issues prompted them to become villains, or who used their bodies rather than their minds and skills to achieve goals. These stereotypes reflect societal ideas which reduce women to being mentally unstable and unable to control themselves, or using a sexual appearance to manipulate men. However, girl power ideas reflected by these participants project that girls can be angry or present themselves however they wish, while still achieving goals and without men being the focus. Instead of these common portrayals, whose tropes they easily decoded, pinpointed and explained, the girls wished for both female heroes and female villains who were physically, emotionally and mentally capable of being in charge and achieving the same results as men. This refutes Mazzarella and Pecora’s (2007) assertion that media images may potentially limit what girls believe they can aspire to. As the female characters the girls were viewing did not inspire or interest them, the potential gender-matching role model influence (Lockwood, 2006) is also negated. Another group from the same school had a similar desire which was succinctly stated:

ABH	So what kind of characters would you like to see in films?
Participant	Girls being bad asses
Group	[laughter]

After discussing how film plots with female main characters tended to focus on romance and finding a partner, they commented “we just need some strong independent women”. The girls from Maple Academy understood that girls and women (including themselves) were strong and competent enough do anything they wanted (Gill, 2003) and wished for the gratification of seeing this reflected on screen. Morgenroth, Ryan and Peter’s (2015) premise that motivation is an essential element of role model influence is not relevant to these girls as they have no expectation, based on prior viewing, of finding role models in films.

The focus group participants offered no indication of an expectation to see more women on screen reflecting genuine experiences. Unlike participants in previous research (for example Thomson, Henderson and Holland, 2003), my focus groups did not speak of using film to source information or influence to implement in their lives and self-projects. The focus group data found displays of NTAA selectivity before, during and after exposure by participants, who decided in advance why they wanted to view the film; what they wished to gain from it; and what they felt was worth retaining afterwards. For both year groups from Maple Academy, the films they selected had to be exciting, interesting and entertaining; while they required more than this for them to become involved, involvement was not always the goal. They wanted realistic characters, but believed films mirroring real life would be dull, instead wanting to view ordinary people involved in extraordinary experiences. The girls from this school added that viewing everyday lives like their own could also be stressful, rather than relieving stress or offering distance from their lives.

Participants from Willow Academy concurred, explaining that they sought films which would show events that they would not encounter in their day to day lives. In the following excerpt, they explain why they sought this type of content.

ABH	Yeah so, they [the films they chose to view] don't give a realistic interpretation just of lifestyle or of people or of anything?
Participant	I think at all. I think some, some things will be like real, but Like, a quite similar representation. But a lot of it's not like, because it's like, if it was a real representation, it wouldn't be as entertaining. It's like you're used to it, like oh that's the norm like, this isn't fun
ABH	So you don't want to see…
Participant	No, you want to see stuff that's like, different
Participant	Yeah, different

Finding films that they could relate to and utilise within their current or future career planning was not important to these girls. Instead, they wished to see lives and situations that did not echo their own. It has been suggested that an impact on the viewer is more likely to occur if characters and situations resonate with audience members (Van Vonderen and Kinnally, 2012). However, Walkerdine (1990) proposes that presentations of reality within media texts might be rejected

by an audience for being either too similar to their lives or too different, as shown in the above excerpt. Therefore, viewing films that portray school situations would not supply desired afterschool gratifications of escape and relaxation. The fact that the girls were not looking for films reflecting their current situations indicates that the strong independent women they craved to see on screen may have been wanted for encouragement. They did not want to resemble or copy someone else in anything more than attitude, for a variety of reasons which are discussed below.

The Maple Academy girls firmly asserted that film had no influence on career planning. This contradicts earlier research suggesting that girls may seek career role models from film (Quimby and DeSantis, 2006) and supports the motivational theory of role modelling (Morgenroth, Ryan and Peters, 2015), which explains that for modelling to occur the role model must be actively sought by the viewer. However, there were small examples of real impact from films on career planning. One example came from Jessica who, during conversation regarding which Disney films the girls liked, commented that her love of the film *The Little Mermaid* (1989) as a child had inspired her interest in marine biology and she had secured a place at university to study this subject. Similarly, the film *The Horse Whisperer* (1998) echoed the desire Nora had to turn her love of horses into a career. Nora commented that “I look after horses so it’s like, that kind of inspired me to, like, wanna like help them and, like, as a career, like, horses that need help and other animals”. Nora, holding a current interest in horses, selected to watch something which included female characters working with horses. She was actively involved, again at all stages of viewing, as she processed and thought first about what she expected to see and then what she had seen.

NTAA postexposure utility and involvement, which encompasses thinking, talking or reading about what is viewed, can be seen in the cases of Jessica and Nora. As Coy (2009) notes, viewing films allowed them to see experiences that they had not yet had, in both cases spending time with animals, and they were able to mentally rehearse these life choices (Ross and Nightingale, 2003) with information they had garnered. In focus group questioning, all the participants said that they were not influenced by films. This, however, does not rule out that they might have been (and in these two cases clearly were) influenced when they

were younger. This adds weight to later discussions of third person effects, whereby the girls believed that those younger than themselves might be influenced by what they viewed and further confirms distinctions between the impacts of film on different teen age groups.

As per the MPM, Nora's identification as an equestrian motivated her to view and interact with films featuring women and horses. The film was evaluated and interpreted, confirming her desire for a career working with horses. The final step for Nora and Jessica would be the incorporation and appropriation of the ideas within their identities when they began to strive for and achieve their goals. Although this concurs with research suggesting that role models felt to be similar to oneself are the most impactful (Lockwood, 2006; Quimby and DeSantis, 2006), the motivation was to view films that interested them, and they subsequently found that it reinforced ideas that they already held, or (as in Jessica's case) provided a subject area that they wanted to investigate further. Nora can be seen as creating this role model as her current point of view and interests related to horses, showing role modelling as an active process (Fisher, 1988). As discussed, the viewing of these influential films occurred before or during a period when these two girls were starting to think about careers which may have allowed influence, a prospect which seemingly no longer existed when they were older. Because most of these older teen girls had already made decisions about whether they wished to go to university; what they wanted to study; and the careers or employment fields they planned to enter, they may have felt that there was little reason to search for modelling or information from films. This therefore impacted their NTAA motivation, selection and interaction at all stages with the films they chose to view. As shown, there were also differences in the options felt to be available to the girls from each school, affecting how they viewed career opportunities and what they might pursue in the future.

7.2.2 Real World Influences on Career Aspirations

Having shown that the participants did not seek or obtain gratifications in the form of role modelling or influence from films in relation to their career planning, this section explores other influences which may have guided their career planning, highlighting differences in aspirations between the schools. In addition

real world influences on the career planning of participants are explored – influences which informed their interactions with the films they viewed.

The participants from Maple Academy, distinctively, expressed goals around fulfilling careers, specifically desiring careers linked to their interests. Their plans and goals were supported and enabled by the school, which celebrated and encouraged achievement and self-fulfilment; this was in stark contrast to the lack of support offered to the Willow Academy girls. Thus, the girls' lived realities supplied varying levels of knowledge of careers and support toward achieving their goals. The Willow Academy girls who were considering university applications or work experience opportunities rated financial security as the most important aspect of a future career, rather than fulfilment. The careers discussed by the older girls at Maple Academy were well-paid and specific, reflecting the girls' interests and study plans; these included civil engineer, vet, zoologist, graphic designer, marine biologist and town planner. At Willow Academy, journalism and accountancy were discussed. Violet and Carol from Willow Academy were interested in creative media jobs but did not have a specific occupation in mind. Both these 17-years-olds said that they would work in 'anything to do with media'; they were the only focus group participants not planning to attend university.

In the following exchange, Violet and Carol spoke about the kind of jobs they would like to do:

ABH	So do you have an idea of what kind of a job you want to do or –
Violet	I will do, I would want to do film and stuff but that's not realistic for me, like I don't think it's realistic. And I would do that for not any price [wage], but like I would just have that as a job and not really bothered about the price, but that's what I'd do but it's not realistic so I wouldn't really, like…
ABH	You don't want it enough to give up the –
Violet	I don't think it's realistic
Carol	It's hard to get into
Violet	Yeah, I like I would do anything like in film, just like in the industry like being on like the sets and stuff
Carol	Like getting coffees

Violet	Yeah, I'd do anything like that but it's not realistic and I'm not confident enough to, like, go and like ask for a job and stuff like that

When asked to clarify her statement that she wanted to work in the film industry enough to take up a low paying job, Violet deflects by saying that it is not realistic for her to expect to find a job in that industry, meaning that salary did not matter. Curry *et. al* (1994, p. 135) refer to this shift from a career that is desired but considered risky to a safer option as being "governed by cognitions about the realities of the employment market…" Changes to the employment market under neoliberalism have seen a rise in the number and level of qualifications required, and a decline in the number of jobs available for those holding similar qualifications (Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005). Carol and Violet's confidence may also have been low, displayed by the fact that they had not asked for guidance about finding a job in the film industry or researched what kind of positions would be open to them, feeling that it was out of reach. While they might have assumed that they were unable to go to university, either due to their predicted marks or lack of desire to undertake loans, they may have simply been gaining the level of education they considered appropriate and achievable.

Self-projects and confidence projects are intertwined and co-dependent. The gratification desired from watching strong independent female characters and "girls being bad asses" can be reframed as a desire for examples of confident women for role modelling purposes. When confidence is portrayed by a character, it can eclipse a number of negative traits; confidence is decoded by the girls as the most crucial element of a character (see Chapter 9 for further discussion). This exemplifies how positive role models may help to overcome gender limits (Signorelli, 1997). The absence of this type of role model was itself motivating, as the lack of examples available fuelled the participants' desire to exhibit these traits themselves and thereby prove that women are capable and strong. However, within girls' and women's lives, the gaining and maintaining of confidence is conveyed within neoliberal discourse as a personal responsibility, rather than activity constrained by gender. Underlying this responsibility is the neoliberal understanding that hard work, self-improvement and ambition would enable girls to overcome any obstacles they faced (Kanai, 2015); this is displayed by the girls undertaking A-Levels and aiming to achieve marks which would enable them to

reach their career goals. Mendick *et.al* (2018) assert this to be particularly true in the current period of austerity wherein young people are invested in hard work and need to believe that it will provide the success they desire. They further state that

> [h]ard work has become pivotal to evaluations of success. Effort has always been part of the meritocratic equation, but now it occupies prime position as the way that success much be achieved, evidenced and legitimized. Hard work is endowed with a moral status. If you are not striving for social mobility, you are failing in relation to society's expectations and above all, failing yourself. (ibid. p.162)

However, as will be shown, although the participants accepted the work that was required for their individualised goals there was a marked difference in external encouragement between the schools with regard to helping them achieve their goals.

Violet and Carol chose to seek apprenticeships in business rather than trying to enter the film industry, perhaps because they felt that there would be more opportunities available. Again though, confidence and appropriate knowledge were issues.

ABH	And what apprenticeships did you apply for?
Carol	I've no idea yet
ABH	You don't know what you want to do?
Carol	I want to do business, something in business
Violet	Yeah, same here
Carol	Like creative
Violet	But I have no clue what
Carol	Like advertising, I like advertising and…
ABH	Have you contacted companies yourself or…?
Carol	No, I just don't, I'm too embarrassed
Violet	I don't know what I want to do in them, so I don't know what to say
Carol	I would do anything in an office, like I would do any job like within business or media like
ABH	Is there not a careers advisor here?
Group	No

The girls said that they had not been advised as to when, or what, help might be offered from the school.

Carol	Like we want to get apprenticeships instead of going to uni and we've heard nothing about…like, we have absolutely no clue what to do because they're all going on about uni and we have literally no idea
ABH	And you don't want to go to university?
Carol	No. Like, that's all they're on about, it's not even an option, like we don't want to go, like it's just…

There is obviously a difference between not wishing to go to university and feeling that it is "not even an option". Carol is not clear, and unfortunately did not expand on this statement, as to whether the lack of options was due to finances, grades or other life factors. The girls said that as there was no careers advisor at the school, they instead relied on teachers for advice and help. In contrast, Maple Academy did provide Career Advisors and all the focus group participants from that school had plans to attend university.

Evidence suggests that the girls had a sense that their teachers did not fully understand the challenges they faced. They were however still reliant on advice from school as parents may not (or may be perceived to not) understand the university system or how to help their children in the ever-changing job market. Through lack of experience and with few or no role models, as discussed, girls themselves may not know what is available or what is required for them to reach their goals (Richards, 2018b). Violet and Carol did not narrow their aims down to specific jobs; they said they would 'do anything' within broad employment sectors. Harris (2004b, p. 26) explains this as girls having "misaligned ambitions", meaning that:

> …they do not know either what job they would like to do or how much education would be required to be qualified for their job of choice. They cannot construct plans for meeting their career goals because they lack knowledge about the relevant educational pathways… These failings are attributed to a combination of family, community, and personal limitations.

However, the lack of confidence they showed may also have prevented them from asking for or seeking available help. The disparity between the resources offered in career support (as assessed by the girls) shows that social and economic resources can limit girls' ideas of their futures (Gordon *et al.*, 2008). In accordance with Reay (1997, p. 229), the Maple Academy girls' life situations and school provided them with "…confidence, a sense of entitlement, knowledge

of the educational system, social networks, and a feeling of being capable of seizing the initiative…" They were therefore aided in their self-projects, designed to help them reach their ambitions in ways that the Willow Academy girls were not.

In addition to the lack of guidance from school, the same Willow Academy group said that they had not spoken in detail to their parents about career choices. They revealed self-censorship at play in their discussions with their parents, entering conversations with pre-conceived ideas of what their parents wanted for them. The following exchange, which occurred after Joanna explained she would not physically qualify to reach her dream job of astronaut, exemplifies the tendency toward assumptions. The speed of the exchange made it challenging to pinpoint who was speaking. All the girls in Joanna's group, however, agreed that while they did talk to their parents about career aspirations in limited ways, they held firm ideas about what their parents would expect of them.

ABH	You don't talk to your parents about it, your parents don't encourage you to do exactly what you want?
Joanna	I think your parents want the best for you though, at the same time they do want you to do what you love but…
Participant	But they'd rather you get a proper job
Participant	Yeah, like, I dunno…
Joanna	I dunno, my parents probably asked us but I dunno, I'd rather not talk about it
Participant	Talk about it
Joanna	If it's not realistic

Joanna also shows independence here, making her own decision about her future based on the facts as she understands them. She expresses a pragmatism which is similarly reflected in the statement from one of Allen *et al*'s (2017, p. 233) participants who said, "Aim for something that you can get, otherwise you're just gonna disappoint yourself." Viewed from a neoliberal perspective, this could be seen as setting realistic and achievable goals or, conversely, as not pushing yourself to your full ability to strive for the pinnacle of success. Having given up on following a career in the space industry entirely, as there was "no money" in the field, Joanna had not asked for advice at school as to alternative careers that would allow her to follow her interest in space. She said that there was no

individual time given with teachers in which to discuss aspirations and she believed teachers would have laughed at her. Because she did not receive information, guidance or support from the school, Joanna did not hear about potential ways she could find a career that incorporated her interest, leading her to abandon it entirely. She had instead decided to go to university to study journalism.

Harris (2004b) highlights the importance of parental help in girls' career decision making, but these girls implied that they were not talking to their parents about future employment and did not feel supported by their school, showing them as being failed by the system. The concept of self-projects suggests that there are no limits to achievement in personal life or work, but fails to take into account social contexts which may remove or restrict opportunities for some girls (Chatman, 2015), or the physical and emotional challenges of moving into different work levels or attaining higher educational credentials than their parents (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001). Richards' (2018a) qualitative research with 89 rural primary and secondary schoolgirls also saw this type of reaction to seeking career advice and discovered "[m]ost of the girls had chosen not to tell teachers about their career ambitions or any problems encountered at home and in school, through fear, embarrassment and lack of trust". This lack of disclosure occurred because the participants believed that teachers did not understand their lives and were not able to offer them appropriate advice. Consequently, the girls, like Carol and Violet, did not know the requirements for exploring career paths of interest and thus did not pursue them, instead assuming they would not be able to find employment.

The participants' aspirations may be curbed if they assume that what their parents want for, and expect of, them is financial security above personal fulfilment (ibid.). This goes against relationships, a fulfilling career and financial stability being what youths associate with future happiness (Mendick *et al.*, 2018). There were no expectations by the girls from Willow Academy that they could be financially stable in a job they found personally fulfilling, as seen with the Maple Academy groups. Rather, the girls negotiated the values of success learned from their parents (Thomson, Henderson and Holland, 2003). As Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) state, self-identity work, an expression of the project of the self,

does not occur in a vacuum; it involves social and interpersonal relations. Influences from outside the family also played a part in framing and curbing older teen girls' expectations, with friendships, other family members and media potentially shaping life planning.

The girls from Willow Academy were shown to be aware of potential limits to their future freedoms and did not plan beyond what they believed to be reasonable and achievable. Those hoping to attend university were planning to study subjects which they felt would lead to reasonably paid 'realistic' and stable careers, such as accountancy. Those wishing for apprenticeships, as avenues towards employment, were 'willing to do anything' to secure a job in an office. These attitudes towards future work show that there are still limits placed on older teen girls' expectations of what is desirable and possible, whether by others or themselves. This is viewed by Mendick *et al.* (2018, p. 135) as youth feeling "…a profound sense of personal responsibility for mitigating the risks of an insecure labour market and receding social safety net." In comparison, the participants from Maple Academy embodied the belief that they were free and able to pursue any path that they wanted and were encouraged and supported by family and the careers programme within the school to work towards their desired careers. As Allen *et al.* (2017, p. 233) state about one of their own participants,

> ...social position and the resources available … growing up play a role in shaping his ability to follow particular paths. Exploring both young people's talk about celebrity and their transitions therefore enables an understanding of the neoliberal context in which narratives of meritocracy and individual achievement circulate at the same time as persistent social inequalities frame young people's opportunities. Young people are constantly negotiating these contradictions as they think about, and move towards, particular futures.

Neither looking for nor gaining gratifications from films in the form of information or role models for career choices, the participants relied on support and information offered to them directly, although this was not always sought by, or available to, all girls. While some of the Willow Academy girls' limitations resulted from their lived experience, those that they placed upon themselves were often explained as necessary to fit with personal definitions of success. The

following section further explores differences in girls' expectations and understandings of the influence of planned motherhood on career goals.

7.3 Motherhood

This section considers focus group responses to representations of motherhood in films to assess how the participants viewed motherhood in their future lives. It focuses specifically on the differences between the 17-year-old group from Willow Academy and the 18-year-old group from Maple Academy, as the views expressed contrast in significant and interesting ways. There was no indication from the girls in any focus group that marriage and family life may be breaking down (McRobbie, 2013). None of the girls said that they were planning not to have a family. Instead, they expressed the expectation of having children and a partner (always referred to with male pronouns) with whom they would equally share parenting and financial responsibilities. As shown, these expected relationships, although traditional in terms of being heteronormative, living together and having children, can be interpreted as feminist: gender equality was regarded as non-negotiable, particularly among the Maple Academy participants. A more in-depth discussion of romantic relationships occurs in Chapter 8.

The notion of an idealised family is central to neoliberal values, emphasising that women will be mothers alongside contradictory expectations of independence and career success (Wilkes, 2015). Keller (2015, p. 274) states that the can do girl "…has embraced 'girl power' and has benefitted from its incorporation into popular culture as a hegemonic discourse within postfeminist media culture". In agreement with Gonick *et al*. (2009), Keller further sees girls as pressured by expectations of self-actualisation within neoliberal values, but claims that there are also new chances for resistance and agency. The opportunity to resist and use personal agency in unexpected and entrepreneurial ways when forming self-projects supplies life scripts for girls, scripts on which to build individual projects. The value of this thesis is an exploration of the impact of these expectations, often shown in film characters and plots, in order to uncover whether older teen girls were able to exert agency over their lives as part of individualised self-projects.

Women's plans and expectations relating to motherhood, as assessed and evaluated by Gill and Orgad (2018) and Scharff (2016), are impacted by class and gender, with middle-class women expecting to balance work and home effortlessly. However, motherhood complicates and compounds difficulties that women already face with work/life balance. Mothers of young children are now more likely to be employed than in the past, due to economic demands, single parenthood, the desire to use qualifications or the decline in income worth (particularly since the introduction of austerity measures in the UK) combined with higher pension ages (LSE Gender Institute, 2016). Women are less likely than men to receive advancement opportunities and rewards such as pay raises. Those with families are often questioned about their commitment to paid work (Prescott-Smith, 2018). Thus, even with a good education, careful planning and the creation and implementation of career self-projects, the participants in this study face varied and added challenges compared to their male counterparts, specifically due to their gender.

The juggling of home life and paid work requires a skilful, and sometimes unrealistic, negotiation of competing commitments (Rottenberg, 2014). Uneven care responsibilities and labours within the home fall primarily to women (LSE Gender Institute, 2016). However, the evidence suggests that the participants calculated that, with planning, hard work and selection of the right partner, they would successfully achieve a balance. Their acknowledgement of what would be needed to meet these goals corroborates earlier research showing that, in gender terms, young women are more likely than young men to envisage futures involving relationships and the balance of work and home life (Kerpelman and Pittman, 2001; Anthis, Dunkel and Anderson, 2004; Chalk *et al.*, 2005). However, there were vastly different expectations among the participants regarding how motherhood would, and should, fit in with and impact their lives. It is therefore crucial to explore how these expectations might have influenced the girls' attitudes towards and planning for motherhood and if these ideas relate in any way to what they viewed in films.

7.3.1 Motherhood on Screen

The 18-year-old group from Maple Academy were fans of the *Harry Potter*[8] series. Lily Potter – Harry's mother, killed by the evil wizard Voldemort when Harry was a baby – was discussed when the girls were questioned about whether they could think of any mothers that they had seen on screen. It was Lily's actions, taken to protect Harry, which were of particular interest, as Caitlin explained:

ABH	Do you notice, we've talked about this before, the relationships between women in films. Mothers? Can you think of any films with good relationships with mothers or any kind of relationship with a mother?
Caitlin	There's a good, ah just *Harry Potter*, with Lily dying for Harry, I found that…
ABH	Was what sorry?
Caitlin	Lily dying, Lily Potter dying for Harry, like putting herself in front of Voldemort
ABH	Oh right
Caitlin	And also the father being like 'run, take the kid'
Group	[laughter]
Caitlin	It's a very, very male role to take, but then also the mother protecting her son, like saying look, take me instead, and I found that very much a, quite an interesting, like not interesting, but just kind of it's a natural thing, mothers just always kind… well, in my eyes they always should try and protect children to the best of their ability, and she just did that and yeah, I like that

Caitlin shows an understanding of societal gender roles and expectations of how mothers and fathers should behave which framed her interpretation of this part of the story. She says that, in her view, mothers should protect their children, showing that at least part of her appreciation for this character relates to its reinforcement of previously held views (Fisher, 1988). This reinforcement of motherly protection can be seen as NTAA utility during exposure as Caitlin is reassured that her viewpoint is valid through her decoding of the character's actions. She decodes and accepts the encoded message that mothers being protective is natural and expected.

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[8] See Appendix N for series references

These girls were also aware of the trope of absent or deceased parents within children's and young adult literature and films (Feasey, 2009; Arosteguy, 2014), and understood this as a common back story for characters. It was also viewed as trying to create empathy or sympathy for the characters, and to free the characters from any restrictions a parent may place on their actions.

ABH	Well, there seems to be a big thing in fiction and in films that the parents are absent
Group	Yeah
ABH	For one reason or another
Group	Yeah
Participant	There's a lot of orphans and –
Participant	Divorced like…
Group	Yeah
	…
Participant	Well it's like loads of films and books, they, like, try to add depth to a character when, like, a family member has died so it will be like a romance novel and, like, the big thing will be the girl being like, oh yeah well, my parents died when I was little…
Group	Yeah
Participant	And stuff and it's just –
Participant	And then they're like, ohhh it's sad

This group was gratified when viewing strong women characters who make their own choices, a characteristic they found lacking in many films. Their appreciation for Lily's actions may be interpreted not only as recognition of her natural maternal instinct, but of her strength of character in attempting to fight a wizard much more powerful than herself to protect her child (and saving his life) – and to continue caring for her son even after death, appearing to him in spirit form.

Despite their expression of admiration for mothers acting as natural protectors, the girls from this group situated themselves in opposition to the requirement for motherhood in films.

Participant	But then I guess, like, that in lots of films the woman is there for the man, and he wants a wife who's going to be a mother, so, I don't know…
Participant	It's tied together
Participant	Kind of like we're in the the habit giving it a box
Group	[talking over]
Participant	The happy ever after implies, always implies marriage and kids, like

Group	Yeah, oh yeah
Participant	Like *Notting Hill*, they get together and get married and have a baby
Participant	Have kids
Participant	Like, she's a famous actress! [laughs]
Group	[talking over]
Participant	It's like you can't be happy if you don't have kids

They understood the conflicting and repeated patterns and expectations of neoliberal motherhood in films, displaying a societal understanding which informed their media literacy, but they only related to a few specific elements. Within their decoding of the film texts, they rejected the dominant reading, the expectation of motherhood, as this was not something they felt was going to be imposed upon them personally, as will be explored in the next section.

7.3.2 Imagining Motherhood

The Willow Academy group's discussions about the requirement for a realistic career plan has already been highlighted. Career planning, foregrounding a well-paid job, is not unusual, however, these girls expressed the conviction that once they had children, their own needs and desires would, and should, become secondary. This is shown clearly in the following exchange where they express their views that supporting their children financially would be more important than their own happiness or fulfilment. Interested in how the girls placed their own personal fulfilment below that of others, I tried to draw out an explanation as to why their emotional satisfaction with their job was less important than financial reward.

Participant 1	I just think you could be happy in a job though, like, I think it's depending on the people you're with. Like, I think I could be, like, in like, a horrible job but getting good pay, but I don't think it would be that bad, like I think I could, like, put up with it
Participant 2	I think about, like, the future as well though… like if you, like if I had kids, I'd, like, have a horrible job knowing –
Group	Yeah
Participant 1	I'd have like, like, be able to like fend for them, like, I'd rather hate my job than like, be like in a rubbish job and have, like no money for, like, them
Participant 2	That's what, yeah, I'd rather have a horrible job being able to, like, provide

ABH	You don't think it would be just absolutely soul destroying to do something that you hated every single day?
Participant 2	No not if you've got like a husband and kids that you…
Participant 1	Your job's not your whole world, like.
ABH	But it is 9 hours a day that you have to spend?
Participant 1	When you become an adult though you can't, like, do everything for yourself, there's like other people that, like, if I had, like, well, if I had kids I would rather have a job that paid well that I didn't like so that my kids could have a good life than, like, have a job that I loved and for all to have to, like, squeeze into like… …
ABH	And a good life, it all comes down to what you can afford?
Participant 2	Yeah, it's not like a mansion, a good life but a good life's, like, comfortable, like I wouldn't like, I would be happy not being, like, super super rich as long as I was like comfortable, like, and could take my children on holiday and stuff.
Participant 1	Or like, if they weren't freezing because you couldn't afford heat or food.
Participant 2	That's really dramatic but yeah
Participant 1	I don't think you really get the chance to think about, like, something unrealistic that you want to aim for like especially in school like I don't really think you get the chance to do that...

This exchange confirms that these girls saw the primary purpose of work as providing money for their family. A 'rubbish job' is defined as one that does not pay enough to have a large enough house and a 'horrible job' as one that has high pay but is not enjoyed. This contracts Mendick *et.* al's (2018, p. 62) finding with 14 to 18-year-old English boys and girls that "…having enough to get by matters but very few young people prioritize money." Caring for their family was the priority and work merely a way to finance the happiness and fulfilment they expected to find in other areas of their lives. As Skeggs (1997, p. 82) argues, gaining an education is a way for girls to turn themselves and their skills "…into an economic resource in the labour market…". Walkerdine (2003) supports this, arguing that girls have been incited to gain upward mobility by investing in education. Education and employment for these girls were resources used to ensure that their families would be financially protected and able to afford their expected lifestyles. The girls did not discuss whether they would expect their husbands to take on work for financial reasons rather than mental or emotional fulfilment. There was no expectation among the girls for a personally rewarding

career or to stay at home with their children while their husband or partner supported them, instead their views showed an emphasis on a personal responsibility to be financially successful (Mendick *et al.*, 2018). This contrasted with the views and expectations of the Maple Academy group discussed later in this section. The Willow Academy girls considered their expectations 'realistic'. Once again, the lack of discussion about what the girls might aspire to do is represented by the claim that they did not have the chance to think about 'something unrealistic'. Rather, they believed they had to form plans that fit with what was expected of them and their future lives, based on their current lived realities.

Studies have found that emerging adults "…reported that living well involves having nice material things and that owning socially acceptable things will bring them happiness…" and that "…millennials rank higher on material values measures than any other generation" (Lewallen, Miller and Behm-Morawitz, 2016, p. 257). The Willow Academy girls are not alone in their ideas about wealth. Lewallen, Miller and Behm-Morawitz further found that celebrity media was highly successful in influencing viewers towards aspirations for elevated levels of materialism. Beutler (2012) found that, for middle school students moving towards emerging adulthood, extrinsic desires are part of financial ideas. This suggests that there is a belief among older teen girls that having money and the right possessions will ensure happiness. In the following extended excerpt, I asked the participants to explain their ideas on appropriate salaries above job fulfilment; materialism; and where they believed their ideas came from.

Participant	I'd rather be in a job that I didn't even like that much knowing I had, like, money
Group	Yeah
Participant	Rather than being in a job that I liked and not have any money
Group	Yeah
Participant	So I think my own influence, like, oh ok I'll go to uni so I can do this, not because like, ah, Emma Watson went to uni, it's more for, like, myself, like it's selfish, but it's more for myself like
ABH	So do you all consider the money before you consider what else you what you actually want to do?
Participant	Yeah because it's realistic, like you need to consider, like, the money

Participant	Like, you can love your job but what if you don't have a house
Participant	Yeah, it's a bit like…
Participant	That's probably why the Kardashians are so influential
ABH	Well, you can still have a house but perhaps not a massive house
Participant	I think it's up to, like, individuals' desires as well though, like that would be my desires, to have, like, nice things
ABH	Where does that come from that that is what, what your life should be like, where do you get that idea from?
Participant	I, it's other people
Participant	Even real-life people you see them walking around, like
Group	Yeah
Participant	Not celebrities, I wouldn't influence what I want off celebrities, I would be like –
Participant	Like if you've got like a new ring, I'd be like, oh I want that
Participant	Driving past a nice housing estate, like, I [incoherent]
Participant	Yeah, I wouldn't think, oh I, but I love them, imagine like the Kardashians because that's not realistic, but you think I wanna live like them
Participant	I wouldn't aspire to live in, like, a bad place
Participant	Like if I see a house that's, like, bigger than my house, like I drive past it and I'm like, even if it's just got like one more bedroom and, like, another sitting room or something I'm like, woah, how good would it be to live there
Participant	You want to live in that
ABH	Because you want more than you've been raised with too?
Participant	It's not like that I'm, like, I'm not like ungrateful for like what we've been raised off but like…
Participant	You always want to get that…
Participant	…you don't want to, like, put your Mam and Dad down because like, they didn't have that, but you want to prove that you can do it
Group	Yeah
Participant	Do you know what I mean? Like I don't wanna have to rely on, like, my husband or something to like, be the main breadwinner and get a house
Participant	Like I wanna be able to do stuff like that by myself
Participant	Not even to be, like, better than your parents even, like I'd be happy being the same as mine

They clearly articulated that the decision to go to university was made for personal or individualistic reasons rather than in response to film characters. Comparing their existing assets to those of others, both on and off screen, raises desire to obtain possessions, ranging from houses to rings. Their choice was seen as either having employment they liked, or earning enough to support their desired lifestyle. The girls had created a self-project to guide them towards the

level of affluence they wanted. This suggests that "…prosperity depends not only on accumulating stuff, but also on the other social and emotional dimensions of one's level and standard of living." (Beutler, 2012, p. 19) These girls spoke in terms of possessions they could gain to provide for their children (and families) as a basis for a 'good life'. Beutler (ibid., p. 26) found that "... individual family environment plays a crucial role in the development of money aspirations." The optimism of the Willow Academy participants that they would be able to do better than their parents financially is common amongst emerging adults (Lewallen, Miller and Behm-Morawitz, 2016) (emerging adulthood encompasses 18 to 25-years-old). However, Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003) explain that girls are not always comfortable in expressing this desire for wealth and comfort. Therefore, they often couch their aspirations in terms of doing a bit better, as shown.

While openly admitting external influences, the Willow Academy girls denied this emanated from films. While noting screen lifestyles, there were no comparisons made by the girls to film characters or the depicted lives of mothers. These participants were not seeking guidance from the media, and they did not use films for this purpose. Real-life markers of success influenced decisions and planning, rather than fictional portrayals that they could not relate to or believe were possible for themselves. Making sensible choices was vital to these girls so that they could obtain what they had set their sights on. Goals were set to ensure they were able to support themselves, their children and to be able to contribute equally to any intimate partnership. The girls' ideas and expectations came from, and were perhaps limited by, the environment in which they had grown up. The Willow Academy girls acknowledged and appreciated the work their parents had undertaken to provide for them and did not wish to offend them or let them down (Richards, 2018a). They were placing the 'caring self' at the forefront of their future goals in a manner not discussed by the Maple Academy girls.

The Willow Academy girls did not expect to avoid paid work and did not express a desire not to work. Employment was a central element of their future selves. In direct contrast, among the 18-year-old Maple Academy girls, views about future employment were framed within neoliberal and postfeminist discourses. Although they all planned to continue working after having children, it was discussed in

terms of a choice about whether to opt-out (Sørensen, 2017; Gill and Orgad, 2018) and be stay-at-home mothers. Whereas the Willow Academy group repeatedly positioned themselves as working to support their children, the Maple Academy group discussed their future employment in terms of a 'career', wanting to ensure they had reached some level of success before having children. They believed that mothers should be free to make their own decision about whether to stay at home; work; or plan a career break around having children, speaking to their expectation of agency and choice. This was the same group who understood and rejected the filmic trope of women giving up their careers and lifestyles to become wives and mothers. The following exchange further revealed their ideas of motherhood. It shows how the girls participated in negotiated reading, allowing them to find enjoyment in films while rejecting encoded patriarchal ideas.

ABH	What does that [how motherhood is shown in films] make you think about motherhood and family, does it make you go 'nah' or…?
Participant	I dunno, like, I want to be married and have kids, but I want to do that for me and not because everyone else is telling me that that's the right thing to do
Group	Yeah
Participant	It's nice to have the choice, like
Participant	I'm not, I don't want to be a wife and mother as a career, I don't want to be –
Group	No
Participant	I want to have the adventure first
Participant	Well, I want to have my career
Participant	I want to have a career as well
Participant	I don't want to give up that for, I think they should be, they shouldn't be everything
Participant	No
Participant	Especially seeing as it's never everything to the man necessarily
Group	No
Participant	I think, like, they should take equal responsibility so if I'm staying off in the holidays, they need to stay off some other time
Group	Yeah
Participant	It's not, like, all down to the Mum

These girls did not believe they should have to give up their career, as children "shouldn't be everything, especially as it's never everything to the man necessarily". This attitude corresponds once again with Harris' (2004b) assessment that the establishment of careers may delay motherhood, but that

having children is still important in girls' planning. They wished to establish a balance: working to reach career ambitions without losing the chance to have children once a career is established (Scharff, 2016). This 18-year-old group spoke confidently about their expectation that equality would extend into all areas of lives, including the home. Not only did they incorporate the postfeminist rhetoric of individualism, choice and empowerment (Gill, 2007b) into their ideas for their futures, but they also fully expected partners to accept their choices and plans. For example, Sarah said:

> I think if you pick someone, well, if you're with someone who thinks that you should stay at home and be in charge, then you're with the wrong person… because they don't understand what you want… if that's not what you want.

Sarah not only presumed that she would continue to have her career after having children, but that, in order for them to be compatible, her partner should respect her choice. As McRobbie (2009) deduces, the success of equality with partners over domestic labour and childcare is now a private process, endowed with the judgement that those who achieve balance have chosen their partner well. Other girls within this group agreed with Sarah's assessment and this led to further discussion exploring the type of partner they would require. These girls' desire to continue working after having children contrasts with the images in films that they discussed, where women are seen mothering at home while their male partner works outside the home to provide. Neither of these two groups expected men to economically support them. However, the Maple Academy group had firm expectations about the choices which should be available to them.

> Sarah I think it does very much depend on the individual and if you find you match an individual who has the same thoughts as you, wants the same things as you, then great, but if not then you're definitely in the wrong place
> Jenny Or someone willing to, like, accept that you might change your mind
> Sarah Yeah yeah
> Jenny Like, accept that
> Sarah It's not set in stone
> Jenny You might want to stay off [work] for two months and then want to go back and they've got to, like, accept that and accommodate it

Future planning by the participants is hereby shown to hold multiple options. They had an awareness that once they had a baby that their lives might be and feel different, requiring adjustments to their plans. It also shows an expectation that both partner and career support either a break from, or an early return to, work if they do not wish to take the full period of parental leave afforded them. Although speaking of partners, the girls' needs were foregrounded, seeming to allow no space for partners to have a say in decisions being made. Although the girls expected support, they did not appear to view parenting as a partnership in which equals decide together and compromise (McRobbie, 2013). Instead, acceptance of the girls' decisions, no matter what they might be or how often they may change, was considered necessary for the relationship to succeed. This suggests that, at this time, they lacked experience with heteronormative romantic relationships which required this level of compromise. The participants' ideas regarding romantic relationships are discussed in detail in Chapter 8. The media-projected idea that choosing the right partner is the solution to balancing work and family (Sørensen, 2017) is also revealed to have been internalised here. Additionally, the opportunity to stay at home with children is a decision relying on economic viability (Rottenberg, 2017). The lack of discussion about stay-at-home mothers by the Willow Academy groups suggests it may not have been a possibility that the girls considered available to them.

Motherhood and career can be seen as discordantly entwined for these groups of girls, through the conflicts over societal expectation; the lived experiences of gender; and the social position of their parents combined with differing self-projects regarding how and where children should fit into their lives. Despite postfeminist and neoliberal narratives of women managing to successfully juggle career and motherhood (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008), these girls understood the impossibility of having one without it impacting the other. Within neoliberalism, achieving this balancing act is left to the individual, and what may have to be given up to achieve balance between the two is a personal struggle that the girls would be expected to achieve individually. The films they viewed offered them no clues as to how to manage these projects, but these were not the sources to which they looked for guidance on motherhood.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter provides a new view of older teen girls' ideas of career and motherhood and the influences thereupon. In trying to understand how girls relate to filmic representations of career and motherhood, this chapter has shown that the participants were proficient in decoding the societal and patriarchal messages in films they viewed, but that they were not seeking role models or influence from this source to inform their self-projects. The lack of female characters whom the participants felt reflected what they wished to view, and the ways they felt women should be represented, meant that they rejected the possibility of modelling from films – a rejection which has previously not been explored in the literature. Having discovered in the focus groups that films were not persuasive, it became important to understand why the participants did not seek role modelling from films and what, if anything, was impacting the decisions and plans they were making. While occasional small influences at a younger age were admitted, these predated the period in which the girls began to make decisions about their educational pathway towards any specific career.

Career projects centred on what the girls specifically wanted and expected from their working lives. For Willow Academy girls, this was to support their children financially rather than to hold personally fulfilling careers as the Maple Academy girls expected and felt that they were entitled to. These differing attitudes towards work were also shown as influencing attitudes towards motherhood. Maple Academy girls believed they would have the option to decide whether they wanted to be stay-at-home mothers when the time came, whereas Willow Academy girls made no suggestion that pausing or stopping work was a choice. Motherhood self-projects were linked to romantic relationships, with male partners discussed in terms of producing children together and maintaining economic equality.

The next chapter investigates the two areas which have been presumed of the upmost importance to teen girls: romantic relationships and feminine appearance. Having established that the participants expected to have heteronormative relationships leading to children, and having outlined their clearly expressed viewpoints on the presentation of women on screen, it again looks to understand

whether film is sought for any gratifications or influence in these areas while also exploring the girls' own ideas about these subjects and how these have been developed.

Chapter 8 Older Teen Girls and Representations of Romance and Femininity in Films

8.1 Introduction

Building on the structuring life factors of career and motherhood, this chapter investigates romantic relationships and feminine appearance, subjects generally presumed to hold a great deal of teenage girls' attention, and which are understood to be influenced by film texts, as discussed in Chapter 3. It continues to investigate the readings undertaken by 16 to18-year-old girls, and whether they are seeking and obtaining gratifications from the films they choose to view. The participant's understanding, or decoding, relates to and affects whether there is any utility in incorporating elements of what is viewed into their self-projects and daily lives, as per the ninefold typology of active audiences (NTAA Levy and Windahl, 1985) and the teen girl focused media practice model (MPM Steele and Brown, 1995). This chapter also explores whether neoliberal ideas of personal relationships and femininity impact girls' views of self and future planning. As there has been little research directly with girls in relation to interactions between the embodied self and representations in popular culture (Jackson, 2016), the data collected in the focus groups is important in providing a glimpse into older teen girls' relationship with the representation of femininity in films.

Studies relating to girls and portrayals of romance in films have been undertaken with girls both older and younger than the participants in this study. For example, it has been argued that girls between the ages of 6 and 14-years-old have ideas of romance which are influenced and formed by what they watch in film or television (Pasquier, 1996; Driesmans, Vandenbosch and Eggermont, 2016). Additionally, research with emerging adults (18 to 25-years-old) found that

> "[w]omen, relative to men, were exclusively likely to report romantic yearning in response to memorable movies. Thus, not only were women likely to tune into romantic genres, they were also able to report how these movies impacted their developing romantic schemas." (Greenwood and Long, 2015, p. 645)

Galloway, Engstrom and Emmers-Sommer (2015, p. 703) suggest that from a U&G perspective "…it may be the case that individuals seek reinforcement of

romantic beliefs in mediated messages, as these symbols simultaneously prompt pursuit of the proper means to realize one's convictions." This is problematic as the formulaic portrayal of (predominantly heteronormative) romance as a central plotline in films has raised concerns that it may reinforce stereotypical gender discourses leading to a issues such as low self-esteem and depression among girls (ter Bogt *et al.*, 2010). Finally, films about and aimed at teenage girls present that "…acquisition of a heterosexual romance is the 'prize' for successfully performing femininity" (Hill, 2015, p. 53), thereby linking physical appearance to romance. Chapter 7 showed focus group participants to have self-projects relating to motherhood but revealed a low level of interest, demonstrated through a lack of discussion, about who might father those children and how those relationships might fit into their lives. There was also no conversation around alternative partnerships or non-heteronormative relationships, perhaps because the participants did not feel confident speaking of them within the focus groups or because discussion focused on mainstream films which largely provide limited representations of sexuality (Daniels, 2016). This chapter therefore questions whether there was any resonance or impact from films towards the girls' ideas of romantic relationships. It also reveals that while distinct differences occurred between the schools on opinions of career and motherhood, they were closely aligned on their attitudes toward romantic relationships and femininity.

8.2 Romantic Relationships

In research comparing romantic films to views of romance within society, Dowd and Pallotta (2000, p. 552) differentiate between the emotions of falling in love and being in love, explaining that selecting a partner requires "…compatibility of interests and beliefs, economic potential, health prospects and other similar concerns". Neoliberalism approaches love as an investment in the future, requiring rational thought leading to the demystification of romance, as choosing the correct partner is highly important (hooks, 2013). The idea of being 'completed' by a partner has been replaced by the more practical concern of fulfilling needs for companionship, sex and happiness, meaning that these relationships are not always permanent (ibid.). The project is not completed once a relationship has been established, as partners must continue working to ensure that it fulfils each party's developing needs.

Scharff (2016), meanwhile, suggests that women, who may or may not have a choice of staying home with their children, might delay a romantic relationship in order to put their career first. There has been a move away, under neoliberalism, from romantic cultural scripts and a disruption of pathways into romantic relationships, which arguably has changed the way young women view romance in films (Koontz, Norman and Okorie, 2019). Koontz, Norman and Okorie's grounded theory analysis and in-depth interviews with university-aged American women finds that while romance in films is still presented in a traditional view, it is not perceived the same way by young women, who increasingly understand screen representations of romantic love to be fantastical and irrational. Their research further finds that an exertion of energy is required to overcome the dissonance between the romantic love young women view on screen, and the realities of love that they experience. While Giddens (1991, 1992) sees intimate relationships as forming a part of self-projects, the ideas are theoretical and abstract, even though they are portrayed as having significant impact (Mitchell and Green, 2002). Mitchell and Green further describe what Giddens calls 'pure relationships' as offering greater equality between men and women and requiring commitment and reflexivity. Each partner must work on the relationship and themselves in order to achieve success. The expectation is that the relationship will only last as long as it serves both parties, with the choice to remain or leave being a personal decision based on whether both parties are being helped to self-actualise (Mitchell and Green, 2002; Koontz, Norman and Okorie, 2019) and attain their other self-projects.

8.2.1 Romance on Screen

When asked about romantic relationships on screen, girls from almost every group used the word 'unrealistic' to describe what they saw. This reflects Galloway, Engstrom and Emmers-Sommer's (2015) cultivation theory research, specifically addressing whether repeated exposure to media portrayals of love and romance encouraged unrealistic expectations for undergraduate participants. However, in opposition to their findings that female participants were influenced by what they viewed, the participants in my own study decoded romantic plots in a negative way and found them unappealing. A 16-year-old group from Willow Academy was specific about the type of plots that American teen films held. They spoke

about how romantic relationships are shown to usurp all other parts of teenage girl characters' lives.

ABH	What do you think about teen films? Films that are made about your age group and are supposed to be aimed at your age group. That's a great expression on your face there, I wish I could get that on tape because it's brilliant, not impressed!
Participant	No, not at all, they're really unrealistic, especially American ones
Group	Yeah
Participant	Definitely American ones
Participant	It's either like really, like, really like masochism, like you've got your Marvel DC stuff, or it's like, dump all your plans, there's a boy
Participant	Yeah exactly, it's always like every girl, they're always after a boy, always after a boy
Participant	They're always being nerdy in films
Participant	Literally, opening shot of all teen films, down to earth as well, like they start off like, must do my work, and then it's like but there's a boy and you're like, oh yeah
Participant	And somehow, they still manage to get the perfect grades and the lad that they want, what, no
Participant	They have so many parties
Group	Yeah
Participant	That's so unrealistic
Participant	But the parties they go to, I'm like, no
Participant	I remember watching one in middle school and being like, oh my god, I'm going to have so many parties… [I've been to] one
Group	[laughter]

This shows that the girls understood that focus and effort are necessary to receive good school marks and that the time girls in films are shown to spend on boys would make this impossible. The girls compared what they viewed to their own lives and experiences and did not find them to be congruent. The only expectation that American teen films seem to have instilled in these participants was that there would be numerous parties to attend once beginning high school, something that they were disappointed to find was not true of their English school experience. Education was recognised as a chance for these girls to have independent futures (Gordon *et al.*, 2008) and receive financial and social gains, so they resisted the idea of boys being worth substantial amounts of their attention and effort. Also, as identified by Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005), girls have historically been expected to place romantic love above friendship, replacing platonic friends when

a romantic partner was found. However, girls, including those taking part in this research, are now placing higher value on their female friends, and working to maintain those relationships. The 18-year-old Maple Academy group did not enjoy films in which girls fought over a boy, jokingly saying, "…friends don't fight over boys, there's so much better things to fight over." They were also frustrated with Bella from *Twilight* "ditching all her friends" in favor of her love interest. The participants considered these films unrealistic and not reflective of their own lives and desires. This attitude is far from the reputation of 'boy crazy' teen girls who place the search for romance above all else (Valenti, 2007).

The lack of interest in viewing on-screen romantic relationships also seems to refute the idea that girls are at risk of becoming sexualised and developing an early interest in intimate relationships through the prevalence of sexual media images (Brown *et al.*, 2006; Brown and L'Engle, 2009; Katsulis *et al.*, 2013; Renold and Ringrose, 2013). These findings may, of course, reflect a discomfort in speaking about such things in a group, or indicate that participants felt that they already had the information they required regarding romantic and sexual relationships and thus were no longer actively looking to learn anything new from this type of film. Alternatively, their understanding of films as purely fictional prevented the girls from reading them as informational, and therefore they did not select them for this reason. Another example of their apparent disinterest comes from Naomi and her group from Maple Academy.

ABH	How do you feel about teenage films, films that are made specifically for people your age, that are marketed to you?
Rose	I think –
Naomi	Cringey
Rose	Yeah, I think they're really cringey
Group	[laughter]
ABH	Cringey how? Because they're predictable or?
Kate	Um, a bit pathetic
Rose	Yeah, like if they're like aimed at girls our age they're always about –
Sally	Horrible
Naomi	Soppy, like
Group	Yeah [laughter]
Rose	She's fallen in love with someone, it's –
Naomi	She's fallen in love with a vampire, that's always what it is
Group	[laughter]
Rose	Or a werewolf

Naomi	Someone she can't be with because they're, like, but it's like, it's not like real life because it's so soppy and stupid

This group refers to the dominance of vampire and werewolf plotlines at the time of the focus groups; many of these being adapted from young adult (YA) books, featuring teen girl characters and aimed at that audience. Agreeing that romance in films was unrealistic, a 16-year-old Willow Academy group shared their opinion of teen films, adding 'cheesy' to the 'cringey' and 'soppy' judgments of the Maple Academy group.

ABH	What about plots of teen films, they're all set in high schools and what do you think, do you watch them?
Alison	I don't like them, no
Laura	No, if it's a strong enough like story line to watch
Group	Mmm, yeah
ABH	Were they something that you ever watched? Did you watch them when you were younger?
Group	No
ABH	No … they're not something that you've ever been interested in?
Group	No
Laura	No, because usually when like someone says 'oh it's like a teen, it's aimed at teenagers', I usually think, well, it's going to have like, romance or something in there and I just don't like that as a part of the plot I just, I just, just don't really
Alison	It's the way
Laura	It could be, like, shown as well because like, generally in teenage movies, well what they, like aim of teenage movies it could be, like, proper cheesy the way they do it
Group	Mmm
ABH	Yeah, that's the word that always comes out when I ask about teenage films, cheesy
Group	[Laughter] Cheesy, cheesy
Alison	Yeah, cheesy
Laura	It's just kind of too, too ideal, like it's too perfect to find love and it's just not something that I find interesting as a plot, like as a storyline it's just kind of like…
Alison	It's not realistic either
Group	No [talking over]
Laura	I've seen it many times before

Laura's expectation that teen films will contain unrealistic romance is agreed upon by the rest of the group. Her lack of interest in watching romantic films meant that she did not choose to view them as the romantic plotlines were boring

and repetitive but shows that she did have experience in viewing these films, having “seen it all before”. These girls did not think relationships portrayed on screen were romantic in a realistic way at this stage in their lives. This viewpoint reflects the societal shift in ideas of romance and love, whereby love have been demystified (Dowd and Pallotta, 2000) and relationships are more rationally assessed for compatibility in a wide range of areas, as opposed to the idealistic happiness often shown in films (ibid.,; Koontz, Norman and Okorie, 2019).

However, teen films do not seem to have made this shift in the understanding and decentring of romance and were therefore decoded by the girls in oppositional ways as not credible. Joanna and Carol agreed that the presentation of relationships in films was one of perfection not to be expected in real life. The girls were not being entertained or finding role modelling in the romance they viewed in films (in large part because they chose not to view it at all) and therefore were not cultivating unrealistic expectations (Galloway, Engstrom and Emmers-Sommer, 2015) or using the material to inform their gendered selves (Koontz, Norman and Okorie, 2019). Instead, this under-researched age group were rejecting unrealistic expectations, such as centralising a boy in their lives above the education and friends, and the passive behaviour of female characters to which they did not subscribe. Greenwood and Long (2015, p. 627) suggest that the MPM

> … leaves open the possibility that media-derived exemplars of success, romance, and conflict resolution may impact teens in ways they may not always be aware of, via more subtle processes such as priming, framing, or the cultivation of media norms through repeated and frequent exposure.

While prior research understands these exemplars to influence girls toward desiring love and romance, for my participants teen film romance has worked in the opposite way, informing and cementing the view that romance is over-rated and distracting. Their age may also have influenced these ideas, as they would soon be moving on from high school into more adult situations and their considerations of motherhood suggest that they had mentally moved from considering ‘boyfriends’ to ‘partners’.

A group of 16-year-olds from Willow Academy expanded on the perceived lack of accurate romantic relationships during their discussion of the film *The Notebook* (2004). The film depicts an elderly man telling a love story to an elderly woman; the story is enacted in flashbacks. It transpires that the story is their own, but as the woman has Alzheimer's disease, she does not remember their history. There are many passionate moments, both of physical attraction and raised tempers, and for the girls, it was the combination of these behaviours in particular which made it unrealistic. Alison commented "…I thought it was, like, a good story, just didn't think it was romantic." This shows a NTAA selectivity during exposure, as she chooses to ignore some messages of the film while enjoying others.

A Willow Academy group was also outspoken in their opinions of the film. Like Alison, Samantha said that she enjoyed the film but that it was not realistic. The girls are shown clearly here to be able to be entertained without being influenced in behaviour or beliefs. They were able to find pleasure in the elements they found entertaining while negotiating a reading that compared what they saw to their own lived realities and understandings of romance. From a MPM perspective, they interacted with the film content, but after evaluating and interpreting its content based on their lived experiences they did not chose to apply, appropriate or integrate anything they viewed into their identity or lives. The wholesale dismissal of romantic ideas from films can be classified by the NTAA as postexposure utility wherein the girls talk about and reflect on what they have seen and then collectively agree to reject it.

This group went on to discuss the elements of the film that they found to be the most unbelievable.

ABH	Everyone goes on about what a romantic film it is
Samantha	I do like the film, I love it, but it's so like –
Joanna	It's like play fighting and stuff and like when they're arguing he just, like, kisses her
Samantha	Yeah
Samantha	That wouldn't happen though, like if you were, like, proper like foaming at your boyfriend, like a proper and he kissed you, you'd be like get off
Joanna	Yeah

Samantha	Like it doesn't work, like, relationships don't work in films like they do in real life
Joanna	Yeah, definitely not, I woulda went nuts
Samantha	I would have probably hit them
Group	[laughter]
Samantha	Get off us
ABH	But she does hit him several times
Joanna	Yeah, but then he kisses her and then they end up just getting with each other
Group	[laughter]
Joanna	They just forget everything

Their reading of these scenes may be based on a value judgement of how they felt they would behave in such a situation. The type of relationship shown in the film dos reflect how some couples interact but is not something that the girls understood or subscribed to, having not experienced it themselves. Unlike the undergraduates in Galloway, Engstrom and Emmers-Sommer's (2015) qualitative cultivation theory research, the Willow Academy group did not see love as 'conquering all' or have idealistic ideas about romance. In addition to the discussed lack of realism, the girls also did not view it as romantic that the female character's anger is defused physically rather than respected and heard. Instead, they reflected Hefner and Wilson's (2013) qualitative findings from a study of American university students, which showed participants not adopting the views on romance repeatedly seen on screen. A lack of long-term media effects from the viewing of romantic plots was also found in a quantitative questionnaire based study of 11 to 14-year-old Belgian girls (Driesmans, Vandenbosch and Eggermont, 2016), suggesting that the influence of films on girls' romantic ideas occurs far less frequently than has been suggested.

Being unapologetic fans of Disney films, participants at Maple Academy discussed the film *Frozen* (2013) which has been understood to provide a more modern depiction of Disney princesses, and framed in academic analysis as a feminist story (Wilde, 2014; Ames and Burcon, 2016a). The group described the plot line of Anna falling in love with Hans at their first meeting as unrealistic. This group shared with the Willow Academy group the understanding that films do not portray realistic romantic relationships. Girls appeared media literate, possessing the necessary skill to either protect oneself from media messages or empower participation in a mediated world (Livingstone *et al.*, 2014). The

consensus between schools further shows that "…media literacy cannot be defined in isolation from either the immediate or the wider social contexts in which it is situated… people do not create meaning individually but through their participation in interpretive communities..." (ibid. 2014, p. 215) Thus, the participants may have been making oppositional and negotiated readings of teen and romantic films not only in relation to their own beliefs and understandings, but in the accepted form of their peers.

In the following exchange, two girls from the Maple Academy group discuss Anna's sister Elsa's unease about Anna's decision to get married to someone she has only just met.

ABH	What is it about that film that makes it so good?
Participant	When Hans turns out to be evil
Participant	Yeah, that, ohhhh
Group	Yeah
Participant	It's worst
Participant	And then you watch it again and you're not, like, this isn't cute
Participant	And also when Elsa's like, you don't, you've known him for like five minutes
Group	Yeah
Participant	Thank you!
Participant	I really like that, yeah
Participant	The voice of reason
Group	Yeah
Participant	But I didn't…
ABH	You found that a positive thing?
Group	Yeah
Participant	I think like…
ABH	There was some comment that it was teaching young girls not ever to trust men
Participant	Well that's fair!
Group	[laughter and talking over] there's nothing wrong with that, I think that it is…
ABH	Not after five minutes anyway
Group	Yeah
Participant	No, exactly it's like why it is … reality
Participant	If you've known them for five minutes, you're not in love with them and I think that's an important message
Group	[laughter]

The good-humoured discussion amongst this group of close friends revealed that the girls knew and understood the romantic tropes within Disney films (Hefner

and Wilson, 2013). They were also able to negotiate what they viewed and its relation to their values, ideas of independence, and a view of romance they considered to be more realistic than love at first sight. The university-aged participants in Koontz, Norman and Okorie's (2019) interview based research, which utilised thematic grounded analysis, held similar viewpoints. Romanticised princess plots were seen as unrealistic by both their participants and the older teen girls in my research. While not admitting that they were swayed by such plots, the girls did allow for third person effects, wherein other viewers would be more influenced than themselves (Perloff, 1999). This is shown particularly by Jenny's comment about what she believed the film might teach other viewers, "if you've known them for five minutes, you're not in love with them and I think that's an important message." This statement illustrates her ability to form a rebuttal and negotiated reading, assuming others would have a similar NTAA postexposure utility toward the film and this message.

As will be shown in the next section, the exhibition of personal autonomy and independence were essential requirements for female film characters that the participants wished to view. Although discussing quite different genres, the girls were able to clearly articulate their dislike of what they considered unrealistic romantic relationships. However, there was no indication that they were seeking pleasure and entertainment from viewing romantic films at that time. Although one participant stated that she avoided films with romance as the central plot, Chapter 5 revealed that romantic comedies were viewed at home by participants. Their views on the content of these films would suggest that they watched romantic films in a distracted manner afforded by the predictability of their plotlines. The dissonance between a disinterest in romance and an expectation of motherhood is significant. The following section investigates what the participants expected from future partnerships.

8.2.2 A Desire for Independence

Two groups at Maple Academy spoke of wanting to see film relationships where women kept their independence rather than changing themselves and having to rely on men to support them. This can be seen as projecting a postfeminist idea of relationships and economic independence (Harris, 2004b; Tasker and Negra,

2007; Chatman, 2015; Sørensen, 2017), alongside the neoliberal ideal that people are responsible for their own informed choices regarding their life trajectory (Cronin, 2000; Ells, 2003; Chen, 2013; Budgeon, 2015). It also corresponds with the views expressed by Willow Academy participants in the previous chapter, who said that they did not wish to rely on their future husbands financially. A Maple Academy group spoke of the behaviour they would like to see female characters exhibit.

Speaker	
ABH	You want to see them doing different jobs or acting in different ways or?
Naomi	Being more like, women usually start off, like, really independent in films and then they meet a man and ruin it and get all like soppy and, like, dependent and stuff but…
Kate	Have you seen *The Wedding Planner*?
Naomi	No
Kate	Ugh, J Lo's in it and she starts like that and then she just ruins it

The Wedding Planner (2001) shows an independent woman who is respected in her career. When she falls in love with a man whose wedding she has been hired to plan, she risks her employment, loses her professionalism and becomes generally befuddled. The film features a successful woman surrendering her independence and placing romance at the forefront of her life.

Another Jennifer Lopez (J Lo) romantic comedy, *The Back-up Plan* (2010), was criticised for similar reasons by another group at Maple Academy.

Speaker	
Ellie	And like *The Back-up Plan*, have you seen that one? That's like, focused on her, but he still manages to become, like, a very influential like character in it and like –
ABH	Is that the Jennifer Lopez one?
Ellie	Yeah, I don't know who the man is but
ABH	He's the bloke from *Hawaii Five-O*
Ellie	Yeah it was quite controversial when I watched it 'cause it was like, she had this plan and the man ruined it
Rae	He just kind of came along, yeah
Ellie	Yeah, and it's like, why did the man need to, like, I know that there wouldn't have been a movie without it but why did the man need to be in the movie, why couldn't she have just like managed by herself like she was planning to do? Why couldn't they have just

shown the, like, the movie of how she got on with it herself

The plan they are referring to is to have a baby through artificial insemination as a single parent, which is enacted at the very start of the film. Lopez's character is financially secure with her own business and apartment, and ready to take on the responsibility of motherhood alone, having not found a romantic partner. Directly after the procedure, she meets a man and they fall in love. Much of the action and comedy revolve around how he feels about her pregnancy and how her life changes to accommodate him within her motherhood plans. The girls from this group were annoyed that the film presented an idea that all mothers required a partner.

Lizzie	It's annoying
Rae	Yeah, because there's loads of women that don't
Ellie	Even if you don't have a father at the beginning [of a film], there will be one by the time –
Lizzie	That's not true, it's so annoying

The participants understood the tropes and plots of romantic films, but were not able to suspend disbelief when it came to issues such as this that clashed with their personal views. Most of the girls highly admired independence as a quality of film characters. It was not the family unit in its entirety that the girls wished to be independent of, however, as a male partner was always referred to in their plans. Independence, to them, seemed instead to mean not being reliant on a man financially, and being able to make their own life decisions without a romantic partner restricting or redirecting them. Again, they capably decoded patriarchal ideas within films through involvement and utility during exposure, and then rejected them as not fitting into their self-projects through their postexposure involvement and utility. The desire to have a partner with whom they share parenting and financial responsibility is distinct from any need to have a partner as a symbol of achievement, fulfilment or financial support.

Once again, choice and agency were the desired plot elements the girls wished to see reflected on the screen, These fit with their postfeminist and neoliberal understandings and planning for their future lives, as displayed in their discussions and the prior analysis chapters. Although expecting to have a partner

of some kind, their lives and plans were not dependent on it, as Rae shows when she says that not all women have partners to raise children with. They were able to identify and question patriarchal gender roles repeated by films and understand them as unrealistic. Van Damme and Biltereyst (2013) propose that girls may compare their own relationships to screen media; however, this was only seen in a single example in this research when Joanna from Willow Academy stated that it was reassuring to assess her own relationship as better than that from a film. While Steele (2001) suggests that film plays a common role in teenagers' lives by supplying information on societal values for their consideration, the focus group participants decoded these messages in oppositional ways, finding them unrealistic, unachievable and undesirable.

To summarise, the general impression which emerges from the discussion of romance and relationships in films is that many of these girls focused on individual goals rather than those relating to romantic partnerships. McRobbie (2015, p. 15) posits that in neoliberal times "[t]he search for a rewarding career and a boyfriend stand as precursors to perfection", suggesting that both goals might be part of teen girls' self-projects. However, although there were mentions of future partners during discussions of both career and motherhood, their acquisition was not central to any of the projects discussed. Clarifying this, the 18-year-old girls from Maple Academy, when asked whether finding a man was important in their future, replied no but "if he comes along, great". Girls of all ages presented themselves as able to recognise negative stereotypical representations of romance and did not feel compelled to copy or strive to attain anything they saw, refuting the idea they were "highly impressionable" (Franiuk and Scherr, 2013, p. 14) to romance in films. However, it is not known whether their friendship group conversations outside of the focus groups revolved around boys and dating, meaning that they understood and were trying to avoid the stereotypical idea of teen girls as boy obsessed. There seemed to be little to no gratification sought or obtained from viewing romantic films, and teen films were particularly vilified and perhaps thought to be patronising as participants did not respect the way teen girls were presented within them. At times, gratification also came from making fun of these films and agreeing with their peers' opinions, the consensus that they were in bad taste suggesting that their dislike meant they had good taste in films. The participants were not fans of these plots which they

considered unrealistic, and were able to decode, analyse, explain and thus resist what they considered wrong with them – rather than being prompted to create or design their self-projects to prioritise the search for a romantic partner.

8.3 Expressions of Femininity

Focus group questions further investigated how participants understood and negotiated ideas of femininity in films. Discussions included diverse female representations on screen and participants' feelings and negotiations of what they saw. Of particular interest was whether the images prompted them to form or amend self-projects of appearance. The linking of femininity to consumerism, which underpins dominant neoliberal discourse around popular cultural representations of femininity, presents femininity as achievable through the purchasing of correct items (Evans and Riley, 2013; Jackson, Vares and Gill, 2013). Whether or not they wished to consume the items shown, the girls displayed an understanding of the cultural expectation linked to the consumption of feminine goods. They had the required knowledge of appropriate femininity, allowing them to understand monetarily successful femininity (Riley, Evans and Mackiewicz, 2016) as others who would be using the knowledge to judge them. Media coverage of celebrities' bodies is explained by Heaney and Redmond (2016) to set appropriate standards and encourage and position the audience to judge. This judgement may extend through to the characters they portray and whether their appearance is realistic or attainable. The situations characters are shown in, and the girls' knowledge of the physical, emotional, financial and time costs of reaching celebrity beauty standards, also inform judgement. This is not to say that the girls did not gain gratification through enjoying depictions of femininity or did not appreciate what they saw. Rather, it displays their ability to understand and decode these images for what they are, fictional depictions intended for entertainment, rather than as examples they feel expected to follow in their day to day lives.

Physical appearance and the required effort to create and maintain it did not appear a priority within any of the girls' lives, although it may be more influential than they were willing to share in the focus groups. While the construction of the feminine self and the consumerism involved has been presented as empowering

(Groeneveld, 2009), admitting influence could potentially show girls as lacking in autonomy rather than making informed choices (Budgeon, 2015). The following discussion shows these older teen girls were able to decode the signs that may direct girls and women towards the socially expected feminine appearance, and to negotiate their reading through their cultural location and experiences of being 16 to 18-year-old students in rural England. They decided whether they held any interest in using what they viewed to strive for these ideals, and what gratifications they wanted and obtained from film femininity.

8.3.1 Femininity in Films

Film portrayals of an ideal feminine body seemed not to be influential to the participants' embodied identities. Budgeon (2003, p. 43) explains, from interviews with young women regarding the production of their identities and self-narratives, that although media images of the 'perfect' body type caused them to feel badly about their bodies, "…the young women were able to negotiate these discursive constructions and their effects in a way that allowed for strategies of resistance…" The focus groups similarly understood the messages they were receiving and the possibility of pressure but, although feeling badly when comparing themselves to these representations, they seemed able to find ways to distance themselves and resist. The girls' focus was primarily on the presentation of femininity, revealing a postfeminist and third-wave feminist attitude to the cultural and commercial acts of femininity, or commodity feminism as incorporated within girlie feminism where feminine practices and appearances are considered a personal choice and undertaken for enjoyment rather than political purposes. This interest in feminine displays has been analysed by a range of scholars (for example Gillis, Howie and Munford, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Jackson, Vares and Gill, 2013; Genz, 2015) as a reassurance, for both men and women, that women can be sexually attractive whilst behaving in feminist ways and achieving career success through enacting a postfeminist masquerade (McRobbie, 2007). The participants found pleasure and enjoyment in understanding how these feminine displays were achieved, rather than trying to replicate them or resisting them outright.

Assessment of the physical bodies in films was seen in a group from Maple Academy who said that they did not compare themselves physically to the characters they saw.

ABH	So do you every compare yourself to the women you see in films?
Lizzie	No
Ellie	Nah
Rae	No
Nora	Not really
Lizzie	I think they're too much, I dunno, I guess sometimes it's a bit too much high expectations
Ellie	And materialistic sometimes
Group	Yeah
Lizzie	Totally

Lizzie revealed that she had judged what she had seen to not be personally achievable as it expected too much of her. Ellie expanded upon this, adding that the materialism shown in films was either beyond their capabilities or something they did not wish to display themselves. These negotiated readings enabled the girls to understand what the images meant in terms of whether they would be able, or willing, to attain them or to make and enact plans to do so. A Willow Academy group similarly displayed their media literacy by showing a clear understanding of the societal expectation that girls would want to copy what they see. They were able to discuss the appearance of an actress, of a similar age to them, without it having any impact on their lives beyond either appreciating or disliking her.

ABH	And how does comparing sort of the way they look to yourself how does that make you feel?
Participant	I think, like, if you like really, like, you know, and they have, like Bella Thorn or whatever in *The Duff* –
Group	[murmuring]
Participant	Like when she's, like, she's our age and she's, like, got such a nice figure, but at the same time it wouldn't like make us go… ahhh…I wouldn't leave the cinema and be like, 'I'm going on a diet to get that'
Participant	Yeah, Bella Thorn's like a nice [unintelligible]
Participant	Ahh, but isn't she bonny
Participant	Yeah, oh well
Group	[laughter]
Participant	I hate Bella Thorn
	…
ABH	So you notice it and you compare it, and you think that would be nice, but you don't actually do anything about it?

Group	Yeah
Participant	I don’t, like
Participant	I think people take it over the top when people, like adults are always like, ahh children like, they’ll watch it and they’re like gonna be like, ‘aww I wanna be like them, I’m going to diet’. It’s like no, you do notice that like, ahh I wish I looked like that, but you’re not like, ‘I’m going to go diet now’, like, no
Group	Yeah
ABH	It’s never, not even when you were younger, it never hit you like that that you actually wanted to do something?
Group	No, not really
Participant	I think it did, Disney princesses, you would want to be like a Disney princess

Further explanations of girls finding influence in femininity on screen are offered by Hoffner and Buchanan (2005, p. 331) in their research with female and male young adults via questionnaire.

> ... physical appearance was related to wishful identification, particularly for girls. In fact, Hoffner found that attractiveness was the only predictor of girls’ wishful identification with female characters. This outcome may have been partially due to differences in the girls who selected female versus male favorites but may also reflect gender differences in television portrayals. Specifically, different traits tend to be emphasized or rewarded for males and females, with men rewarded more often for assertiveness and achievement and women rewarded more often for having an attractive, youthful appearance...

As shown, the participants understood these screen gender roles and any wishful identification which occurred for the participants was secondary to their admiration of female characters who displayed the ‘masculine’ traits referred to by Hoffner and Buchanan. They also differed from these findings as they selected male characters more often than female as favourites. The participants projected themselves as knowledgeable and knowing through their scepticism and cynicism, conveying the notion that they refused to identify with what they viewed and thus engaged in oppositional, or individualised, readings.

It is argued that “…women who are heavy viewers of thin-ideal media may develop the attitude that thinness is socially desirable, experience greater body dissatisfaction, and engage in weight loss behaviors.” (Van Vonderen and Kinnally, 2012). Although the Willow Academy group did notice and compare

themselves to the bodies they saw on screen and conceded that it caused some dissatisfaction about their own bodies, they firmly denied acting towards changing themselves physically. However, it is again possible that they were not willing to discuss any action they may have undertaken within a focus group or that they may denied any such media influence in an attempt to maintain their autonomy. They presented themselves as focused on deconstructing images in films to consider whether there was anything personally desirable, necessary or achievable. A NTAA selectivity during exposure meant that they would only give their attention to messages that they were interested in and could ignore the rest. Their post-exposure involvement and utility further allowed them to decide that, although some messages might have affected how they felt about themselves, they were not going to take any action in response to this feeling. The participants were seen to focus on aspects of filmic texts that related most closely to their interests and would provide them with information; entertainment; pleasure; inspiration; advice; and skills for personal goal setting and future use.

The participants' life situations and understandings of appropriate femininity reassured them that there was no present requirement in their lives for them to emulate what they viewed. If the expectation for beauty was too high, it could be dismissed as not worth attempting to strive for. Negotiated readings of female characters in this manner allowed the avoidance of pressure. Alternatively, the girls avoided pressure that would clash with the expressions of independence and required self-confidence as projected by 'love your body' discourses (Gill and Elias, 2014; Gill and Orgad, 2015, 2017; Favaro, 2017). The evidence suggests that the girls display a wide-ranging active media literacy through their ability to not only decode, but to apply the knowledge in personal and social contexts (Livingstone *et al.*, 2014). These contexts also influence the decoding and outcomes forming the circular model found in the MPM.

Kate and Sally from Maple Academy discussed the improbability of maintaining a perfect appearance in certain film situations:

ABH	Do you ever compare yourself then to anyone that you see on screen, or compare your life to theirs or the way you look to them or anything?
Kate	I think maybe appearance, yeah

ABH	And how does that make you feel?
Kate	Dunno, they're like so, like, perfect and obviously because they're in a movie but –
Sally	The make-up as well, the make-up always seems to be really good, even in, like, a fighting scene. It wouldn't stay like that
ABH	They're not sweating
Sally	No, they're not

Kate's prediction that actresses in films will always look "perfect" reveals the expectation and requirement of characters to exhibit an elevated level of attractiveness, as well as the clear understanding that what she views is contrived. However, there are limits for the girls, even within fictional settings, as to what is acceptable in terms of appearance. Sally finds it too much to expect her to suspend disbelief that characters could keep groomed appearances during activities such as fighting, and is jarred out of immersion when this occurs. 16-year-old participants from Maple Academy also spoke negatively about unrealistic beauty standards within film situations that would be logistically impossible.

ABH	How does that make you feel?
Group	Awful, poo, just poo
Group	[talking over]
Participant	I'll sit there and be like, what is this and then my dad gets the back end of that, like he'll be listening to me kicking off about *Pretty Little Liars* and he's like, what and he'll be like, yeah. And I'll be like, they're in the wild, why has she got shaved armpits, why is she wearing eyeliner…There is no water, but she's got eyeliner
Participant	That is really irritating with some, like, dystopia film and it's like the zombie apocalypse and they're, like, come to mud and whatever but they've still got eyeliner and they've still got their hair and they've still got their shaved legs or something and I'm thinking it's the zombie apocalypse, they're not going to spend like half an hour sitting in the bathtub shaving their legs
Group	No, no
Participant	*Jurassic World*, she runs in heels, how?
Participant	How?
Group	Yeah
Participant	I would take them off and then run

The negative feelings toward their appearance combined with the skills and knowledge to critique the images is shown by Gill's (2012) research with 10 to

13-year-old girls to be something girls can do from a pre-teen age. As Gill assesses, however, "…girls' ability to produce subtle and sometimes angry 'decodings' of media content did not seem in any way to displace alternative, powerful responses to what they saw, read and heard." (ibid., p. 740) The unrealistic situations the characters were in allowed the girls to disregard them as possible. Lockwood and Kunda ((1997) explain that unobtainable role models are discouraging and demoralising, which is reflected in the participants' feeling "poo" when comparing themselves to actresses, but is mitigated by their oppositional reading of maintaining beauty standards in such situations as impossible.

While corroborating Retallack, Ringrose and Lawrence's (2016, p. 88) statement that "…girls are negotiating these issues in complex ways that need to be demonstrated through empirical research", these girls did not openly express the same feelings of pressure as did the younger participants or those in Carey, Donaghue and Broderick's (2010) study of 14 to-15-year-old Australian participants who "…saw appearance as 'definitely' important in their school, and noted that this led to pressures to diet in order to 'fit in'. Appearance and weight were seen to contribute to popularity, with 'looking good' thought to equal peer acceptance, and "[t]he appearance ideals reflected in fashion and celebrity news media were incorporated into the local appearance culture of the school…" (ibid., p. 311) This highlights the differences between age groups through the potential growth of media literacy and sense of self as girls grow older. This is further supported by the university-age participants in Van Donderen and Kinnally's (2012, p. 52) research among whom "…no significant link was observed between media exposure or media comparison and body dissatisfaction."

The portrayal of hairless bodies and flawless makeup in the situations mentioned imply that it is natural and always expected for women to look groomed and maintain beauty standards no matter what the circumstances. In addition to being, and remaining, unnaturally well groomed, bodies themselves were understood to be fantastical. Rae from the same group as Lizzie and Nora, who saw expectations for feminine appearance in films being too high, said that "…you never see female actresses with fat rolls". Using mainly gestures and body movements, the

group expanded together that actresses prevented slumping or sitting in ways which allowed their stomachs to push out. They described and enacted the contortions to find positions where their stomachs would appear to be flat; “They’re like, they do that and they’re like, they’re sitting like this but they’re doing that”. Again, this confirms that the girls were able to remember that what they were viewing was constructed rather than a reflection of reality. They understood the methods used to create these appearances, without having the desire to copy it. There is no negotiation with these images; they decode and understand them and then reject them completely as unnatural and only something that occurs on screen. There was also gratification from the enjoyment of sharing this knowledge and understanding with each other socially, confirming that they were all able to see beyond the façade and not be taken in by what they viewed. The differences between their own bodily experiences and those shown in films was also commented on by a Willow Academy group:

ABH	So looks-wise, they’re not representational of the world
Group	Yeah
Samantha	They’re always a lot more mature as well
Joanna	Even the girls as well though, they’re like, like the main ones especially are always, like, these like, skinny like –
Samantha	They never have like spots or greasy hair and stuff
Joanna	And their make-up’s always right and it’s like, who does that for school every day?
Samantha	It’s not like normal, like nobody’s ever wearing joggers and stuff
Group	Yeah

The girls did not find themselves lacking compared to what they saw on screen but displayed attitudes similar to those explored in Milke’s (1999) quantitative and interview-based research on the impact of mass media beauty images on girls’ self-concepts, undertaken with 14 to 16-year-olds. Those participants described the gap between film representations and reality to be unrealistic and did not find media images to be important in their lives. My participants judged film portrayals as lacking, and through this active negotiated reading they were able to distance what they saw from their daily lives. This contradiction is not unusual. Jackson (2016) notes from her work with pre-teen girls that although they wished to meet the physical standards portrayed in media, they were able to negotiate their readings by understanding that images were unrealistic. Thus these girls

"…embodied self-understandings in relation to media representations as multi-layered and irreducible to linear 'media effects'" (p. 69). Although perhaps wishing to match standards shown, there was again no action taken to make this happen as it did not reflect their physical experiences at this stage of their lives.

Emily, Jessica and Angie from Maple Academy spoke of the differences between their daily clothing choices and those shown in films. Whereas the Willow Academy uniform was traditional and worn across all year groups, the Maple Academy Sixth Form dress-code required only specific colours be worn, which allowed some degree of personal expression. The group commented on teen girls' clothing in films.

Emily	They wear different clothes every day
Jessica	Yes
Emily	Like, I'm not gonna lie, I've worn these jeans like four days in a row
Jessica	Same
Group	[laughter]
Angie	Same
Emily	Who has the wardrobe space for a different outfit every single day?

As with the Willow Academy girls' unwillingness to spend hours on their hair and makeup for school, these girls preferred to focus on other things that they found more important and fun than appearance, such as schoolwork and friendships (as well as having more time to sleep and relax). In Chapter 6, girls spoke of coming home tired from school; living rurally involved long journeys to school for some girls, so they would not wish to expand the length of their day by spending lengthy periods of time on their appearance. Also at play here is the knowledge that they would not be judged negatively for wearing the same clothing repeatedly, as their friends did the same. There was no indication that they felt pressured to present themselves in a particular way due to societal monitoring, surveillance or disciplining (Gill, 2007a), either by peers or adults.

The focus groups agreed that comfort was more important than fashion when it came to dressing for school and felt comfortable enough to both wear the same clothes "four days in a row" and to admit it, confident that they were not alone. This supports the understanding that "…girls look to their peers to secure

appropriate behaviour and looks.” (Winch, 2015, p. 231) In this study, the appropriate behaviour was not influenced by media texts, but specific to their situation and life stage, meaning that although they might have been monitoring each other they were also supported, rather than negatively influenced, by peers in presenting themselves to the correct standard (Carey, Donaghue and Broderick, 2010). Although impacted by school rules and fashion, which limited their choices as to what was available, they did not all look the same as Gill (2007a) suggests younger teen girls do. Gill expands upon this when arguing that neoliberalism and postfeminism present girls as being able to choose freely and that beauty can lead to empowerment. However, Duits and van Zoonen (2007) argue that girls actually display diversity in their appearance and that the assumption that girls are forced to appear a certain way (by patriarchy, consumerism or religion) silences them and ignores their autonomy. Whether autonomously chosen or not, appearance is a central element of identity construction within neoliberalism and postfeminism and the participants supported each other in finding ways in which to avert external pressure.

At the time of the focus groups, all the girls seemed to be focusing on the modes and methods of achieving femininity through consumption and collection of skills rather than actual bodily work. Undertaking appropriate acts and the acquisition of skills (Butler, 1986) were considered worth time and effort. However, films were not an area of the media to which they specifically looked for information in this area. Further reasons for the lack of influential representations emerged from the same Maple Academy group, who discussed adult actors and actresses portraying teenage characters and why this caused annoyance.

Belinda	Yeah, cause then you’ve got women who’s gone like fully through puberty being mastered femininity then they’re like acting our age
Nicole	That’s the thing about teen films is that they’re not our age
Belinda	Yeah, like if they had, like us in it, we look kind of, we’re at this point, whereas they’re like 25, plus they already know exactly how to do their hair, they’ve had it done professionally anyway, but like it’s not realistic, we can’t hit those standards. Like physically we couldn’t hit those standards
Nicole	And boys think that we’re always gonna, oh we can be like that, but it’s not, like, reality because it’s not

Group Yeah

Nicole's comment that boys think that girls can "be like" the female characters in films suggests a third person effects belief that boys are more influenced by film images than girls who deconstruct them. It also introduces the understanding that girls know that they are subject to the male gaze and are aware that they are being judged against these images. However, these girls do not seem to reflect the understanding that their "…worth and potential for happiness is strongly bound up in their ability to be found desirable by men" (Carey, Donaghue and Broderick, 2010, p. 300) as they were able to see that these comparisons were unfair through their knowledge of the professional skills involved. They once again exhibit a third-wave feminist understanding of personal choice, as previously discussed, where they are encouraged to "…engage with beauty and fashion in terms of playfulness and pleasure rather than coercion." (Elias, Gill and Scharff, 2017, p. 21) Decisions about, and work on, appearance were all about themselves: how they felt, how they judged their bodies and compared them, and what they wanted or felt they needed to do. As Stuart and Donaghue (2012, p. 99) argue, "...'choice' has become the bottom-line value of postfeminism; in this view, so long as a woman's actions or circumstances are considered a result of her own choices, no further analysis or problematization of them is welcome or warranted" but "the pleasure and gratifications gained from beauty practices should not preclude analysis". Potentially, the collection of information for future use could have been related to dating and getting a romantic partner, but the subject was never broached in these terms.

Although Duits and van Zoonen (2006, 2007) and Gill (2007a) focus on sexualisation and girls wearing clothing classified as 'porno chic', there was no mention in any focus group of sexual or sexy appearances; all of the discussion regarding femininity in films revolved around how unrealistic and unachievable it was, particularly when being compared to fully mature adult women. Additionally, although Harris (1999) suggests that girls discipline their bodies to look like adults, there is a lack of evidence leading to this understanding here: these girls very clearly understood that their bodies look the way they do due to puberty, which prevented them from being able to "physically hit those standards" as their bodies have not yet matured.

Interested in her phrasing, I asked Belinda to expand on her statement that the actresses in question had already "mastered femininity". My initial understanding was that she was referring to controlling and shaping the body after puberty in relation to projects of diet and exercise and behaving in a way that could be classified as feminine. However, Belinda expanded to explain that she meant the mastering of feminine skills.

ABH	Is that something that you've picked up from films, that there is a point where you master femininity, that you know how to be a woman and that's that done and onto the next thing?
Belinda	No, master it, like in the sense of like, their make-up. They go to school, it's eight in the morning and their make-up is like –
Nicole	I want their hair
Belinda	…perfect and I'm like, they must have spent like three hours on that, I'm not getting up at, like, five to do that

Belinda understood that time and professional training had gone into presenting adult actresses as teen girls. The girls wished to look that way – as shown by Nicole "wanting" their hair – but were not willing to invest the time required to achieve it; the effort was not seen as worth any reward that might be gained. While Jackson and Vares (2015a) describe their pre-teen participants as feeling hopeless and unable to achieve idealised celebrity appearance as they did not have access to required help and skills, these girls did not feel negatively about their lack of knowledge and not attaining the standards. Instead, they accepted that the skills were currently beyond them and understood that it was not unobtainable natural beauty which set celebrities apart (Coleman, 2008; Evans and Riley, 2013). Thus, the participants in this research decoded the messages about femininity presented in films and separated what they viewed from their own experiences and collected knowledge regarding hairstyling and makeup. Femininity was seen here, again, as something to be worked towards, mastered, rather than something women and girls just were. Work needs to be done to the body to make it appear, and remain appearing, appropriately feminine and to remain up to date with required skills.

Femininity, as a set of values and performative identity, was neither a natural state of being nor a constant, instead, it was a repeated performance (Walkerdine, 1989; Butler, 1993b). It was not, however, a performance that these girls were willing to invest time in at this stage of their lives. This refutes the idea that girls are easily misled and unaware of pressures from media or marketing strategies (Driscoll, 1999; Galloway, Engstrom and Emmers-Sommer, 2015; Vares and Jackson, 2015). Expressions of femininity and appearance for these girls are therefore not about being self-indulgent, empowered and making choices (Jackson and Vares, 2015a), but it can be seen as worthwhile spending time and effort acquiring skills and knowledge, which can involve utilising films for this gratification. In this area, there was evidence of a consensus across the schools and age groups around expectations of, and correct locations for, displays of femininity and how that differed from what the media constituted as appropriate femininity for their age group and the attention they were assumed to give it.

8.4 Conclusion

The selection of films to view and their interpretation (Oliver, 2002) were crucial to the participants' refusal to allow any impact beyond information gathering and entertainment. Films were shown to have tangential impact, supplying reassurances and knowledge that the girls used to inform their current understandings and plans in the areas of romantic relationships and feminine skills. Romantic partnerships were shown not to be high on any of the girls' agendas, and the critiques of romance on screen centred around unrealistic plots, particularly regarding loss of female identity within relationships. This was firmly rejected by all the girls, as was the idea that a woman's main goal should be to find a partner. They were specifically interested in characters who displayed and retained strength and independence, particularly when the character was shown to be following plans and achieving goals. Participants perceived this behaviour as encouraging and took it to indicate that if they persevered, they would reach their own goals. Specific examples of the NTAA and MPM in practice were provided to show how the girls were active in their decoding of films, creating both oppositional and negotiated readings, and how these were incorporated into their lives via various U&G.

The views and values conveyed in the focus group discussions suggest that the girls had decoded and were highly aware of unrealistic physical expectations and standards of femininity shown in films. Rather than attempting to mimic or strive to achieve these standards, they negotiated what they saw by referring to their milieu for guidance as to what beauty skills and knowledge they should incorporate into their daily lives, being active in their readings. Not wanting to undertake the work required was mitigated by not needing to present themselves in these specifically feminine ways in their daily school lives. There was no discussion of social activities besides going to the cinema and the participants did not comment on their appearance for such trips, so the analysis cannot extend into this area, although the exclusion of this topic may indicate that fashion and beauty were of low importance outside the school environment for at least some of the girls. They were seen to be seeking and gaining information and pleasure from collecting knowledge regarding skills and products needed for future use. There was an understanding that their lived reality would change once they were no longer A-Level students, and that they would encounter different expectations for appearance. Despite strong feelings about representations of girls and women in films, and the effort this cost them in working to distance themselves from expectations, they were still finding gratification through not only entertainment but the ability, both alone and in conversation with their friends, to deconstruct the appearance of actresses on screen, which was shown through the enjoyment they gained in these discussions.

Continuing to incorporate the themes and analytical tools discussed in this chapter, the following chapter investigates focus groups' interactions with two popular YA teen girl characters (and the actresses who portrayed them) in order to ascertain how participants related to portrayals of characters similar in age.

Chapter 9 Older Teen Girls' Interactions with Hermione Granger and Katniss Everdeen

9.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter investigated ways that films and film characters were decoded by the participants, and explored their active involvement in film viewing. Using focus group data and illustrative examples from the survey, this chapter narrows the focus to the two characters mentioned most frequently: Hermione Granger (Emma Watson) from the *Harry Potter* series and Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) from *The Hunger Games* series[9]. Such strong opinions regarding these characters and actresses were expressed in the early focus groups that later groups were specifically asked about their thoughts and perceptions. The film franchises were extremely popular during the fieldwork period, with the final films of each series having been recently released.

This chapter unpicks how the girls read and negotiated with these young adult (YA) teen girl characters (both of whom originated in books) and the actresses playing them. Applying lenses of postfeminism, girl power and identification, the girls' reactions are investigated to see how they interacted as an audience in conjunction with their current lived realities and life stage. Drawing on feminist thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2012; Nowell *et al.*, 2017) to analyse the films in relation to themes developed from the fieldwork data, this chapter also explores behaviours identified as influential or desirable, and considers the participants' understanding of role models. It further explores whether modelling or any other gratifications were sought or found in connection with these characters and what influence the interconnection between the character and actress may have had.

Although the participants claimed to have little interest in film characters or celebrities, focus group discussions revealed a sizable knowledge of both Hermione and Katniss and the actresses portraying them. The chapter discusses

[9] See Appendix N for book and film references.

the characters separately, beginning with a brief introduction to the films and characters themselves. It then moves on to discuss the participants' observations and feelings, investigating how they speak about and relate to these characters.

9.2 Hermione Granger and Emma Watson

Harry Potter is now enmeshed in popular culture forming "…part of the mediated childhoods of at least two successive generations of young people" (Zsubori and Das, 2018, p. 406) and every focus group knew and were able to discuss the series. The seven books, which have sold over 500 million copies worldwide (Rusli, 2017), were adapted into eight films, garnering box office receipts of over 6.9 billion US dollars worldwide (Rapp and Thakker, 2017). Despite the significant amount of academic writing on the series (more so the books than films), there has been a lack of research into audience interpretations within media studies (Das, 2013).

The series tells the story of the titular character and his two close friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, as they advance year by year (from age 11) through the English Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The series was designed to grow alongside its audience, with a book being released each year and (as with *The Hunger Games* series) it contains standard YA themes of an out-of-place protagonist with special powers who is combatting a villain and negotiating a heterosexual love interest (Garcia, 2013). During their tenure at the school, while learning various forms of magic – and simultaneously dealing with homework; bullies; first romantic relationships; competitions; and family relationships – the friendship trio fight to defeat a villainous wizard and his followers who threaten to take over the wizarding world. Each instalment covers a challenge the friends must overcome using their skills, knowledge and personality traits. There has been a great deal of academic writing about Hermione, portrayed by British actress Emma Watson in all eight films. Much of this research has focused on gender and varying feminisms within the series, utilising philosophy and celebrity studies theories (for example Heilman, 2003; Gladstein, 2004; Collins Smith, 2010; Parry-Giles, 2011). However, there is little fieldwork-based research endeavouring to understand how teen film audiences, and in particular older teen girl audiences, view the films.

Hermione is not a sidekick or romantic interest, but rather a central character in her own right (Bell, 2012) who participates in much of the action and is regularly seen saving her friends, and the day. She is a “Mudblood”, which in the story’s nomenclature is a derogatory term for a witch born to non-magical (or “Muggle”) parents. Aware, and often reminded by other students, that she lacks social status within the wizarding world, Hermione responds by being a voracious reader who works extremely hard and is top of the class. While not initially accepted as a friend by Harry and Ron, she develops into an equal member of the trio through hard work, intelligence and studying (Gladstein, 2004) and by displaying loyalty and bravery, character traits of the school house of Gryffindor to which the three belong (Dresang, 2002). Having undertaken the academic work – which the boys are shown as unwilling to do – her knowledge repeatedly saves them all. Although her educational achievements and attendance at Hogwarts aid her acceptance into the wizarding community, there are those for whom her background will always prevent her from cultural or social recognition. Hermione’s character can be viewed as an excellent example of a successful social and educational self-project. It is explained and analysed within this research to ascertain whether she reflects neoliberal and girl power ideals of self-confidence, strength, individuality and perseverance and conveys these ideas to the older teen girl audience by representing women within a male-dominated space (Mendick *et al.*, 2018).

Lips (2007) assesses role models and mentors as important in the guidance of academic aspirations, showing that attainment and success are not atypical for girls and women. Furthermore, Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) and Lockwood (2006) argue that wishful identification is more likely to occur with a character whose gender matches that of the audience member and who shares similar attitudes. Both Hermione and Watson were spoken of by my participants in terms of their intelligence and educational achievement. This influence is clear in the following excerpt wherein a Maple Academy group were asked their thoughts on Hermione.

ABH	Yeah, what do you think, you mentioned Angie, *Harry Potter*, what do you think of Hermione Granger?
Angie	I really like her, because like she’s like really engrossed in her education and not necessarily about guys and then she’s like, she’s independent and she

	doesn't like, listen to people, but then in the books she's better, but like overall it wasn't bad. Like Emma Watson did a good job I think, because she started off like "I'm nothing like her, I'm nothing like Hermione." But then by the end of it she's like, right, women's education, right, she's like really like politically into, like, feminism and everything, which I think is a good role model for girls
ABH	Do you think that Emma Watson herself is a good role model?
Group	Yeah, great
ABH	All of you were nodding at that one, ok
Belinda	Like, she didn't need to go and get an education because her job was set out for her as an actress but then she went
ABH	She didn't ever need to work again; she didn't need to go and get another role
Belinda	Yeah, but she still works, and she still went and got a full education, she didn't have to, but she still did, and I think that's really good

Growing up in the public eye while playing the character, Watson became entwined with Hermione for the audience (Gray, 2017) and, as such, these Maple Academy girls spoke of the actress and her role in the film interchangeably, often going back and forth in a single comment, as shown. Angie was impressed with Watson, inspired by Hermione, and judged that through embracing feminist ideas and gaining education Hermione was channelled into Watson's off-screen life, elevating her role model status. The girls judged education, independence and feminism to be worth emulating, particularly as girl role models in general, especially those exhibiting these ideals, are lacking in society. This links to Morgenroth, Ryan and Peters' (2015) argument that good female role models offer more than a single relatable element and if a role model is to be inspirational, they need to be seen as desirable, evoking admiration and identification.

Hermione and Watson were noted for their hard work; similarly, Allen *et al.*'s (2017) 15-year-old English participants recognised the importance of working hard to overcome barriers in their lives. My participants further showed an understanding of the neoliberal creation of the self whereby hard work is a requirement for success and achievements, (particularly in education), as is personal responsibility. Watson and Hermione were viewed as examples of

successful planning and focused work which led to them achieving their goals, thereby reinforcing an already held belief and understanding as well as supplying reassurance that the participants' own determination and work are worthwhile. The girls demonstrated knowledge about Watson through their ability to compare her off-screen life and personality to Hermione's. The fact that Watson got a university education despite not 'needing' to was seen by Belinda as admirable, showing respect for educational achievements in their own right rather than solely for career advancement. The girls appreciated that, like themselves, both Watson and Hermione placed education and learning as priorities. This exemplifies Duits and van Romondt Vis' (2009) understanding that the observation of celebrities successfully setting and reaching goals can aid viewers in developing and reaching their own ambitions.

The societal expectation that girls should do well in school (Gill, Esson and Yuen, 2016) combines with self-projects which are created and enacted for the attainment of qualifications (Giddens, 1991; Skeggs, 1997; Harris, 2004b). The girls understood that education was necessary for them to reach career goals. Therefore, seeing a character focus on her studies and achieve her goals (while also maintaining close friendships and being appropriately feminine) spoke to their own self-projects. Laura and Karen from Willow Academy discussed the desire to emulate Hermione.

Laura	… 'cause I remember when I was younger, I used to try and style myself on Hermione Granger
Group	[laughter]
Laura	I used to try and curl my hair like her because I thought she was, like, a good person
ABH	How old were you?
Laura	I must have been five, I was about five
ABH	Goodness, now I feel old!
Group	[laughter]
Laura	And I used to, um like, I wanted to look like her, so I had like, *Harry Potter* clothes and curled my hair like her, and I was, like, yeah
ABH	Do the two of you, Hermione?
Alison	The same things I was gonna say
Karen	Yeah
ABH	Yeah, that she was quite influential. Was she influential in terms of making you want to do work, schoolwork, to use your brain, or just the way she looked?

Karen	Yeah, like, I remember kind of thinking she was like, so intelligent… I was like, I wanna be that as well, like... I want to be like Hermione Granger in every aspect

The desire to copy ‘everything’ about Hermione did not occur during their teen years. Laura said she was “around five” (although she was most likely several years older). The shared reaction to Hermione and her influence on these three girls at a young age suggests that, for certain young girls, there may be some truth in the theory that positive role models in film can influence appearance aspirations and other ambitions (Jackson, 2016). Ames and Burcon (2016b) conclude that YA books also deliver messages to girls about beauty standards. The participants' interest also reflects Fisher's (1988) premise that role models are selected according to current ideas and interests. Thus, when they were younger, they wanted to have Hermione's hair and ‘be just like her’, while as older teens they admired her intelligence and work ethic in relation to school, as that was now their focus. This change in identification with age also reflects Hoffner and Buchanan's (2005, p. 342) analysis that “... women identified with female characters whom they perceived as successful, intelligent, attractive, and admired.” The developments in the influence Hermione had on these girls can be seen as cultivated rather than immediate (Livingstone and Das, 2010). As the girls had aged, their lived realities transformed in both form and impacts on their personalities and ideas of the future.

Karen and Laura were not unique in their childhood admiration for Hermione (Foster, 2012). In my survey, 11 out of 79 respondents stated that their most watched film was from the *Harry Potter* series. Four of the 11 answered the open question of what it was about the film(s) that made them want to view it multiple times by saying that the films (and books) had associations with their childhood. One respondent said “[I] grew up reading the books and watching the films and I fell in love with the story and characters” and another that the series had “childhood associations (comforting for me)”. This familiarity and nostalgia relating to films from their younger years offered comfort; by showing an emotional element to film selection, it speaks to motivation extending beyond entertainment value (Young, 2000; Bartsch, 2012). Although comfort is not one of the six gratifications sought from television viewing as listed by Rubin (2009), I

would suggest that the sense of comfort found within this film (and book) series is related to companionship (which *is* on Rubin's list), offered by characters that the participants felt had grown up alongside them and were easily relatable.

The influence Laura speaks of also combines appearance and personality – wanting to have the same hair because Hermione was a good person – and this admiration was still relevant to her at 16-years-old; having aged in the films, Hermione remained relevant to Laura's life stage. The ability of this franchise to grow alongside its readers and viewers through the aging of characters and the resulting experience at each stage makes it a successful example of the YA genre and has led to many more book series being published (Garcia, 2013), several of which were also produced as films. Preceding the earlier discussion, Laura made a statement about the strength she felt that Hermione projected.

ABH	What about Hermione Granger? Do you like Hermione?
Laura	I thought she was quite a strong character
ABH	I know it's a few years back, you were a bit younger
Group	Yeah
ABH	But she was one that stuck with other groups
Group	Yeah
ABH	That they still really liked her
Laura	I think she was quite a strong character because she kind of, she was the brains behind everything and like, she wasn't there for beauty, she was there for brains. She had like, a purpose, and she often got them out, like obviously Harry and Ron, she often got them out of like, tough situations, which was quite nice to see

Hermione can further be seen as a positive role model for promoting education and hard work, as well as being a 'loyal friend'. However, it is less clear whether these themes were influential to the girls or if they had intentionally appropriated what they viewed into their identities, as per the media practice model (MPM Steele and Brown, 1995). There may have been occurrences of utility and involvement during and after exposure whereby the girls used what they saw to reinforce their own ideas and reflect upon the incorporation of elements into their own lives as identified by Levy and Windahl, (1985) in their ninefold typology of audience activity (NTAA). Once again, the achievement is appreciated above

looks, but whether there was intentionality in seeking this by the participants is unclear.

Identification with Hermione came through the recognition that this character addressed them as girls by exhibiting characteristics they found important, such as strength and intelligence (Driscoll, 2002; Gill, 2007b), and which they hoped that they also possessed and exhibited. This praise, both for Hermione within the fictional world and Watson off-screen, highlighted both postfeminist and girl power traits. Hermione reflected their current life situation as teen girls in school and showed that the use of self-projects could lead to rewards and recognition. Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) found that children wishfully identified with male characters when it came to intelligence. They were unable to determine, however, whether the aspiration was for the mental ability of the character, or the association of achievement and success with intelligence. For these girls, it appears to be both elements that attracted them to Hermione. It was not just that she was smart and worked hard, but that these attributes were rewarded with success, both practical and in the form of recognition from adults for her educational achievements.

Another possible attraction to Hermione was that this character type is rarely seen in films aimed at teen girl audiences, as suggested by Laura's final statement above that Hermione's actions are "quite nice to see". In teen films the smart girl, usually presented as being unattractive, is transformed into a beauty for the sake of a romantic relationship. Laura interpreted Hermione as strong for utilising her knowledge and "brains" in appropriate times and ways but never her looks, as shown when she states that Hermione "wasn't there for beauty". While not wanting to emulate the character anymore, Laura still admired traits that Hermione showed. Laura's view of the characterisation in the films is compatible with that expressed by the character Ron Weasley, who views Hermione as the organiser of the group, stating that he and Harry would not survive without her help (Alexander, 2012). There is, therefore, no negotiation needed to decode Hermione's character or status as it is clearly explained and shown throughout the films.

This recognition of intelligence beyond school contexts is something that many girls from Maple Academy also wished for. Further evidence of their identification with both character and actress through their actions and ideals was shown when they discussed how Hermione and Watson had influenced them.

ABH	So on the same level as Jennifer Lawrence on being influential and influencing you to, to what?
Angie	To care about my education really
Anne	Yeah
Angie	Like I'd seen how well she did in this school and how much she was appreciated for being so smart and I'm just like, yeah, I want to be appreciated for being smart
Anne	Yeah
Nicole	And Emma Watson came from quite a poorish background, like she, I remember her saying her Christmas presents were books and writing materials and pens and pencils so that she could actually study, because like, her parents weren't like, they worked really hard for her education and that was quite a thing. So, she didn't come from like, loads of money, she came from like, our kind of background, just like, above working-class
Anne	And now look where she is
Group	Yeah
Nicole	I mean it was an opportunity she got when she was 11 but still
Group	[laughter]
Nicole	She still worked for it

For Nicole, the fact that someone she judged to be from a similar social class as herself had done well added to the positive influence. This further level of identification with Watson beyond character and film made it seem possible to Nicole that through hard work she could reach her goals as Watson had. Thus, Watson also fulfils the neoliberal requirement for balancing normality and uniqueness (Allen and Mendick, 2013), being both similar the girls but also being a film star. The recognition of their intelligence and hard work by others is important to the girls. Similarly, Paule's (2017) British high school participants explain in online forums and group interviews that being recognised as smart and hard-working by teachers leads to further encouragement and expectation. This extra teacher interaction can potentially lead to higher achievement and marks, which are key to future achievements; however, this kind of recognition may not be equally available to all girls.

The educational opportunities that Watson and Hermione were able to access were understood by girls to be insufficient on their own: hard work was essential for both their success (Mendick *et al.*, 2018). As Hermione increased her knowledge and skills, she gained appreciation and the respect of students, teachers and adults. Influence from character traits rather than actions or achievements is similarly found in Budgeon's (2001) interview-based research with 16-20-year-old girls who also revered strength and confidence. This type of celebrity admiration was extended and further demonstrated by Naomi, from the same school, who stated that she admired the singer Beyoncé for reaching her goals. Naomi found Beyoncé inspirational for her personal self-projects (such as career and family) as "… [Beyoncé] got where she wanted to be. I want to get where I want to be but it's not the same place as her." Thus, the example of hard work was an important impact from both films and celebrities for the participants and something they expected to have to undertake in order to achieve the lives they wished.

Hermione's inspiration and shared similarities was also discussed by another Maple Academy group who talked about the elements of the character they related to.

ABH	Out of anything you've seen recently or ever, have you got any favourite characters from films? People that you think are really cool or you've enjoyed watching or?
Maggie	I really like Hermione Granger out of *Harry Potter*
Sarah	I was just going to say
Group	[laughter]
ABH	Hermione is a bit of a winner, we've got what three, four, five, everybody's nodding!
Group	[laughter]
ABH	What is it about Hermione that you like?
Maggie	Um, I just find her really inspiring, how she's – [mumbled interruption]
ABH	How she's what?
Maggie	Gorgeous
Group	[laughter]
Maggie	Um, just how she's really determined, and she just comes across as a really powerful person, and I really, like, admire that
Caitlin	She's kind of like, she's an interesting character in that, she's kind of, she's relatable. In that she's something to aspire to but not something impossible, like, you know. I think if you compare it to the *Hunger Games*, you could look up to Katniss

	Everdeen but you're never gonna be, you couldn't be Katniss Everdeen because you know, you don't live in District 12 and all that (laughter). But you could be Hermione, like, you could have her qualities
Sarah	She's like, smart and nice but she's not like ridiculously popular
Jenny	She's not ridiculous
Group	Yeah
Jenny	She's very down to earth
Maggie	She's achievable
Group	Yeah
ABH	And do you think that comes across in the films, or?
Group	Yeah
ABH	It does
Group	Yeah
Jenny	Like, everyone admires her
ABH	It's been played well in the film?
Group	Yeah

This combination of traits – being down to earth, friendly and intelligent – made "being like" Hermione seem "achievable" to the girls. Her actions and personality traits were desirable, further supporting the claim that positive role models exhibiting plausible and realistic achievements may boost motivation (Lockwood, Jordan and Kunda, 2002). Violet from Willow Academy expanded upon this, also using the word "relatable", in her explanation of why Hermione and Watson were influential.

ABH	Take them one at a time, Emma, what do you like about her, Emma Watson, what is it?
Violet	She's a very good female role model
ABH	As an actress or as a person?
Violet	Person as well, I think that makes, I think that's important in like, an actress, like it's important for them to be, like, relate… I don't – [trying to remember word]
Carol	Relatable
Violet	Yeah, like she seems, um, good roles as well and I think she like, really thinks about the role that she takes when she's being an actress
ABH	Yeah
Violet	To make sure and take a good, you know
ABH	Did you all like Hermione?
Group	Mmhhhh, yeah
ABH	When you watched *Harry Potter*, you're Hermione fans, what is it that you liked about Hermione?
Carol	She was really smart and funny
Joanna	She's funny
Samantha	I really like *Harry Potter* though

Carol	She was like normal so like they picked on her and stuff
Group	Ummm
Carol	And then look, became friends and I thought it was nice

Violet explained that Watson was a "very good female role model" both as Hermione and off-screen. She also thought that it was important for an actress to be relatable in order to have influence. Other girls from this group were Hermione fans, and Watson and Hermione's accomplishments were again judged to be attainable, and their hard work seen as leading to success. This drew the girls in and offered reassurance regarding their own lives and situations (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997; Lockwood, 2006). The experiences of the character and actress led them to believe that their own hard work could also garner results. The girls thought, because Hermione reflected what they already believed was important, that her modelling was positive and it was acceptable for themselves and others to be influenced (Perloff, 1999). In finding both the character and actress relevant to their situations and selves, and therefore being able to relate to them, the participants resonate with Kleemans *et al.*'s (2018) social comparison theory. Kleemans *et al*. posit that role models most likely to be used for comparison are those most similar to ourselves. The Women's Media Centre[10] (Chancellor *et al.*, 2019, p. 132) reported that 65 per cent of girls ages 10 to 19 did not believe there were enough female film and television characters that they could relate to. Their report further identified that only 8.1 per cent of 6 to 20-year-old female characters in 900 films between 2007 and 2016 displayed academic goals or interests. Hermione's situation and identity was closer to the girls than Katniss', which appeared to be important to how relatable and influential participants found them to be. The world building of Harry Potter included many easily identified English prosaic images and ideas such as red buses, pubs and head girls and boys. (Das, 2013) Fictional film worlds which reflect the girls' own experiences spoke to them more directly and encouraged them more than American-based films about teens in situations of which they had no personal experience, as shown by the girls finding American teen films to be unrelatable.

[10] "The Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2019 is comprised of original research by the Women's Media Center and aggregated research from academia, industry and professional groups, labor unions, media watchdogs, newsrooms and other sources." (Chancellor *et al.*, 2019, p. 11)

However, resonances between the character and their own life projects contrasted with a lack of influence to action from Hermione and Watson for this same group. Whilst they liked both character and actress, and were able to discuss at length the attributes of both including good role modelling and admirable details of Watson's life, this modelling was considered to be a third person effect (Davidson, 1983; Milkie, 1999; Perloff, 1999; David *et al.*, 2002; Park *et al.*, 2007) rather than a personal one.

ABH	You were saying that you liked Emma Watson because she was independent, feminist and played intelligent characters, is that not an influence to you to want to study or –
Samantha	No, it would influence someone….
ABH	Stand up for yourself or anything, you just admire her but you're not going to copy anything?
Samantha	No I don't think it makes us wanna do anything
ABH	… So, you're not influenced to find out more about feminism and to stand up for equal rights or to study hard so you can go to a good university or, nothing like that?
Carol	It sounds bad but no
Samantha	Like if the time came, I had to like, do that, I would do it, but I wouldn't just be, well, this woman on a film did it so I can do it
Joanna	I know it's probably not very helpful but not really

Samantha said that she admired Watson for her feminist work and the roles she chose, but that this did not have any influence on her. She understood the implication that a role model's behaviour was intended to be copied and to inspire action not just respect. As seen previously, the girls from this group had made their career choices. They were not looking for validation from education itself, but were using it to attempt to gain financial stability and social status, particularly in terms of the economic stability to provide for future children. While Hermione was relatable through a reflexive understanding of their own lives and the character, influence did not occur, but they were able to acknowledge and understand how it may have been of use to other girls. This further suggests that they judged their world knowledge and ability to differentiate between reality and fiction to have made them invulnerable to messages others may not be able to resist (Park *et al.*, 2007; Tal-Or, Tsfati and Gunther, 2009). Again, there was no negotiation with the text to read Hermione in a particular way: the character was realistic and relatable, but clearly understood as not real and therefore not influential.

Similarly, another group from Willow Academy, when asked about role models, suggested that Hermione was 'probably' a role model. The group discussed their opinions:

ABH	Um, do you think that film characters can be role models or should be role models?
Group	[silence]
Georgia	Probably can
ABH	Mmm, but you can't think of any that are?
Georgia	Not for me, no
ABH	No? OK
Michelle	Dunno, probably can as well, like people might think Hermione is a role model or something, I dunno
ABH	Hermione?
Michelle	Yeah
ABH	And do you think that she is, was she for you? We're going quite a few years back now for that
Michelle	Not for me but like, I dunno, she could influence other people
ABH	In a positive way?
Michelle	Yeah, because she's like, strong, so yeah
ABH	Did you like Hermione, did you like Hermione Granger?
Donna	I'm not a massive fan of *Harry Potter*
ABH	Not a *Harry Potter* fan, that's fair enough
Georgia	I don't know, I'm not really a fan of Harry Potter
ABH	You're not a *Harry Potter* fan either
Georgia	He's alright

Here Georgia spoke about the character Harry Potter, as seen by her use of the word 'he', while the other girls are speaking about the franchise. This suggests that her recall of the series was the main male character, which is consistent with the previous findings. The girls in this group, although having a good knowledge of the franchise, were not fans and did not find Hermione of great interest or influential. They were however, like the 17-year-old girls from their school, able to note that others may be positively influenced and offer reasons for these third person effects.

There were no age or school patterns of who admired and was influenced by Hermione or Watson. Members of a Maple Academy group were also not fans of the series when asked whether the character was of interest to them:

ABH	Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter*? She doesn't do anything for you?

Group	No, nah
Rose	I don't like *Harry Potter*

Another group responded likewise:

ABH	Are you Hermione fans?
Emma	Oh god no, not really [laughs]
ABH	No?
Andrea	I've watched *Harry Potter* but –
ABH	No, she doesn't strike you?
Andrea	She doesn't do it

This lack of enjoyment and interest indicates that the girls rejected even considering whether there may be any third person effects, contrasting with the Willow Academy girls. It may be that the group were not influenced as their desire to be empowered and autonomous agents of their own lives may have made them feel unable to freely express any influence from external sources (Harris and Shields Dobson, 2015). Hermione and Watson were thus decoded in three separate ways by participants: admirable and influential to themselves; admirable and influential but only to others; or of no interest or influence on themselves or others. No specific gratification beyond comfort of the familiar or enjoyment of the story was sought, so Hermione did not operate as a role model for them. This shows that even within the narrow age range of 16-18, girl characters are understood and related to in a variety of ways – indicating that the assumption of a consensus of understandings by girls from 13 to 19-years-old is misjudged.

There was little discussion regarding Watson and Hermione's appearance within the focus groups, beyond a comment that Watson was 'gorgeous' and the discussed desire to copy her hair. A character's appearance was not central to what the girls remembered or admired. The girls' interpretations of these films went against the common teen film trope of female characters being predominantly admired for their looks (Gray, 2017). A character's actions were always more important to these older teen girls. In line with the participants' ideas about demonstrations of femininity, Hermione's displays of femininity were exhibited in appropriate locations and times (for example, at a school dance and a wedding) and did not interfere with her focus in other areas of her life. Hermione is a good example of actions and intelligence holding more importance than looks and this is recognised and appreciated, even by those girls who were not fans.

Despite Hermione having a boyfriend for a brief period and developing romantic feelings for Ron – with the epilogue showing them married with children – no discussion of Hermione in relation to romantic relationships took place in any of the groups. “Teaming”, where the audience decide which of the available love interests they wish to see the protagonist choose, has become commonplace, particularly with YA books and films, and is often influenced and encouraged by the media (Petersen, 2012; Skinner and McCord, 2012). Romance does not play a pivotal role within the *Harry Potter* series and, although relationships and attractions occur, they are secondary storylines. Violet (Willow Academy) noted the lack of teaming in the series when she said, “It’s weird because *Harry Potter* never had like teams either, like everything has teams now, sort of, and it’s weird” showing an understanding of the convention and commonality. The girls did not appear disappointed by the lack of romance. This correlates with their individual opinions of, and lack of interest in, romantic relationships on and off screen, as discussed in Chapter 8.

Participants were predominantly responding to Hermione’s character and to plot points which they could relate to their daily lives. They enjoyed seeing a female character receive recognition for her intelligence and play a large part in the action of the films. They paid particular attention and interacted with Hermione (in both book and film versions), then evaluated and decoded what they saw and interpreted whether it was influential or useful. The success of Hermione and Watson’s actions and self-projects in relation to education were viewed as successful and encouraged girls to keep working towards their goals even though they did not accept that role modelling was occurring. Lived experience appeared again to be the deciding factor as to which characters were relatable and sought out for viewing. Girls from all age groups spoke of Watson and Hermione with admiration and respect, showing identification can occur even when it is not motivating in practical ways.

9.3 Katniss Everdeen and Jennifer Lawrence

Also much discussed in the fieldwork, *The Hunger Games* is a trilogy of books and four films[11], the final book split into two films. The story focuses on the life of Katniss Everdeen, portrayed by American actress Jennifer Lawrence in all four films, who lives in a post-apocalyptic North American country called Panem. Panem is comprised of 'Districts', each supplying an essential resource to the ruling Capitol. Katniss lives in an impoverished sector which mines coal. She has little education and no prospects for improvement. Her father has died before the story begins and, consequently, her mother had mental health issues leaving Katniss to provide for her mother, her younger sister Primrose and herself. Katniss accomplishes this by illegally hunting in the woods with her male best friend Gale. Katniss' protective nature prompts her to volunteer to take her sister's place in the Hunger Games, a battle to the death between child and teen 'Tributes' (two drawn by lottery from each of the 12 Districts) which takes place each year within a computer-controlled dome and is televised to the nation.

Within the trilogy, Katniss participates in the Games twice and is involved with the Resistance in their attempts to overthrow the Capitol. Along with physical combat and political issues, the story also comments on reality television and the formation of media images, as attempts are made to manipulate Katniss (and the audience of the Games) through constant pressure from both the Capitol and the Resistance to present herself in particular ways to suit political agendas. The final two films of the franchise were in cinemas during the fieldwork period. The series was not as universally known (as books or films) as *Harry Potter*, but a significant percentage of the girls in the focus groups had seen at least one of the films. 13 of the 79 survey respondents named one of *The Hunger Games* films as the last film they had viewed, making it the most popular in this category, with 12 respondents having made a trip to the cinema in order to view the final film of the series.

Katniss' self-projects and options are not aimed at bettering herself personally or improving her prospects for work, education or relationships. When the story

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[11] See Appendix N for book and film references

begins, she assumes she will never leave her District and her life is thus purely about survival. Katniss, who is 15 years old at the start of the books, does not attend school and the skills she needs are practical, such as hunting for food and making money, rather than intellectual. Her primary motivation is to keep her family, particularly her sister, safe and throughout the series this goal predominantly influences her actions and decisions. Although there are many opportunities to compromise or abandon her responsibilities and beliefs – with various temptations offered and expectations placed upon her – Katniss attempts to remain faithful to her beliefs and to maintain her personal goals and self. Although discussed in terms of being an action heroine (e.g., Kirby, 2015; McClearen, 2015), none of the girls spoke of her in this way; instead, the strengths they perceived were displayed in non-physical ways.

The Maple Academy group who had been positive about Hermione and Watson expressed a very different opinion of both Katniss and Lawrence, again conflating the character and actress during discussion. Whereas Hermione was described by this group as being determined, powerful, achievable, relatable, down to earth and interesting (their descriptors), they read Katniss as unachievable, unlikeable, annoying, self-centred, unsympathetic and a whiner. Although respecting that Katniss had some successes, they were unable to relate to her. The events depicted (the dystopian society and her experiences related to it) were removed from their own lives and the negative personality traits they felt Katniss portrayed distanced them from the character.

Fighting skills alone were not enough to retain the interest and affection of the 18-year-old Maple Academy group, even when it offered the physicality of "girls being bad asses" that they said they wished to see more often. Sarah explained another reason that Katniss did not resonate with her:

Sarah	…I mean, I know the internet loves Jennifer Lawrence
Group	[laughter]
Sarah	I'm not a huge fan of Jennifer Lawrence which I think slightly influences me not particularly liking Katniss

Despite negative feelings about the character and actress, this group was able to clearly explain traits and behaviours which they found admirable and allow that both Katniss and Lawrence may be influential in a positive way for other girls (similarly to the third person effects from Hermione). They were not seeking or finding any gratifications in the form of role modelling or influences from either the character or the actress, including enjoyment or entertainment. One survey respondent also expressed a dislike of Lawrence, replying to the question of whether there was a character to whom she would not like to be similar with “any Jennifer Lawrence character”, including Katniss in her list. Another survey respondent replied to the question with just ‘Katniss’, revealing that Sarah and her group were not unique in their dislike. In the previous section, girls from all age groups expressed admiration or dislike of Watson and Hermione, while an aversion toward Lawrence and Katniss occurred only in the 18-year-old Maple Academy group, other age groups responding positively. Although they did not explain fully why they felt this about Lawrence, it reveals that casting plays a central part in their film selection process, even when the character is specifically intended to appeal to their age group.

There were, however, participants who admired both Hermione and Katniss and found relatable traits within each. The participants from Maple Academy, who identified Watson as sharing their social class, also had a great deal of knowledge and admiration for Katniss and Lawrence. Emily and Jessica began the discussion by labelling Lawrence a role model. Asked who their favourite film characters, actors or actresses were, the group spent several minutes discussing actors and male characters, as analysed in Chapter 5, before an actress was mentioned.

ABH	…Now that’s interesting because that’s the first woman to come out
Belinda	Yeah
Anne	Really?
ABH	Yeah, you’ve all mentioned men, that’s the first actress that’s been mentioned
Belinda	Meryl Streep, though
Group	Yeah
Emily	Jennifer Lawrence, though
Jessica	Yes
ABH	What about Jennifer Lawrence, just particularly *The Hunger Games* or other things?
Emily	I think like, outside of movies as well, she’s quite

	like, a good character, like she's got, she's quite a role model
Jessica	She's quite relatable
Emily	Yeah

As with Hermione and Watson, relatability was vital to the girls and helped draw them to the actress. Emily expanded on calling Lawrence a role model:

ABH	A role model in what way?
Emily	She doesn't, like most movie stars you see them like, all glammed up all the time where she, she looks more relaxed. She, like, I can relate to her more than I could relate to Cara Delevingne, a British model/actress/author]
Angie	And she fell down a set of stairs which, you know, if I was winning an Oscar, I'd fall up the stairs
Emily	Yeah
Angie	And then she like, talks positively about food, she's like, I want pizza, like where's the food
Anne	She's not afraid to like –
Angie	Eat
Anne	Yeah, in front of people, she's just like –
ABH	And you find that inspirational?
Angie	Yeah
ABH	Is that because she's different to all the other…
Angie	She's not afraid, like, she doesn't body shame, she's just –
Group	Yeah

Chapter 8 discussed the participants' dislike of media pressure to physically present themselves in particular ways, specifically the unattainable ideal which they easily recognised. Retallack, Ringrose and Lawrence's (2016) qualitative research with 12 to 15-year-old girls on body image, feminism and social media also recognised that the ideal was not attainable, suggesting that this was not exclusively an older teen girl understanding. My participants were happy to find a public figure who represented how they felt, and they appreciated Lawrence's down to earth behaviour; rejection of media attempts to normalise unnatural body standards; and refusal to feel ashamed of her actions, celebrating her personality traits and attitude. Colling (2017, p. 47) suggests that "[i]n the Hollywood film industry stars have often been exploited as key to gaining audiences for teen film and girl teen films often include actors that function as stars outside of the diegesis." However, it appears that Lawrence is relatable to these girls because of her rejection of the traditional Hollywood star attitudes and behaviours, which attracts them to view her films. Kanai (2015, p. 330) finds that

> What is notable, then, is the way in which Lawrence both uses and successfully erases the affective labour of normative femininity. Her ‘authenticity’, performed through an open confessional style, narration of humorous, self-deprecating anecdotes and laidback demeanour effaces the affective labour of managing a desirable feminine persona.

This suggests that while the girls believe Lawrence’s actions and appearance to be natural, these can also be perceived as a performance requiring work and “…the act of drawing attention to these events marks them as out of the ordinary.” (Mendick *et al.*, 2018, p. 64). It is possible that the participant’s decoding of Lawrence as sincere rather than constructed is due to the desire they harbour for just this type of representation. While presenting a “glammed up” appearance in appropriate situations, such as film premieres, this is understood to not be maintained or required constantly. An actress within the system presenting real life femininity to which they could relate was used to confirm their own feelings and understandings. Girl power rhetoric is used widely in media aimed at teen girls (Gonick, 2006; Chen, 2013; Dyhouse, 2014; Hopkins, 2018), thus providing the terminology and understanding of this type of postfeminism. What Lawrence *did* was essential; her actions in rejecting expectations of femininity once again created the positive impression. Not only was she vocal in her rejection of diet culture, but was also seen eating high-calorie foods, positively reinforcing her message and showing she was authentic.

The 18-year-old Willow Academy group had a long exchange about both Watson and Lawrence which covered their feminist leanings and then moved onto opinions of whether actresses could be role models.

ABH	And then Jennifer Lawrence
Participant	She’s really funny
ABH	In real life?
Participant	Yeah
ABH	Yeah
Participant	Down to earth
ABH	Do you think that they are role models?
Group	Yeah, like yeah…
ABH	What makes them role models?
Participant	She’s writing for the women’s rights for the paper
Participant	Which one?
Participant	Jennifer Lawrence
Participant	Yeah and Emma Watson’s like, at everything, yeah…She’s like an ambassador for UNICEF or

	something isn't she?
Participant	She has a degree
Participant	And she has a degree
Participant	She's a doctor
Participant	She did all the films and graduated from like, Brown
ABH	Sorry?
Participant	She graduated from like, that Brown University in America
Participant	Did she, that's good
ABH	Do you think that it's rare for an actor or actress to be a role model or do you think it's –
Group	No, nah
Participant	I think it just depends on the person really
ABH	Depends on the person?
Participant	Like who they look up to, I think any, I think any actors or actresses are probably a role model to someone
ABH	In what kind of way, what do they?
Participant	Just like what they're doing and like, look up to them [interruption]
ABH	So anyone could look up to anyone that they see?
Group	Yeah
ABH	And do you think that people copy what they're seeing?
Participant	Some people do
Group	Mmm yeah
ABH	What kind of things would they copy?
Participant	Like what they wear and how they act. Like I think Emma Watson's probably influenced quite a lot of women to follow what she does with the feminism and like, respect themselves more and stuff
ABH	Right, ok. So, sort of give them ideas of how to act as a woman?
Participant	Yeah
Participant	Quite a lot of people probably don't know like, what to do, like they've heard about like, feminism and stuff but don't really know about it. And I think she like, talks about it a lot and like, makes it easier to understand
ABH	And you think that's a good thing?
Group	Yeah
ABH	Yeah, all of you agree? Nodding, can't get nodding on the tape!

The interpretation of Lawrence as funny and authentic (Kanai, 2015) was also part of her appeal to the girls in this group. Understood to be a feminist, Lawrence's feminism has a different emphasis than Watson's. Watson self-identifies publicly as feminist, acting as the spokesperson for several campaigns; representing international organisations; and promoting feminist literature via social media.

She has been presented awards for her feminist undertakings (Brady, 2016; Gill, 2016; Rottenberg, 2017; Dejmanee, 2018). Although not correct on all the details of Watson's achievements, mistaking UNICEF for the UN and saying that she had a doctorate rather than bachelor's degree, the girls were correct about the university she attended. They credit Watson as making feminism accessible and being a role model in this area.

The media also label Lawrence as a feminist (Hamad and Taylor, 2015; Kanai, 2015; Brady, 2016), and compliment her focus on body positivity (including food positivity) and equal wages in Hollywood; Lawrence uses her platform and reputation as an Oscar-winning actress to speak out on these issues. She has been judged as displaying a "postfeminist coolness" and presenting a "…performance of confessional yet humorous feminine authenticity…" (Kanai, 2015, p. 323) Lawrence's social identity, as discussed, may have perhaps felt closer to the girls because they enjoyed watching her gain popularity with down to earth behaviour, versus Watson's social identity which garners a higher level of respect from highbrow publications and organisations. It was not clear whether the group were prompted to watch Watson and Lawrence in films because of their beliefs, or even if they themselves were influenced towards feminism. Once again third person effects were assumed. What is clear is that they understood and admired these women who spoke out on prominent issues and supplied behaviour and opinions that could serve as models.

Two Willow Academy groups listed Katniss and Lawrence as role models separately, showing that character and actress can act independently as role modelling examples as well as complementing each other. As discussed previously, the Maple Academy girls who did not view Lawrence as a role model were still able to appreciate Katniss as offering positive third person modelling.

ABH	So, it's funny because the other group were saying that they admired Katniss and that they thought she was a good role model, she got what she wanted, she went for what she wanted, but you don't?
Caitlin	I can understand where they're coming from with the respect of, she's doing it to try and protect her family, to try and get through it basically, she's had to do this experience

	that she didn't really want to do, so I kind of get that respect…
Maggie	I think it's a bit like she was, like a girl, as well, I think it's quite interesting that they did a girl to go out and like, win this competition that's like, about strength and fighting, and I really liked it from that point of view. I mean I do find the character annoying, but I do
Group	[laughter]
Caitlin	I do also appreciate that she, like, got, like, the strength of her character

The situation that Katniss finds herself in is understood by the participants to be a justification for the actions and behaviours she exhibits. As she must kill to survive and shows remorse, her violence is acceptable as it is undertaken reluctantly, using her skills in archery and tracking. The girls enjoyed her displays of skill in winning the competition and she was viewed as being strong, but it was still not enough for girls within this group to relate to her or like her as a separate entity from Lawrence. Ames and Burcon (2016b, p. 51) suggest that girl characters being portrayed as tomboys send the message "... that it is impossible for characters to be both feminine and powerful. The conflation of Katniss's masculine traits with her status as a potentially feminist character is therefore problematic as it implies that a strong female character must be 'one of the guys'." However, no participant used the word feminist to describe Katniss. Her strength is celebrated for being displayed by a girl rather than seen as masculine. Maggie particularly appreciated seeing a girl undertake actions that were unexpected and rarely, if ever, seen in films. This acceptance of displays of strength may also suggest that they understand girls to be strong, meaning that its display in the films is not jarring but, rather, a reflection of what they know to be true. This enjoyment did not rely on liking the film, character or actress.

The discussion within the Maple Academy group moved to Lawrence's portrayal of Katniss.

ABH	And is she someone that you'd copy anything that she did, not anything that she did, but if there was something you particularly liked that she'd done would she influence you to –
Emily	Yeah, I think she portrayed The Hunger Games pretty well as well
Group	Yeah

Emily	Although that's not very relatable because I wouldn't really want to be in there
Group	No [laughter]
	…
Anne	She was like, she's quite, she's strong and she's like, independent, quite a lot of the characters she's in and then it was in *X Men* she was really good in it as well
Emily	Oh yeah
Anne	And then she was like, another strong kind of independent character
Belinda	Silver Linings that was good
ABH	Silver Linings Playbook?
Anne	That's really good

Samantha from Willow Academy also showed knowledge of Lawrence's resume and believed she could reliably portray a character when she stated, "I'm just glad that it's Jennifer Lawrence playing her, I don't think anyone could do a better job than her". The characters previously portrayed by Lawrence reflected what the Maple Academy group found important (or unimportant, in the case of romantic relationships) in their own lives. The strength and independence (both relating to romantic relationships and general life) she portrayed through characters represented ideas of girl power that almost all the girls commented on and were shown in the previous chapter as desiring, whether they found the character relatable or not.

There was no consensus between the schools on Katniss' focus on her family's protection. Willow Academy girls saw this as a show of strength and independence, which directly relates to their prioritisation of caring for their future families above their own desires. The Maple Academy girls, however, saw this familial focus as selfishness, believing Katniss' responsibility to the revolution, and thus wider society, to be more crucial. This viewpoint echoes these girls seeing children and family as less central to their future planning. It is also once again a display of utility (during and post exposure) as defined by the NTAA, in that the girls use what they view to confirm their own beliefs, taking what they have viewed into their own lives to help sustain these ideas.

The Maple Academy group continued their discussion, moving onto romantic relationships in the series.

Belinda	She isn't seen as needing a man to do this stuff for her which I think is kind of like –
Group	Yeah
ABH	The characters?
Group	Yeah
Belinda	I like her in *The Hunger Games* in that she takes care of Peeta and Peeta doesn't take care of her
Anne	She kind of like reverses the roles that are set on us
Belinda	Yeah and then but they still try to put a love triangle in *Hunger Games* when –
Belinda	Yeah like [unclear]
ABH	They created it…
Belinda	It's really ironic because in the books it was the tv people in the books trying to make it into a love triangle and then we made it into a triangle exactly like, you know, the oppressive people were trying to do
ABH	Yeah?
Belinda	It's kind of disheartening when the film's about her saving her sister and saving like, her society and then all the media is talking about is Team Peeta or Team Gale and you're like, you really missed the point of the book, haven't you?

Belinda's comments reflect the concern that, despite all her talents and strengths, Katniss' value was still dependant on which male character she chose for a romantic relationship (Skinner and McCord, 2012). These girls did not find the romantic sub-plot of the film engaging but, rather, distracting from the elements of the story that they believed more important. Here the girls' discussion of the film and books was intertwined. They entered the cinema with prior knowledge of the story and characters and therefore had ideas of their own about what they wanted to see on screen. Book Katniss has little interest in romance so does not follow the "dump all your plans there's a boy" characterisation the girls disliked in teen films, and they were disappointed that the films differed in this way. Within both the books and films, Katniss and Peeta pretend to be romantically involved in order to garner sympathy and support from the Game's audience. The 'looking after' being referred to, however, is not a stereotypical mothering by a female character, although Katniss is forced to nurse Peeta as part of the romantic deception. What Belinda is referring to is the physical protection that Katniss offers Peeta as she is the better fighter and more physically skilled. The recognition that Katniss can defend not only herself but also a male character, "reversing the roles", is important and impressive, particularly as these roles are seen as being "set on us". The alteration of the story in the films to foreground romance made the girls unhappy, feeling that it diminished the important actions

she was undertaking. Their understanding and decoding of Katniss from the books did not match what appeared on screen.

Belinda noted that the teaming was pushed in the films and by the media. It is unclear whether she felt pressured to choose a side or happily did so, but she was aware of the projection by the film. Rose from Maple Academy commented that the love triangle was “really cringey in the film” and this put her off viewing. This contrasts with opinions of her and Belinda’s groups who still admired Katniss’ strength despite her being forced into a romantic relationship. Samantha from Willow Academy complained that Peeta was whiney and dependent on Katniss, and found the requirement for her to look after him made her appear less strong. The rest of her group were split between this interpretation and enjoying the emphasis on romance. However, with some of the girls having read the books, discussion of the romance in the films raised the differences.

ABH	Because it’s not actually a typical love triangle in the books but in the films they have made it a love triangle
Carol	They made it about love
ABH	Every time you see Katniss and Peeta together, you get a shot of Gale, and he sees things that he didn’t see in the book
Violet	I think that makes it more interesting though, ‘cause like that’s the bit I’m probably most interest [sic] in. I’m like, who’s she going to go for, like one of them is going to die or something
Carol	It’s like Twilight
Violet	Yeah
Joanna	See, that’s the only thing that annoyed us about The Hunger Games films was the way they’d changed it from the book, so they try and make it more about the relationships than…
Carol	Yeah
Joanna	‘Cause the whole books was meant to be based on like, her like saving her family, but they based the films around which one should I love

For some girls, the changes made to the story were disappointing. Like Belinda, Joanna wanted to see Katniss’ goals in the films reflect the books, which although dealing with female sexuality, sexual development and heterosexual relationships as standard YA themes (Younger, 2009; Garcia, 2013), did not make these central elements of the story. The depiction of Katniss in a caring role was read in diverse ways by the participants, depending on whether they viewed Katniss as protecting

Peeta physically or tending to his wounds in a motherly fashion. Violet was the only girl to say the teaming and love-triangle were an enjoyable part of the film and the most exciting. So, while there was a majority consensus that the elevation of a romantic plotline within the films was unnecessary and unwanted, which relates to their previously discussed views on romance and romantic films, it was not universal. There may also have been other girls who felt as Violet did but were not, for whatever reason, willing to speak up in their group.

A common reading of the film and books is exemplified by Byrne (2015), who argues that Katniss performs femininity and exhibits multiple identities depending on the political and social pressures she faces, meaning that she does not personally choose any role. Her decisions are described by Firestone (2012) as being reactive and influenced by obligation rather than actual choice. However, this was not the girls' decoding; they saw her as making choices freely and independently, a reading supported by Green-Bartlett (Day, Green-Barteet and Montz, 2014, p. 42) who judges that "Katniss becomes a fully autonomous individual when she stops merely responding to her circumstances and begins making choices of her own accord". Katniss performs femininity for a purpose, sometimes enjoying it and other times being self-conscious and uncomfortable. This performance exhibits a third wave understanding that it is possible to enjoy looking traditionally feminine while still retaining other postfeminist traits (Baumgardner and Richards, 2000; Kelly, 2005; Ferriss and Young, 2007). Katniss is styled by others in various dresses, makeup and hairstyles depending on the situation, while her personal preference is for trousers and no makeup with her long hair tied back. However, what Katniss personally wanted and believed was more important to the girls than the demands made on her appearance and affections. There was consistency in the way that the participants spoke of unrealistic portrayals of beauty on screen, as discussed in Chapter 8, and their appreciation of the respect offered to Hermione and Katniss for their achievements.

Conversation about appearance further touched on the discussions of femininity in relation to the age of the character compared to the age of the actress portraying her, and expectations which may arise from this. Girls who had not read the books were unaware that Katniss was 15 years old at the start of the series. Opinions on

Lawrence being in her 20s while portraying a young teen differed. A group from Maple Academy was not comfortable with what an older actress portraying a teenager might imply or how it may influence girls.

Maggie	And I think there are lots like, of just films like, I think they create, I dunno, like [laughs], reinforces the stereotype
Group	Yeah
Maggie	The expectations sort of become higher for, I dunno, the way you look and I dunno
Group	Yeah
Jenny	And the fact that like, Jennifer Lawrence is playing a 15-year-old and no 15-year-old would ever look like that
Group	Yeah
Jenny	Like I dunno, everyone probably goes through the awkward teenage phase
Group	[laughter]

Their rejection of unrealistic expectations placed on teenage girls to reach physically impossible beauty standards suggests that they believed in third person effects and the impacts on younger girls' expectations for themselves. When asked why they thought Lawrence was cast despite being older, they said, "because she's pretty". They did not judge her reputation and awards for earlier roles, or her popularity with teen girls, to have been the primary factor in the casting decision. This is an example of what Mendick *et. al* (2018) label undeserving celebrity, whereby Lawrence is not seen to have worked for her success, it being awarded for her looks, whereas Watson is considered deserving for the effort she is seen to continually make toward her own education and feminist projects. Samantha from Willow Academy was also unhappy with the age difference, stating twice that "stuff like that annoys me". Those in Samantha's group who had not read the books assumed Katniss to be around 18 years old and were surprised to hear she was written as younger.

ABH	… you're like, ok with the fact that Jennifer Lawrence is a lot older than the character
Group	Oh that. Yeah. That's –
Samantha	Stuff like that annoys me, yeah
Participant	How old was she meant to be?
Samantha	Stuff like that annoys me
ABH	It annoys you?
Samantha	Yeah like on Gossip Girl the characters are like 25 and they play –
Participant	But you can tell on there

Samantha	Yeah but you're not meant to, they're playing like 16-year-olds and stuff, that annoys us
Participant	I think she looks like our age [18]
Participant	Yeah, I think I'm with [Participant], that's different because she doesn't look that old, but when they're all really old like on Gossip Girl, that's obviously really old
ABH	How old do you think she looks in The Hunger Games?
Participant	I think she would look our age
Participant	I don't, she looks 16
Participant	She, I thought she was, I thought she was 18, 19
Participant	Yeah 18
Participant	In another film as well
Participant	I didn't know she was supposed to be 16

However, Naomi from Maple Academy said that the casting was no worse than other portrayals of teens by adults, and Kate agreed.

ABH	You don't think she wasn't a bit too old for that role?
Kate	No
ABH	No?
Kate	How old is she?
ABH	She's in her 20s and she was playing like a 16-year-old
Naomi	But then again, Hannah Montana, the guy that plays like an 18-year-old was 30 something with a family so…
Group	[laughter]
Naomi	You can't really complain about Katniss
ABH	No, I'm just asking because it put off another group I spoke to, they were like, she was just too old, you couldn't believe that she was 17 years old, she doesn't look 17
Kate	Oh, I would definitely
ABH	But she was fine for you?
Kate	Mmmhhhh

Although an age difference between character and actresses was known to be the norm, not all the participants accepted it, particularly as they felt it falsely implied that they would be able to achieve a similar appearance. Therefore, the suggested beauty standards were read in a oppositional way and rejected.

As seen, strength was the trait predominantly assigned to and admired in Katniss. Caitlin, from the Maple Academy group which disliked Katniss and Lawrence, commented in the earlier excerpt on two types of strength displayed by Katniss, physical and mental. Caitlin appreciated both. Strength, resilience and confidence

are all requirements of girls in neoliberal times (Baker, 2010; Favaro, 2017; Gill and Orgad, 2018), and thus Katniss' ability to navigate the circumstances, excel and win contributes to a negotiated reading leading to respect, despite her character flaws.

Emma and Andrea from Maple Academy also found Katniss a strong character.

ABH	What did you like about The Hunger Games?
Andrea	I dunno, I just really like it
Emma	It's nice to have the main character as a girl probably
Andrea	Oh yeah 'cause then…
Emma	Because she's really strong
ABH	Do you think she's a good strong character?
Emma	Yeah, you can actually look up to her, where sometimes the characters in other films you can't really, like Mean Girls you don't really want to look up to them
ABH	And what it is about Katniss that you think makes her strong?
Emma	Her ability to like, she speaks what she thinks, and she's not really bothered what happens about it
Andrea	Yeah, she like, just does what she feels like it

Having the main character be female is not uncommon in YA literature and there is a long history of strong and positive feminist heroines (Ames and Burcon, 2016b). However, this has not translated to the screen, with only 31% of films in 2018 having female protagonists (Lauzen, 2019). When asked later which characters they thought could be role models, Andrea asserted that Katniss' example "gives you like motivation to do stuff" and to have more confidence. Willow Academy's Violet liked Katniss for "just like how she was so independent and does what she wants" which is an almost identical description of the ideal qualities of a female role model as that given by a 17-year-old participant in Budgeon's (2001) research regarding emerging feminist identities. Budgeon links this to postfeminism and the commercialisation of feminist ideals. However, McRobbie (2009) stipulates that films incorporate girl culture to profit from the girl audience and Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) suggest that girls are sold products to aid in fulfilling their desire to look like teen characters in films. However, there is no indication of the girls in this research remarking on being sold anything, or wanting to be sold anything, by either of these films at the time

of the focus groups. The only physical attribute that any of the girls wanted to copy was Hermione's hair, and that desire occurred at a younger age.

Carol, of the same group, described Katniss as brave, showing these traits as positive and desirable. The girls were able to disregard elements of the character they did not like and to foreground strength which is decoded as the most important trait for positive modelling. The girl power idea of strength, where girls are expected to say what they think and be decisive, is particularly attributed to Katniss. Harris and Shields Dobson (2015, p. 152) note that "…young women are invited to see themselves as inherently powerful; that is, a priori empowered, choice-making agents", which is exactly what Emma and Andrea admired about Katniss. This opinion differed significantly, however, from that discussed earlier wherein this behaviour was seen as self-centred. A Willow Academy group agreed that they found Katniss strong, not for her fighting but for the fact she was brave, stood up for herself and did not give up.

ABH	What do you think of Katniss in the films?
Michelle	I think she's really good
ABH	You think she's good? Good in what way?
Michelle	I don't know she's just, I just think she's good, like a strong character
ABH	You think she's strong? What makes her strong?
Michelle	I don't know
ABH	But she just comes across as strong. What do you think of her [Georgia]?
Georgia	I like her as well, I think the same, she comes across as really strong
ABH	Can you think of what it is that makes her strong?
Georgia	It's going to sound really cheesy but yeah
Group	[laughter]
Georgia	Um kind, it's not just 'cause like she's like really, like you know, she have fighting [unintelligible] and stuff, it's just more kind of brave and like, that kind of thing
ABH	Because she's brave?
Georgia	And like she's really [unintelligible] She doesn't give up
ABH	Oh right, ok, and what do you think of her [Michelle]?
	…
Michelle	I think she stands up for her opinions and everything, she's strong

Bravery here is again not just a physical act but also personal integrity and the ability to stand your ground against opposition. Another group from this school

further characterised Katniss as brave and as having the independence to do what she wanted. These reactions suggest that viewing a teen girl character who is unaffected by doubts (or at least negotiating their reading to remove the focus from the times she does feel doubt) encouraged participants to continue to include strength and resilience in the achievement of their own self-projects. It may also reflect character traits that they feel that teen girls have which are not recognised or shown in the media and are therefore enjoyable for them to view. Harris (2004b, p. 17) assesses that film and television characters exhibit high levels of girl power ideas "…because they are outspoken, not afraid to take power, believe in themselves and run their own lives…" reflecting the traits the girls respected, enjoyed and related to the most in Katniss.

The most telling comment about Katniss was made by Donna of Willow Academy in an offhand manner as she left the focus group to return to class: "she's not very good, but she's the best that we've got". The way girls acknowledged their negotiated reading of Katniss. By not accepting or foregrounding behaviour and actions they did not relate to, instead focusing on her strength, independence and single-mindedness, they showed an awareness of the character's shortcomings. However, they were taking what they could get and making the most of it, it being rare to see a teen girl in this type of role. Despite relating to aspects of Katniss' character and their third person effects understanding that she could be a role model, not a single girl said they felt she was a role model for themselves. With the unanimous opinion that teen films were 'cheesy' and focused on romance or unrealistic school situations, finding a teen girl character that they were able to relate to, even if this required them to ignore elements of the plot and characterisation, was worth the compromise in order to gain pleasure and enjoyment. This was particularly true if she resonated with their self-projects and girl power understandings of femininity and strength.

9.4 Conclusion

This chapter clearly shows the interest the girls had in viewing teen girl characters, despite not being fans of teen films. These two characters displayed various forms of strength and intelligence rather than traditional femininity and romance. As distinguished, however, identification with a potential role model

required more than just similar age and gender; other commonalities had to exist for influence to occur. For example, as an English schoolgirl of the same age as the participants and facing similar challenges relating to school and friendships, Hermione was more relatable to the girls than Katniss, who lived in a dystopian setting and was forced to battle to the death with other teens. The relationship to the emotions, pressures and experiences specific to their stage of life may have influenced which characters were considered important, relatable and influential to the girls. Barker, Arthurs and Harindranath (2001, p. 150) state that "[p]eople's responses evolve and take shape over time, and do not, except perhaps in particular cases, have a moment of completion." The participants' relationships and understandings of these two characters, and the actresses, had developed over time as the books and films were released and they aged alongside the characters. Therefore, their own experiences and developing personalities impacted how they understood and decoded the characters and what they liked and disliked. Feelings toward the actresses portraying the characters also directly impacted how the girls felt about them. The findings suggest that postfeminist ideas of power, strength, individuality and choice elevated the interest in Hermione and Katniss and the actresses who played them. However, the participants were still not seen to intentionally seek out other films with these actresses in them, consistent with the findings in Chapter 5.

Romance was low in the girls' priorities and, in the case of Katniss, the love triangle in the films detracted from the character and plots. Many girls were unhappy that romance overshadowed Katniss' other actions rather than allowing her to stand on her own and remain independent; they would have preferred the book to be more faithfully translated. The girls understood the concept of teaming and a lack of teaming within the *Harry Potter* series was noted as interesting, whereas its presence in *The Hunger Games* series was not enjoyed. The girls did not wish to partake in the teaming except in a joking manner, which shows again their lack of interest in this type of romantic competition. As Durham (2003) argues, modern girl heroines change the boundaries of acceptable behaviour for girls and show them as strong, capable and confident. These characteristics were seen as admirable in both Hermione and Katniss, but using romance to distract Katniss from her goals was not appreciated or desired.

In terms of neoliberal self-projects and postfeminist and girl power understandings, many of the girls were able to look past whether they found the character interesting, or even likeable, to note and respect attributes. Third person effects came into play for both characters, with participants able to see reasons for others, particularly younger girls, to find role modelling from the characters or actresses. The girls particularly enjoyed watching both the characters and actresses being rewarded for their hard work and achievements. Despite this admiration, they did not wish to incorporate anything they saw on the screen into their self-projects. Instead, they found gratification from the reassurance that, by following their projects and working hard, they would achieve success. With such an emphasis on individuality and reaching personal goals rather than copying those they viewed, it is critical for self-projects to be constructed based on values, skills and attitude in order to keep their lives individual and authentic; examples of this successfully being undertaken were of interest to the girls.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This thesis has investigated the interactions of 16 to 18-year-old girls with mainstream films, casting light on their film viewing, the ways in which they articulated these practices, and how they navigated the representations shown in films they viewed. This study is unique, not only because it addresses the viewing practices exclusively of older teen girls through both a survey and focus groups, but also as a localised study focusing on girls situated in a rural location. It highlights the parallels and contradictions between my own findings and the small body of existing academic literature on teen girl audiences. Referring to my data analysis, this chapter considers each research question, drawing upon relevant literature to demonstrate the ways in which my research contributes to the field.

10.2 Engagement and Interaction

> ***How do older teen girls in rural North East England select, navigate and interact with mainstream films?***
>
> *a. Where, how, what, why, and with whom do these older teen girls view films, both individually and as groups?*

The findings of this thesis, relating to the practical elements of film viewing by older teen girls, have important consequences for the broader domain of studies relating to girls as audiences. As illustrated in Chapter 2, 16 to 18-year-old girls have been neglected within both girls studies and audience studies, with little known about the viewing habits of this age group. Earlier research assumes that teen girls across the full age range have similar film viewing habits in terms of motivations, likes and dislikes. Chapters 5 and 6 showed, through thematic analysis of my fieldwork data, crucial differences between the participants' actions and earlier academic assumptions. This includes foundational information such as how often they went to the cinema, who they went with, why they went and how they interacted with films at home. The thesis makes a contribution to the literature, recognising that:

> …audiences are necessarily social, embedded in society and history in many more ways than through their relation with the media, so the critical analysis of audiences cannot be satisfied with sporadic inclusion of disembodied, decontextualized observations of behavior or cherry-picked survey percentages but must engage with audiences meaningfully in and across the contexts of their lives.” (Livingstone, 2019, p. 179)

Rather than solely relying on questionnaires which do not allow for complex, personal answers, I conducted focus groups at two schools which allowed the participants to verbalize and collectively create meaning about their film viewing and life experiences (Schrøder *et al.*, 2003). Using thematic analysis, their testimonies were investigated for an understanding of the uses and gratifications (U&G) they may have sought and gained from films. The U&G approach employed comprised the ninefold typology of audience activity (NTAA, Levy and Windahl, 1985); Hall’s (1980) audience studies theory of encoding/decoding; and the media practice model (MPM) advanced by the work of Steele and Brown (1995). These combined approaches were employed to assess what negotiations and interactions may occur within participants' film viewing. The findings reinforced Rubin’s claim that “[p]ersonality, social context, motivation, and availability – based on culture and economic, political, and social structure – all affect the potential influence of media and their messages” (2009, p. 176). Theories of neoliberalism, girl power and postfeminism also underpinned the analysis.

10.2.1 Cinema Viewing

As Aveyard states (2016, p. 147), “…going to the movies can often be about much more than viewing a film”. In this study, cinema attendance was found to be important to older teen girls’ leisure and relationships, although their access to films was restricted in important ways. Rather than freely spending unlimited funds, as has been suggested in earlier research (Gateward and Pomerance, 2002; Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007), my participants had to judge, compromise and plan to attend the cinema at all, according to their resources. They made use of special offers or membership cards to lower the cost. The focus group setting allowed me to observe that the methods the girls used for saving money were not an embarrassment to them, exemplifying the regularity and routine nature of these practices. The participants did not attend the cinema as regularly or effortlessly as

existing literature presents, or as often as they would have liked. They said that had they lived closer to the cinema and had more money, they would have attended more often. This underlines the significance of their rural lifestyles and the impact of transport links and travel fares. A fluctuation in the regularity of visits, depending on film release schedules, was also revealed, indicating that the girls had a good understanding of film companies' release schedules for the types of films they wished to view (Einav, 2007). My study indicates that these girls were required to develop key skills in collating information in order to plan and undertake a cinema visit, showing older teen girls to be informed consumers making rational and educated decisions, rather than impulsive and indiscriminate as some literature suggests (Gateward and Pomerance, 2002).

Further restrictions on these older girls' cinema viewing habits and routines concerned with whom the girls could or would view films. The findings suggest that these girls were not impeded from going to the cinema in a large group. However, as exemplified by their viewing of *Straight Outta' Compton* (2015) and *The Woman in Black* (2012), these large cinema attendance groups did not occur often, there being a three-year gap between the release dates of these films (the only examples mentioned). They gave no reasons for such films prompting such large social outings. I surmise that the girls may have gained social status simply by attending these films as part of their friendship group. Smaller friendship or family groups were the preferred viewing arrangement, realising the desire to get the most out of the money they spent on cinema trips, since larger groups could distract from the pleasure of becoming immersed in the film.

While little such information is available in earlier studies, my focus group transcripts illustrate that the participants regularly attended the cinema with family members. This finding contradicts earlier analyses of teen girls' desire to be alone by separating themselves from their families for purposes of media engagement (Livingstone, 2005a; Jones, 2013). Family groupings included not only immediate family members, but also cousins, aunts and uncles. These groups remained together in the cinema, confirming that viewing was a social event and a way to spend time together (Grundström, 2018). There were no distinctions by age or school regarding family cinema attendance. Although my participants held strong opinions about what they wanted to see at the cinema, they were not always in

control of what they viewed when with their family. Girls also spoke of going to the cinema with just their mothers, some as a regular weekly event, suggesting that film viewing can serve as a relational tool to strengthen the mother-daughter bond (Jones, 2011) through sharing interest in similar types of films.

Family cinema visits may also be a way for these rurally located and financially restricted girls to attend the cinema more regularly without having to spend their own money. Although several participants commented on watching films at home with their fathers when sharing similar tastes in film, none said that they went to the cinema with just their fathers. Mother-daughter cinema visits are not addressed in earlier academic literature on family viewing or teen girls' cinema use. This research therefore provides important insights into these older teen girls' family relationships, revealing that they were happy and comfortable to be seen socialising publicly with family, and did so regularly.

10.2.2 Home Viewing

Unable to attend the cinema as often as they would like, my participants had to undertake much of their film viewing at home and viewing films with family members occurred regularly. Family media viewing at home is often overlooked and rarely recognised as a practice that occurs easily and regularly (Jones, 2013; Chambers, 2016), or acknowledged as desired by teens. Rather, the focus has been on girls' attempts to gain independence from their families, particularly their parents. For the girls in this study however, family viewing was not unusual, and the focus groups spoke in a manner which suggested that they actively chose to watch collectively with family, rather than having been coerced. There was no sign from the focus groups that they did not want to spend time with their families. Rather, there was a willingness to view films they had seen before, or were not interested in, in order to share time, remain connected and enhance family sociability (Jancovich, 2011) perhaps using it as a "social resource for conversation" (Alasuutari, 1999, p. 5) within the household. As with family cinema visits, there were no distinctions in age or school among my focus groups in terms of who viewed with their families at home or how often this occurred. It was an activity universally undertaken, talked about and accepted as a normal part of their viewing practices. The rural locations that these girls lived in limited their

opportunities to view at home with friends. This may have further triggered their desire to engage in social viewing practices with family. Family viewing at home was often undertaken in a distracted manner with the use of a second screen, usually a mobile phone. Nonetheless, this distracted mode of viewing was no different from the way the girls viewed films when alone.

The research participants' views and practices reflect Van de Vijver's (2017) statement that viewing films on computer screens occurred more often than, but was not preferential to, cinema viewing. Although distracted viewing regularly occurred at home, my participants also valued immersive viewing experiences and did not indicate that they had difficulty paying attention throughout an entire film once deciding on this type of viewing. Regular specific viewing times, such as weekends, were used by the girls deliberately to watch films in an immersive manner. The girls did not like their immersive viewing being interrupted and would therefore often watch in their bedrooms. These viewing patterns show that watching films was important, carefully selected and scheduled. It further confirms that immersive or distracted viewing was an active choice made before selecting the film. Aveyard (2016) suggests that watching a complete film is a commitment requiring careful consideration. However, my study also found that participants selected films specifically for non-immersive, distracted, viewing, with girls carefully choosing a film that was ‘easy’ to watch (as it had a formulaic plot or had been viewed before) in order *not* to be drawn into the film or to devote concentrated attention. The choice of non-immersion can be shown by their use of a second screen, whereby attention is divided between activities. In these ways, participants used different films for different purposes, revealing a sophisticated and varied engagement with films. These modes of film viewing were not revealed in earlier research focusing on younger teen girls.

The older teen girls in my study made strategic use of media as *active* audiences, with film viewing undertaken for distinct purposes or gratifications. What my participants considered worthy of viewing was not necessarily determined by the artistic merit of a film. Rather, films were judged for their expected entertainment value, combined with the level of attention they demanded. Whereas cinema viewing was expected to provide immersive entertainment, home film viewing often did not involve the same expectations, particularly if the intention was to

pass the time, be co-present with family members or provide background noise to another activity. This kind of planned distracted viewing highlights earlier misunderstandings of teen girls' viewing practices which have assumed this social group to have poor taste in films. My participants were able to both be critical of what they viewed and find enjoyment. They also understood that they were viewing fiction, which enabled them to navigate their responses in complex ways. Their motivations for viewing were varied and used for different gratifications simultaneously and in varying combinations.

In addition to the shared social space of the living room, the bedroom was an important site for film viewing. The use of zones within the bedroom (Lincoln, 2004, 2012, 2014a) was evident in my study. The area holding the screen was usually in a different space from that where homework was completed. The girls either focused on homework while screening a film or used film for a break between tasks. However, screening a film while doing homework was problematic for many of the girls as it caused unwanted distraction. It either prevented them from starting or returning to a task or drew their attention away during their main task. The girls were aware of this potential distraction, yet it did not appear to have caused them any serious issues (or none that they revealed in the focus groups) beyond the frustration of having procrastinated and been distracted from what they had intended to do. Schrøder *et al.* (2003, p. 8) describe this type of habitual viewing and how it fitted into the participants' daily lives:

> …we should think of audiences as individuals who don't always make a conscious choice to 'expose' themselves to a specific media product. There are obvious exceptions to this rule, one of them being the movie theatre experience, which does have the status of a special occasion for many people. But media uses have the distinction character of the ordinary – that is, people enact a number of chronologically organized routines that follow the temporal units of the year, the week and, most importantly, the day, into which the different media are fitted.

Despite finding themselves repeatedly distracted, the girls in my study did not abstain from the practice. Bedroom film viewing was described as occurring constantly and helped prevent loneliness by making their bedrooms feel less empty when they were on their own. At the same time, the bedroom was regarded as a secure personal space.

10.2.3 Deciding Which Films to Watch

My participants were more discerning than those teenage girls presented in earlier research. They were masters at demassification (Ruggiero, 2000), sifting through the vast range of information on offer such as reviews, trailers, publicity stills and blurbs from a wide variety of sources – including online and discussions with friends (observed in the focus groups) – to find films and stay informed about what was currently popular or due for release. Some of their viewing was undertaken to support the kudos of having seen popular films. Algorithms are used by subscription video on demand (SVOD) providers to direct the audience to films which reflect their interests and viewing habits (Gomez-Uribe and Hunt, 2015; Alexander, 2016; Arnold, 2016). Thus, while the girls were actively making film choices, the options they selected from were curated for them in advance, the only acknowledgement of this being mentions of the 'popular right now' listings. Although using reviews, which have been shown to be male-biased, particularly online (Boyle, 2014), and ratings systems which offer different scales of judgement, the girls had developed their own techniques to counter discrepancies. For example, they thought ratings on Sky to be more severe than those on Netflix and thus made personal adjustments to those ratings when judging whether a film was likely to meet their standards.

Concurring with Steele (2001) that teens are selective about their viewing choices, my participants' choices were personal and based on individual interests and reasoning, whether that be particular types of entertainment or the shoring up of friendships through film knowledge. Most girls in my study said they were not influenced by professional reviews, which were considered different to ratings, and they were not deterred from viewing a film in response to strangers' opinions. However, peer group influence was evident. Reviews from friends were influential, as demonstrated in the case of *Girl, Interrupted* (1999) where the recommendation from a single participant's friend cascaded through the focus group, prompting them to plan to view the film. Participants read reviews after seeing a film in order to compare their opinions with other people's, but recommendations from friends and viewing trailers were much more influential in film selection for these girls. As Valkenburg, Peter and Walther (2016, p. 322) observe, "[s]elective exposure is most likely to occur when it is perceived to

converge with the opinions, values, and norms in the social group(s) to which media users perceive themselves to belong." My participants, then, made active personal judgements, relating to peer group influence, in response to their lived realities and social environments.

Rubin (2009) provides six uses and gratification categories associated with television viewing: escape, companionship, arousal, relaxation, learning and habit/passing time. The categories of escape, companionship, relaxation and passing time have been addressed, while learning and arousal were found not to be applicable (learning is discussed later in this chapter alongside theories of postfeminism and neoliberal self-projects). There was no discussion of these latter categories, despite claims that "[a]dolescents consistently cite the mass media as important sources of sexual information" (Brown *et al.*, 2006, p. 1019). Whilst speaking to a stranger within a group of peers may have made them reluctant to discuss matters relating to sex, the girls' apparent lack of interest in romantic relationships on screen, as shown in Chapter 8, adds to the field of study by indicating that films were not a source of sexual information or guidance for this age group.

Studies of teen fandoms address physical attraction to actors by teen girls who are perceived to be highly emotional and extremely motivated by these attractions in their viewing choices and habits (Nash and Lahti, 1999; Karniol, 2001; Engle and Kasser, 2005; Stevens Aubrey, Walus and Click, 2010; Stever, 2011). Although it is possible that this occurred among my participants, none of the girls in this study admitted that they were attracted to the male star or watched films for that reason. That is not to say they did not find, heteronormatively, a variety of actors good-looking and enjoy viewing films starring male protagonists, as shown by the discussion in Chapter 5. However, their attraction may have been a simple appreciation of good looks and an added element of enjoyment to the films. My analysis shows that, while the appeal of actors might draw in younger girls, by their older teens a wider range of motivations for film viewing have developed, focusing on plot and level of immersion.

Having shown how this study has begun to fill gaps in research on the practical elements relating to older teen girls' film viewing practices and their decisions

about what types of films to view, in terms of how they engage and interact - including location, how they view, reasoning behind film selection and who they view with -this chapter now turns to the remaining research questions. It addresses the potential impacts of representations of femininity on the film screen, and how filmic narratives and meanings were negotiated and articulated in relation to the participants' identities.

10.3 Relating to Representations and Negotiating Meaning

> *b. How might the choice of films viewed by older teen girls impact on their current lives and future plans?*
>
> *c. How do older teen girls relate to film representations with which they engage?*
>
> *d. How are film representations negotiated and articulated by older teen girls?*

It became clear through the analysis that negotiation was required for older teen girls to gain gratifications and relate to the films they viewed. My participants were able to resist certain dominant values represented in films, through negotiations informed by postfeminist and neoliberal perspectives. Earlier research suggests that teen girls' attempts to deconstruct what they view without adult supervision are cause for concern (Hylmö, 2006). However, this research reveals that film viewing among older teen girls is a highly nuanced social activity. First, girls watch films alone less often than believed, even if their companions are networked (boyd, 2010) via social media or mobile phones rather than physically present. Second, my participants watched with their families and had friendship groups with whom they discussed what they had viewed. Third, participants were not seeking to engage with films in ways that directly influenced their lives or supplied role models. In fact, my findings suggest that older teen girls are not exploiting films for any specific type of learning experience or information for their current life situations.

10.3.1 Film Role Models

The lack of desire to seek role models from films was reinforced by the girls' denial that films were influential. This corroborates Morgenroth, Ryan and Peters' (2015) claim that motivation is needed if role models are to be impactful. Disinterest in seeking role models from films among this age group also undermines the media effects premise that role model influences occur simplistically through viewing films. Rather, as the MPM upholds, there was an interaction of motivations, choices and impacts from film viewing among my participants. The gratification sought by my participants at the time of viewing (such as socialising, entertainment, immersion, relaxation, escape, pleasure, background noise, passing the time, etc.) prompted their selection and use (or selectivity and utilisation as per the NTAA) to ensure that the girls received what they wanted, thereby placing them in control. This is not to say that cultivation effects (Cohen and Weimann, 2000) did not occur, but that by the age of 16 these girls appeared to have become proficient in their media literacy, understanding the dominant, encoded messages transmitted by mainstream films. They were able to negotiate their readings, enabling them to take only what they wanted from their viewing experience, as exemplified in the discussion of on-screen femininity in Chapter 8.

Studies such as Petersen's (2012) exploration of adult feminist fans of the YA *Twilight* series reveal that readers (of films and books) can negotiate pleasure and enjoyment from the texts, while accepting them as incongruent with their feminist beliefs and understandings of romantic relationships. Similarly, my participants were able to enjoy action films, despite the lack of female protagonists, and enjoy horror films, even though women and girls are often the victims in this genre (Clover, 1992). The participants in my study were disappointed with portrayals of girls and women on screen, exemplified by the comment that Katniss was not particularly good (in the sense that they found her to be irritating and motivated by what they considered the wrong reasons), but they felt these portrayals were the best on offer at that time. Contrasting with claims that teen girl audiences are undiscerning and emotionally invested in fictional worlds (Kramer, 1999a; Nash and Lahti, 1999; Bode, 2010), these older teen girls accepted that what they were viewing was completely fictional and thus resisted involvement beyond

entertainment. This is a skill attributed to adult audiences by Ross and Nightingale (2003, p. 129) when they state that "…women are not cultural dupes unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy, but rather enjoy particular cultural products both for their intrinsic self as well as for the vicarious pleasures they afford." This, once again, shows the importance of taking account of age differences *within* the teen girl audience age range and understanding that, although still classified as children, 16 to 18-year-old girls are more mature and experienced than younger teens, as reflected in their film viewing practices.

10.3.2 Negotiating with Femininity on Screen

My participants were shown to dislike actresses who were older than the characters they portrayed and who displayed overtly feminine appearances within plot lines that placed romance above independence or personal achievement. Nevertheless, they still gained enjoyment from the films, in ways that chimed with Buckingham's (1987, p. 180) participants.

> The extent to which the children I interviewed were prepared to question the plausibility of events in the programme was quite remarkable. Yet this questioning was informed, not merely by comparisons with their own experience, but also by an understanding of the production process of television… Yet the pleasures gained through this willing suspension of disbelief were, if anything, enriched by the pleasures gained from questioning, and in many instances, ridiculing the artifice.

My focus group participants repeatedly commented and confirmed that feminine characters they viewed on screen were fabrications. This knowledge enabled them to distance themselves from social pressures to emulate what they viewed, since they understood these ideals to be unobtainable. At the same time, however, they enjoyed viewing these reconstructions of femininity, which reflects a third-wave view of beauty as something achievable on a personal level, for fun. Durham (1999a, p. 212) states that:

> The existing literature indicates that girls would benefit substantially from making clear-cut decisions to live without subscribing or aspiring to the unrealistic norms prescribed by the dominant patriarchal ideology of U.S. media culture. Yet detaching from one's culture is a difficult, if not virtually impossible, task, particularly in adolescence.

Participants were not so much trying to detach from the popular culture aimed at them, but instead made assessments of which representations, values and meanings were applicable to their daily lives. They collected information and ideas for their future selves and situations, such as for anticipated work, social or formal occasions. They recognised, though, that it would be inappropriate to present themselves in the styles represented on screen, particularly within a school environment. Additionally, they knew that, financially, they would not be able to afford what they viewed and practically, that they would not have room to store the number of garments needed. Moreover, they were not willing to spend the time and effort needed to achieve those film versions of femininity. Their approach to film representations of femininity displays a maturity in media literacy and self-awareness not seen in studies involving younger teen girls.

Participants agreed that male film characters dominated plots, had attained the good jobs and undermined the independence of female characters by turning them into wives and mothers. It is not unprecedented for girls to select male characters as favourites (Pasquier, 1996) and my participants often named actors and male characters as their favourites, with some groups excluding actresses and female characters from their lists entirely. This could in part be due to the lack of female representation on screen (Lauzen, 2019), which my participants recognised. But it may also be because they judged male characters to be undertaking all the important action and driving the plot, while female characters were not as central or memorable. These films did not engage the participants and the messages that they selected and utilised (as per the NTAA) were those that reinforced how they wanted film representation to change to reflect their own beliefs.

These older teen viewers craved female action characters equal to the male through a “flipping of the script”. My analysis of the themes arising from the focus groups indicates that girls very clearly recognised the gendered privileging of stereotypical male characteristics. The behaviour they enjoyed viewing reflected strength (of character, rather than physicality) and determination, both girl power traits. Characters such as Katniss have been criticised for exhibiting masculine traits (Taber, Woloshyn and Lane, 2013; Pavarthi, 2017), yet it was precisely this type of representation that many of the girls appreciated, identified with and were already attempting to incorporate into their lives.

The question then is whether girls found satisfaction in the representations they viewed *because* they primarily sought entertainment from films, or whether they were resigned to accepting what was on offer since they were accustomed to the lack of relatable and realistic female characters. Their negotiation of meaning began with what film they selected to view. Knowing that genres such as romantic comedies and teen films contained representations that they would not relate to, they chose not to become involved with that content in an immersive way. Importantly, refusing involvement is a form of negotiation, or opposition (Hall, 1980). Understanding and judging film content that targets teen girls to be of low quality, these girls viewed genres such as teen films and romantic comedies (Bode, 2010) in a distracted manner or simply avoided them.

The participants agreed they had viewed teen films more regularly when they were younger, again showing the development of teen girls' viewing habits as they age. Their experiences gave them an understanding of how a younger teen audience may interact with these films. Third-party media effects are relevant to studies of teenage girls' viewing practices, as demonstrated in my research by the number of occasions the girls said that they were not influenced personally, but that younger girls might be. This shows their understanding and acceptance that during identity formation in younger teen years selection, interaction and application of films and their plots and dominant feminine representations are potentially more influential, but these impacts can be matured beyond (Perloff, 1999). An important outcome of this research is that differences within teen girl age groups must be reflected in future studies. Various levels of maturity require consideration in order to supply a more nuanced understanding of how teen girls from ages 13 to 19 select, become involved in, and utilise information from films.

10.3.3 Impacts of Gratifications Found in Films

The older teen girls in my study did not appear to be seeking out specific characters or plots relating to their current life stage. Instead, they claimed that films showing realistic everyday activities would be boring. External social factors including neoliberal and postfeminist values (in particular, girl power) evidently shaped the way they viewed and negotiated with films and what they were seeking from them, particularly in relation to their life plans. They did not

see their own lives, or lives they were interested in, reflected on screen. Consequently, they selected and chose the parts of films they considered acceptable and rejected others. Characters and plots were decoded by my participants to fit their own personal understandings and interests, which differed from one girl to another. For example, *The Notebook* (2004) was considered a 'good' film but not romantic, and Katniss was appreciated for her strengths but disliked for her personality. Likewise, although Hermione garnered appreciation for her intelligence, these girls did not speak of her magical abilities, nor the magical setting and plotlines at all. My analysis shows that what the female protagonists *did* – such as Hermione using her intelligence in practical ways and Katniss standing up for what she believed in – was always the main consideration. This demonstrates that performance and action were motivating factors that decided a characters' level of appeal to these older teen girls.

10.3.3.1 Identification With Film Characters

The features that older teen girls were seeking from films represented the life stage they were about to enter and thus planning for, rather than their current stage. In other words, their viewing decisions and satisfactions reflected their lived realities as they entered emerging adulthood. Having matured beyond teen films, they predominantly viewed films with ratings of 15-plus, featuring situations they might someday face. This enabled them to evaluate and interpret how adults interact and function in western society. They preferred action and horror films specifically for the escapism such narratives provided. These genres have been thought to be the domain of young men (Kramer, 1999b). However, I would also argue that a lack of relevant representations on offer to older teen girls motivates them to use and choose films solely for entertainment and to seek life advice and influences elsewhere. For example, there is a dearth of mainstream films featuring female university students, making it difficult to find characters with whom they might identify and seek guidance from for the next stage in their lives. As discussed, my participants' sophisticated decoding practices were influenced by an awareness of the stereotypical and patriarchal portrayal of women in films which enabled them to critically distance themselves from the idea that films depict reality or might provide guidance.

While my participants were not wishing to draw on female characters as role models, identification was an important basis for negotiation and, if lacking, this led to their disinterest in both films and characters, particularly with regard to teen films. Their own school experiences and situations were more influential on their decision-making processes and formation of self. They did not relate to film narratives set in American schools because the culture was so different from their everyday experiences in rural England. Signorelli (1997) argues that negative role models can reinforce stereotypes and damage behaviour. However, the negative traits interpreted by my participants were rejected through oppositional readings, although they did again think that third-party effects may occur for younger girls. While saying that they were not specifically seeking characters to relate to or that resonated with their lives, some characters did provide far greater identification. As Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) note, gender, race and age are characteristics that viewers can relate to along with behaviours, life experiences and personality. For example, Hermione's attendance at an English school was a positive relational impact through her wearing a uniform, undertaking lessons and completing homework. By contrast, the dystopia in which Katniss lived was not a situation with which my participants could relate. As one girl said, you could not 'be' Katniss because you could not live in the world she occupies and due to this there was much less of a connection with this character.

However, my participants' views contradict Hoffner and Buchanan's (ibid., p. 328) understanding that:

> Perceived similarities in these types of fundamental characteristics seem to facilitate the desire to become more like a character in other ways – for example, by emulating the character's attitudes, appearance, behavior, or other characteristics

For these older teen girls, admiration of characters did not directly lead to imitating their appearance or behaviour. They were far more likely to admire characters who were like themselves, or who displayed behaviours that they already admired, than to style themselves on what they viewed. And the small influences that they noted, such as knowledge about makeup and clothing or the desire to work hard towards goals, were internalised only if they related to ambitions or knowledge already existing among the participants' self-projects or

their understandings of self. This was demonstrated by the influence of Emma Watson (who was considered to come from a similar background to the participants from Maple Academy) and the perception of Watson as someone who regards education as important. Authenticity reigned among the girls, and they were encouraged by the films and Watson to develop strong aspirations and continue to plan and work towards careers. As such, they tended to view Watson as successful in her own self-projects. These older teen girls indicated that they accept reassurance from films and that their planning and hard work was expected to enable them to achieve their aspirational goals, if they remained committed. They were responding to the positive impacts from film characters who exhibited values such as "…success, effort, risk-taking, self-improvement, confidence, entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency…" (Medina-Vicent, 2018, p. 71) and they enjoyed watching girls and women on screen triumphing in their projects, even if they were not similar to their own, but they did not seek or find influence to utilise in their lives. Thus, a key finding of this research is that older teen girls claim that they are *not* searching for or requiring role modelling as previously researched (Lockwood, 2006; Greenwood, 2007; Jackson and Vares, 2015b) with participants both older and younger than mine.

Self-projects are pervasive within media of all types and directed at women in particular ways (Gill and Scharff, 2019). The idea of planning and tracking personal behaviour through self-monitoring to achieve goals is pervasive (McRobbie, 2004; Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005; Gill and Orgad, 2015; Elias and Gill, 2018). Self- projects may also be physical in terms of creating an appropriate bodily appearance through exercise and diet. Managing multiple projects is normal practice within neoliberalism, and my participants confirmed that they understood that these values, both within their situated realities and film viewing, encompass their age group, reflecting Harris' (2004b) 'can do girl'. Girls are expected to make informed choices in all areas of their lives, with these choices presented as individual, personal and unlimited (Adams, 2003). This was reflected in my participants' statements about expectations for career and motherhood. Choice, however, is also viewed as feminist (Chen, 2013; Budgeon, 2015; Sørensen, 2017) and an intrinsic part of girls' achievement of success (Baker, 2010). The particular 'can do' trait reflected and internalised among my participants was expressed as self-invention, shown through their career and life

planning. Although the girls' self-projects included having children as well as a job and spouse, the differing weight given to having children revealed a major difference between the schools, with Maple Academy 18-year-olds showing stronger career aspirations than the Willow Academy group.

10.3.3.2 Planning Future Employment

My participants had preconceived ideas of what was personally possible, in terms of life project, stemming from the social restrictions and opportunities offered or implied by their lived situation. While the Maple Academy girls seemed to have clear career aspirations relating to their interests and personal goals, the Willow Academy girls were focused on taking university courses that would provide them with stable employment in order to provide independence and the ability to provide financially for their future families. These differences reflect unequal access to cultural and material resources in the girls’ lives (Gordon *et al.*, 2008). Much of the career discourse employed by the girls was linked to education, as they prepared to complete one stage of schooling and focused on achieving results to allow them to move onto the next level. Having made choices about what subjects to take for A-Level, most had decided what jobs they wished to hold or what courses to apply for at university, creating a future aspirational self-project.

10.3.3.3 Ideas of Motherhood

Differences between my participants' self-projects relating to motherhood appeared to be influenced by restrictions on what they considered possible within their life situation and also considerations such as where a mother’s ambitions should rank within the needs of the family. For example, Maple Academy girls expected that the choice to become a stay-at-home parent would be available to them and referred to future employment as a career rather than a job, assuming that they would be able to choose or switch easily between the two roles. These girls did not view their future children’s needs as outranking their career plans. They felt that, since children were not the focus of fathers’ lives, they should not be expected to make them the focus of their own. In contrast, Willow Academy participants planned for jobs rather than careers, the most crucial factor being a steady income to provide for the material, housing, and other needs of their future

children. Whether class was an influence is unclear as socio-economic data was not collected during the fieldwork, but one can speculate that there may have been some influence from the participants' own class status and upbringings on these ideas.

So, while these girls' self-projects are presented as individualised and as a way to create autonomous lives, there is a limit to the options and trajectories participants regarded as available when picturing their future lives (Gordon *et al.*, 2008). No participants were inspired or guided by films in relation to motherhood. They noted that women lost their independence when they fell in love, and film tropes conveyed expectations that female characters' futures included children. The focus on career and motherhood was related to opportunities in the girls' future lives and the choices they felt were available to them. While the Maple Academy girls saw independence as vital, Willow Academy girls viewed placing a career on equal or higher status than children as selfish, which again may have been influenced by their upbringing or values promoted by the schools they attended. This was reflected in the disparate views of *The Hunger Games'* Katniss, who was presented as a protective mother figure to her younger sister. Maple Academy girls interpreted her as 'wrong' for placing her family above all else, while the Willow Academy girls considered this to be her strength. Again, this finding reveals that life situations set the groundwork for older teen girls' negotiation with films and that any potential for role modelling or other influence was entirely personal.

10.3.3.4 Expectations for and of Future Partners

Although my focus group participants assumed male partners to be part of future family lives (with the possibility, of course, that heteronormative relationships were all that the focus groups felt comfortable discussing with their peers and a stranger), the formation or maintenance of romantic relationships was not considered in as much detail by the girls as careers and children. This concurs with the views of the participants in a study of young mothers by Mitchell & Green (2002), also undertaken in the North East of England. They found that their participants' future relationship with their children was more important than that with a man. Mitchell and Green (ibid., p. 9) state that:

> …a permanent relationship between a mother and the father of their child(ren) was not viewed as an issue of concern… Retaining one's independence and personal identity within a relationship, especially with the child's father was also an important consideration for a significant number of mothers.

Ambivalence towards romantic relationships shown by Mitchell and Green's participants reflects a lack of detail in neoliberal discourses about love. While these relationships are understood within neoliberal values to be part of personal success, there is no guidance on how to create and develop such relationships or definite ideas as to what form they should take. In my study, girls felt that romantic partnerships should meet their needs, yet they showed little concern for the needs of the other party or how they might interact with them beyond having and financially supporting children. My participants further understood that love in films "…created false expectations due to over-the-top, extravagant portrayals and over-simplified, superficial portrayals" (Koontz, Norman and Okorie, 2019) and therefore did not seek ideas or guidance about love relationships from films. This exhibits once again, that as representations within films did not reflect the kinds of ideas that the girls already held, they simply did not negotiate with them. Indeed, most of the girls indicated that they were not particularly interested in watching romantic films of any kind, beyond highly distracted viewing or background noise.

Teen films were heavily criticised by my participants for plotlines that placed the importance of obtaining of a boyfriend over schoolwork. Boys in teen films were perceived as distracting female characters from their education and this was unacceptable to these participants who had reached the A-Level stage and had future educational goals. Film romance was decoded by the girls as an endorsement of their refusal to be distracted from their other life projects. This shows a maturity and focus in their viewing practices. Such responses set this age group apart from many of the academic studies undertaken on younger teen girls which express concerns that film romance may influence girls' understandings and actions (for example Driesmans, Vandenbosch and Eggermont, 2016). My participants' avoidance of, or refusal to become immersed in, romantic films was a way of reinforcing their existing ideas that romance was not (currently) important. However, although the girls were dismissive of screen romance, it is likely that they had an interest in romance in their daily lives – a topic which was

not part of the focus group discussions. Since the 16 to 18-year-old age group in this research departs from the findings of previous research into the romantic ideas of teenage girls, my own findings contribute new knowledge to the field, providing new information which suggests that there is still much to be learnt about older teens girls' negotiations of romance in films.

10.3.3.5 Information Gathering and Collecting Skills

My participants' negotiations with representations of femininity in films were also influenced by their life situations and their future aspirations. While the girls were collecting information for later use, they were simultaneously aware that what they were viewing did not correlate with their situated realities; the films they viewed set a higher level of expectation than they were willing and/or able to attain. Drawing on Hall's (1980) concept of negotiated readings, we can glean that the girls comprehended the encoding of distinctive versions of femininity in films and that they accepted these as ways women are expected to present themselves. But this was then negotiated in relation to the girls' school environment, which did not require them to present themselves in an overtly feminine manner. Knowledge of the effort, financial costs and skills involved in creating ideal feminine appearances led these girls to negotiate their readings even more carefully as they may not have owned specific products or been willing to spend time and money on achieving 'the look'.

As discussed in earlier chapters, participants also understood that many teenage female characters are portrayed by women in their twenties and that teams of professionals have styled them. These girls knew, then, that they could not achieve these levels of aesthetic labour themselves (Winch, 2015). However, when combined with self-projects of femininity, these negotiated readings encouraged the girls to keep up to date with required knowledge of products and skills for times and locations they might be required. This skill-building showed that these girls were interested in how to display expected modes of femininity. This finding shows the carefully negotiated readings of films by older girls who understood the external expectations concerning appearances, yet felt that they did not have to embody those stereotypes. It also may indicate, however, that the girls

did not wish to appear vulnerable to media stereotypes. They may have been resisting discussions of femininity so that their agency would not be doubted.

My participants' admission that comparing themselves with what they saw on screen made them feel bad reflects Budgeon's (2003) findings with younger girls. The focus group participants in my study understood that they could not meet societal standards of femininity due to puberty, cost, skill and time; this did not mean that they were unaware of those standards, that they were unaffected by them or that they did not wish to achieve them. Durham (1999a, p. 220) argues that "… negotiated reading seems to leave girls in an uneasy and conflicted position vis-à-vis their self-concepts and their perceived need to subscribe to cultural ideals." However, I would suggest that the collection of knowledge acquired by the older teen girls in my research was a way to mitigate any feelings of inadequacy that might arise in reaction to what they repeatedly saw on screen. Resistance required work; recognition of encoded messages; negotiation of representations; and the resilience to evade social pressure to present themselves in specific ways. They still, however, managed to find pleasure in knowing about the most current products and trends and discussing them with their friends. Femininity was therefore converted into a learning and preparation project to be actioned if and when necessary – and perhaps happily anticipated.

10.4 Directions for Future Research

Within this thesis it has not been possible to discuss all the themes and topics arising from the fieldwork, and many areas of interest did not find a place. This section highlights several of these areas and suggests why they might be of interest for future research.

There was discussion in many focus groups about where the girls might seek role models if they were not looking for them specifically in films. The role models my participants discussed included family and a range of celebrities, corroborating with Anderson and Cavallaro's (2002) research on children and role models. Further to their research, studies of superstars' influence on adolescent self-efficacy (Cheung and Yue, 2003) and the self-effects of university students (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997) have suggested that celebrities might also aid in

supporting self-projects. Of the celebrities mentioned in my fieldwork, the most frequent subjects have been Beyoncé (Read, 2011; Chatman, 2015; Utley, 2017) and the reality television Kardashian family (Sastre, 2014; Lueck, 2015; Berryman and Kavka, 2017). There is a lack of research on Cara Delevingne, the British model, actress and author. All these celebrities were discussed positively by several focus groups. This lack of research on how teen girls relate to such celebrities mirrors a broader scarcity of knowledge about who older teen girls perceive as role models and what they are looking for or requiring from them.

Situating my research within the North-East of England, it covered towns and rural locations but lacked diversity: all participants were white and of British origin, reflecting the lack of ethnic diversity in the region. As discussed in Chapter 5, the rural and isolated physical location impacted access to cinemas for these girls and limited their opportunities to socialise with friends outside of school. While new media enables continuous contact with friends, film viewing in groups may be more prevalent for girls living in closer proximity to each other, in urban settings. A similar study in an urban area, contrasting the conditions of this study, would provide a broader picture of older teen girl experience. It would allow an assessment of whether earlier bedroom studies research – stating that girls interact collectively with media within their bedrooms (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001; Steele, 2001; Livingstone, 2007) – applies to this age group. Research that includes girls of a wide range of ethnicities, both within the United Kingdom and other countries, would similarly supply more intersectional analysis and add depth to our understanding of older teen girls' identities and media habits. This broadening of participants is particularly relevant due to the lack of representation of women of colour on screen (for example, Moore and Coleman, 2015). Girls who had left school were not part of my study, but such social groups could supply valuable information about how girls might use and view films, according to whether they are employed, undertaking a training programme, unemployed or in another situation. Disabilities and LGBTQIA+ identification are further intersectional factors about which we lack knowledge and are social groups poorly represented in films (for example Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011). Such research would enrich our understanding of how life factors and lived realities influence older teen girls' film viewing habits and interactions with films.

With most research on teens having been undertaken on girls in their early teens or on undergraduate students, a longitudinal study that endeavours to uncover how girls’ media use develops through their teen years would also add significantly to the fields of girl studies and audience studies. It could potentially reveal at what stage, and how, girls’ uses and gratifications from films develop and change. Such research would illuminate when, and what, processes occur and what influences impact girls at different ages, and how media awareness and strength to resist influence develop. This could be undertaken in a manner similar to studies such as Richards (2018b) study of Northern girls, which followed participants from primary to secondary school, but with a specific focus on films and how girls’ attitudes, viewing styles, tastes and negotiations develop over the teen period.

A longitudinal study might pursue these research questions while tracing the impact of developments in new media such as new mobile applications designed to aid in monitoring self-projects (see Elias and Gill, 2018), and considering how films and other media interaction changes over time. Understanding whether the influence and impact of new modes of viewing are appealing to or resisted by girls of differing ages would add to the knowledge of girls' viewing habits. Such an approach would also clarify variances between this studies' participants family viewing and literature stating that teens prefer viewing alone (Larson, 1995; Livingstone, 2005b, 2007). This could begin to rectify the distinct lack of research relating to how films may facilitate a relationship between teen girls and their mothers.

Finally, the worldwide Covid pandemic has seen dramatic shifts in entertainment, particularly with regards to digital content and viewing habits. Further fieldwork comprising a study of the impacts of the growth of digital film content, particularly with newer services such as Disney+, would also aid in understanding the impacts on older teen girls’ home film viewing practices during lockdown and the closure of cinemas. This would ensure that the habits and individualities of this age group were not lost in contemporary analysis.

These gaps and reflections indicate some of the stimulating angles by which research with older teen girls and their interactions with films can build on my study. They show the high level of interconnectedness between the use of various

forms of media in older teen girls' lives and highlight further knowledge required about this age hitherto neglected age group.

10.5 Original Contributions

This research has added to the field of knowledge regarding older teen girls' interactions and negotiations with mainstream film in several important ways. Chapters 5 and 6 show clearly that many different elements of older teen girls' film viewing, although seeming disparate, are entwined, meaning that they exert impact and influence upon each other. What the girls watched was influenced by when, why and where they watched as well as with whom they viewed. While it has been argued that teen girls, as a homogenous group, view films for reasons which have been deemed frivolous, undiscerning, lacking in taste and uncritical (Mazzarella and Pecora, 2007; Bode, 2010; Shary, 2014), my research shows intelligent young women making informed decisions in their quest to obtain exactly what they sought from the films that they watched. Utilising a variety of information sources and demassification in order to decide what was worthy of viewing in the cinema, the girls then navigated restrictions of locality and finances imposed on them.

Within the home, these older teen girls chose their viewing style and location depending on how immersed they wished their viewing to be and whether they were watching alone or with family members. Second-screening provided a way of negotiating time spent with their families even if they did not want to watch or were not enjoying the film screened. It allowed my participants to be co-present and connected with others to support a social viewing experience. The contributions made by this thesis concerning the practicalities of film viewing among older teen girls offer new understandings of inter-generational family viewing. This study also provides an in-depth analysis of the varied nature of older teens' viewing locations and styles which involved a range of knowledge collection and careful decision making by the girls. The analysis reveals them to be discerning and knowledgeable.

My analysis of specific subjects and narratives (such as career, motherhood, romance and femininity), addressed in Chapters 7 and 8, reveals that my participants did not interact with representations on screen that did not relate to

their lived realities and dominant understandings. As such, these older teen girls did not adopt dominant reading positions. While they enjoyed suspending their disbelief to gain pleasure from the entertainment value of films, particularly those with more fantastical plots such as in the superhero and horror genres, my participants did so consciously, acknowledging and enjoying the escapism it offered. However, my participants were also aware that what was being depicted on screen did not reflect their lives and that most films are encoded with heteronormative and stereotypical ideas of girls and women. As the girls' opportunities and daily lives differed, their negotiation of meanings from films were shaped by these dynamics and by neoliberal and postfeminist values which proport that individuals are responsible for their own successes or failures (Giddens, 1991; Harris, 2004a).

These late teen girls' plans and aspirations were articulated within the framework of neoliberal self-projects in the sense that they claimed that films had no influence on their projects but did occasionally encourage them to continue working towards their goals via film characters shown as successful. Differences between the girls in terms of what they believed possible for their futures arose from their social understandings of their lived realities which either encouraged them to go after their goals, or to modify their ideas to fit the expectations of what they believed to be attainable. With these ideas already set and incorporated into their plans, my participants did not perceive the films they viewed to have any practical influence on what they planned to do with their lives. The significance of these findings is that films and film characters do not appear to inspire older teen girls, and they may not use films to seek out role models. This contradicts the way teen girls have been understood in earlier research. My participants were able to negotiate their readings in relation to their situated realities by identifying small moments of influence that they considered acceptable, such as in the case of film characters that exhibited strength or independence.

Chapter 9 investigated the girls' interactions with the young adult characters Hermione Granger and Katniss Everdeen in order to understand how they might interact with and decode representations of girls close to their age. Their interactions with these films were nuanced and personal, showing a self-awareness that differs from younger teen girl audiences in earlier studies. The

girls used these character offerings to compare what they already thought, felt and wanted and it was through this lens that they related to the characters. They were not searching for ways to be influenced; rather they sought reassurance and resonance with regards to actions, planning and attitudes, as well as entertainment. Their decoding of films and their understandings of their representations freed them from direct influence and allowed them to identify with characters their own age. This was shown by their engagement with and responses to Hermione as a character more relatable in her British school than the character of Katniss set in a dystopian America. These contexts and settings guided their responses to these characters. The level to which the girls were able to relate to the actress portraying the character was also seen to impact how much the character resonated.

My participants sought characters that reflected the stage of life they were about to enter in a more realistic but still entertaining way, to bridge the gap between teen films and films for grown women. Yet neither character reflected the postfeminist neoliberal identities that this age group appeared to wish to inhabit. It should be recognised that it was the actions and attitudes of female characters which were of most importance to this audience group, rather than their representation in certain careers, appearance or specific situations,. These older teen girls were seeking examples of strength, determination, individuality and the successful completion of self-projects, and found such on-screen representations to be encouraging and inspiring. These girls already had plans for their future lives: through postfeminist values and girl power identifications they believed they would be able to do anything they set their minds to, and therefore enjoyed watching characters, male or female, who did the same.

The girls in my study were an active audience (Press and Livingstone, 2006). They read films in ways that worked for them and ignored or declined to interact with film narratives and genres they disagreed with. This late teen audience used film media to inform their self-projects but did not let films create their projects for them. The girls expressed autonomy by avoiding film influences while, at the same time, admitting that they sometimes felt inadequate when comparing themselves to the representations of women they viewed on screen. There was, then, a deep contradiction among these girls between their desire for exciting plots which did not reflect their real lives, and their wish to see realistic portrayals of

women on screen - real women in unrealistic situations and events. Their understandings of femininity and their lived experiences contrasted with what they found entertaining. Thus, the key function of films among these older teen girls was to supply respite from their everyday lives, achieved by using a variety of viewing styles and locations or by supplying information for use at a suitable time in the future. I have also shown that earlier academic assumptions – that girl audiences interact and negotiate with films in the same way across the ages of 13 to 19 – are misleading. Rather, older teen girls enjoy and interact with films through a wider variety of complex and nuanced viewing styles than previously assumed and they seek a range of gratifications from viewing that differ from those of younger teens.

Older teen girls were not looking to films for influence, inspiration, role models, information or guidance. Instead, films often offer older teen girls gratifications of entertainment, pleasure, knowledge, procrastination, bonding experiences and escapism. As Livingston (2019, p. 173) suggests, "...audiences are not so gullible as popularly feared, precisely because they are neither homogeneous nor unthinking." The activities of the participants selecting, becoming involved in and utilising film was a variable construct (Levy and Windahl, 1985) and as individual as each of the girls, their lives and their future plans.

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The Expendables 3 (2014) Directed by Patrick Hughes. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

Girl, Interrupted (1999) Directed by James Mangold. [Feature film]. Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures.

Gossip Girl (2007-2012) Directed by various. [TV series]. Burbank, CA: The CW.

Hannah Montana (2006-2011) Directed by various. [TV series]. Burbank, CA: Disney Channel.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (2002) Directed by Chris Columbus. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1 (2010) Directed by David Yates. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2 (2011) Directed by David Yates. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2005) Directed by Mike Newell. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince (2009) Directed by David Yates. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (2007) Directed by David Yates. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (2001) Directed by Chris Columbus. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (2004) Directed by Alphonso Cuarón. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

Hawaii Five-0 (2010-2020) Directed by various. [TV series]. New York: CBS.

Heathers (1989) Directed by Michael Lehmann. Atlanta, GA: New World Entertainment.

The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey (2012) Directed by Peter Jackson. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies (2014) Directed by Peter Jackson. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug (2013) Directed by Peter Jackson. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

Horrible Bosses (2011) Directed by Seth Gordon. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

The Horse Whisperer (1998) Directed by Robert Redford. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Pictures.

The Hunger Games (2012) Directed by Gary Ross. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire (2013) Directed by Francis Lawrence. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1 (2014) Directed by Francis Lawrence. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2 (2015) Directed by Francis Lawrence. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

Jurassic World (2015) Directed by Colin Trevorrow. [Feature film]. Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures International.

Keeping Up with the Kardashians (2006-2021) Directed by various. [TV series]. Los Angeles, CA: E! Entertainment Television.

The Little Mermaid (1989) Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Pictures.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings (2001) Directed by Peter Jackson. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: New Line Cinema.

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003) Directed by Peter Jackson. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: New Line Cinema.

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (2002) Directed by Peter Jackson. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: New Line Cinema.

Magic Mike (2012) Directed by Steven Soderbergh. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

Magic Mike XXL (2015) Directed by Gregory Jacobs. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros Pictures.

The Notebook (2004) Directed by Nick Cassavetes. [Feature film]. Burbank, CA: New Line Cinema.

Notting Hill (1999) Directed by Roger Michell. London: Polygram Filmed Entertainment.

Pretty Little Liars (2010-2017) Directed by various. [TV series]. Burbank, CA: Freeform.

Silver Linings Playbook (2012) Directed by David O. Russell. [Feature film]. New York: The Weinstein Company.

Spectre (2015) Directed by Sam Mendes. [Feature film]. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Releasing.

Straight Outta Compton (2015) Directed by F. Gary Gray. [Feature film]. Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures International.

Thor (2011) Directed by Kenneth Branagh. [Feature film]. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures.

Titanic (1997) Directed by James Cameron. [Feature film]. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures.

Twilight (2008) Directed by Catherine Hardwicke. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Summit.

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1 (2011) Directed by Bill Condon. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Summit.

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2 (2012) Directed by Bill Condon. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Summit.

The Twilight Saga: Eclipse (2010) Directed by David Slade. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Summit.

The Twilight Saga: New Moon (2009) Directed by Chris Weitz. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Summit.

Warrior (2011) Directed by Gavin O'Connor. [Feature film]. Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate.

The Wedding Planner (2001) Directed by Adam Shankman. [Feature film]. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Releasing.

The Woman in Black (2012) Directed by James Watkins. [Feature film]. London/Toronto: Momentum Pictures.

X-Men: First Class (2011) Directed by Matthew Vaughn. [Feature film]. Century City, CA: 20th Century Fox.

Appendices

Appendix A School Contact Letter

Ms. Anna B. Holt BA(Hons) MA

My Address

School Contact

School Address

Date

Dear ,

I am a mature PhD student in my fourth of six years part time at Newcastle University as part of the School of Arts and Cultures. I am interested in carrying out fieldwork as part of my thesis at xxx School. I live locally and would like to undertake my fieldwork in this area as I have two sons in local schools.

My research is about the film viewing habits of teenage girls, aged 16 to 18, with regard to mainstream films. I am particularly interested in whether the films they watch influence or shape their identities and ideas about femininity. As such, I would like to undertake a computerised survey and then focus group discussions with girls within your 6th Form. I would provide the school with an outline of the study and a list of all the questions beforehand. I shall also adhere to Newcastle University ethical guidelines by providing information sheets and consent forms for the parents and the girls to be distributed once approved.

Obviously, I would ensure my research is undertaken at times specified by the school and working around the girls' studies. Any participation by the girls would be entirely voluntary and they would be able to withdraw from participation at any stage without explanation. All findings gained from this research will be confidential and participants will be anonymised by myself to protect the identities of the girls and the school. I will, of course, provide a report of my findings to the school, along with copies of any published writings making use of the anonymous data.

My project will obtain ethical approval from Newcastle University before the study begins. If you require me to have police clearance before undertaking the research I shall do so if you could let me know what level of clearance you require.

Should you have any queries regarding any aspect of my project you can contact me or my Supervisor, Professor Deborah Chambers at Media and Cultural

Studies, School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University, Armstrong Building, Queen Victoria Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU or deborah.chambers@ncl.ac.uk.

I would be grateful if I could meet with you or a member of your staff to provide further details of my project and address any queries. I can be reached by telephone on xxxx or by email at a.b.holt@ncl.ac.uk.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Anna B. Holt

Appendix B   Computerised Survey

Young Women and Film

Background Information

***1. How old are you?**

- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- over 18

***2. Who do you share a house with? Please include ages and gender of any siblings. (for example, Mother and brother, 15)**

***3. What are your parents' occupations?**

***4. What is your ethnicity?**

- Mixed/Multiple Ethic Groups
- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- Asian / Asian British
- White
- Arab
- Prefer not to answer
- Any other ethnic group (please specify)

***5. How long does it take you to get to school?**

- 5 - 10 minutes
- 11 - 20 minutes
- 21 - 30 minutes
- over 30 minutes

***6. Which subjects are you studying?**

Page 1

Young Women and Film

***7. What are your plans for after 6th Form?**

***8. What kind of job would you like to have?**

Film Viewing Information

***9. How often do you watch films?**

- Less than once a week
- Once or twice a week
- Three to four times a week
- Daily

***10. How often do you go to the cinema?**

- Every 6 months or longer
- Every 3-6 months
- Every 1-2 months
- At least monthly
- Never

***11. How long does it take you to travel to the cinema?**

- 5-10 minutes
- 11-20 minutes
- 21 - 30 minutes
- over 30 minutes

***12. What was the last film you saw at the cinema?**

***13. Have you been to see a film multiple times at the cinema? If so please give title and number of times you went.**

Page 2

Young Women and Film

***14. Do you have a way of watching films in your bedroom (tv/dvd player, tablet, computer etc.)?**

- yes
- no
- sometimes (on device shared with friend or family)

***15. Which device do you use most often to watch films? (i.e. tablet, large screen tv, computer etc.)**

***16. How do you watch films at home? (tick as many as apply)**

- Netflix
- Amazon Instant
- Downloading (unpaid)
- iTunes
- Purchasing/renting digital copy elsewhere
- Accessing digital copy of purchased DVD
- Other free online service
- Television (paid for channel)
- Television (free channel)
- DVD
- DVD rental by post (i.e. Lovefilm etc.)
- Other (please specify)

***17. Do films aimed at teenagers contain plots and characters that interest you?**

- yes
- no
- usually
- not very often
- sometimes

***18. Do you watch films with a rating above your age?**

- yes, all the time
- yes, occasionally
- yes, but very rarely
- never

Young Women and Film

***19. What are your favourite genres of film? (pick as many as apply)**

- [ ] Romantic Comedy
- [ ] Comedy
- [ ] Action
- [ ] Thriller
- [ ] Historical
- [ ] Musical
- [ ] Superhero / Comic Book
- [ ] Crime
- [ ] Horror
- [ ] Science Fiction
- [ ] War
- [ ] Western
- [ ] Other (please specify)

***20. How do you decide which films you would like to watch? (tick as many as apply)**

- [ ] trailers online
- [ ] trailers in cinema
- [ ] will watch anything with certain actor/actress in it
- [ ] film reviews online
- [ ] film reviews in magazines/newspapers
- [ ] friend's recommendations
- [ ] IMDB
- [ ] television trailer
- [ ] television review

Other (please specify)

Film Specifics

Young Women and Film

***21. Please tell me about the last film you watched.**

Title

How you watched it (cinema, computer, tablet etc.)

Where you watched it (home, friend's house, cinema etc.)

***22. Please tell me your favourite:**

Film

Actress

Actor

***23. Which film have you watched the most times?**

***24. What is it about your most watched film that makes you want to watch it multiple times? Please be as specific as you can.**

***25. Do you seek out information about actors and actresses? If so please list where you look (i.e IMDB, magazine titles, website names etc.).**

no

yes

***26. Who is your favourite film character and why? Please be as specific as you can.**

***27. Do films show situations and issues that are relevant to your life?**

yes

no

don't know

Young Women and Film

28. What kind of themes/issues would you like to see films about?

29. Have you ever imitated something you saw in a film? For example; style of dress, type of behaviour, hairstyle or make-up, etc. If so, please explain below in as much detail as you can and include the title of the film and a character's name if possible.

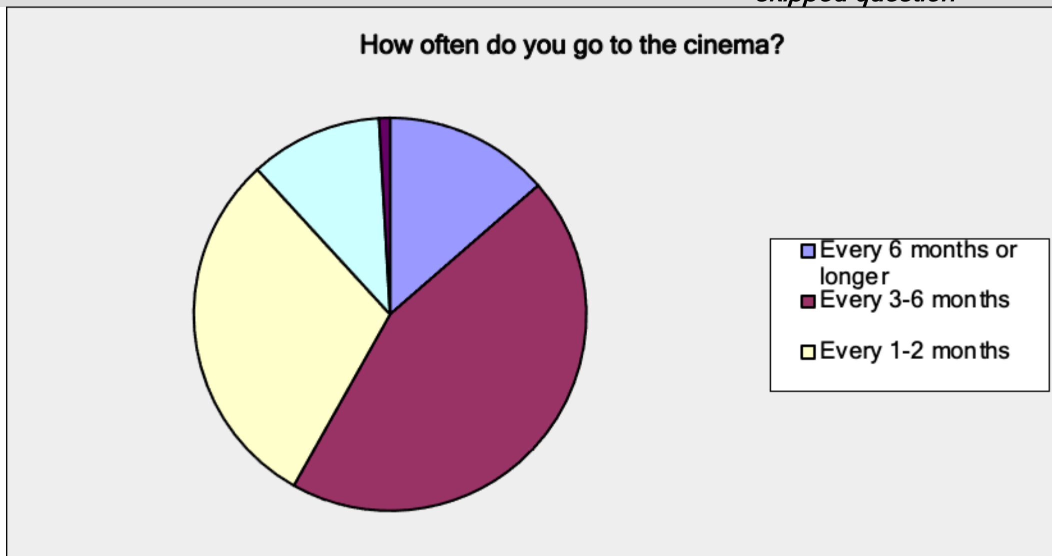
30. Can you think of a film character you would like to be like? Please list character and film.

31. Can you think of a film character you do not want to be like? Please list character and film.

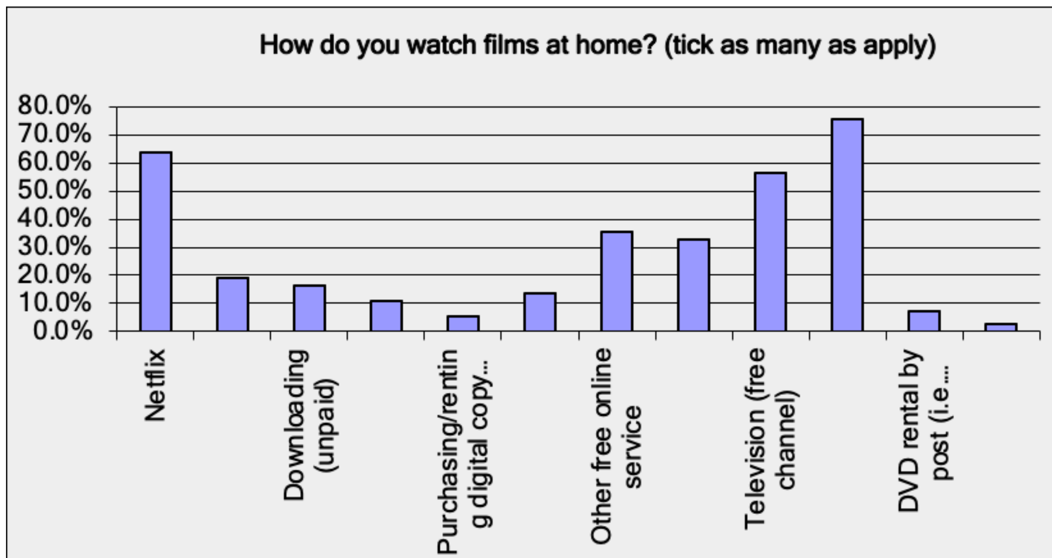
32. Is there anything about film that has not been asked that you feel is important or would like to talk about?

Appendix C Survey Monkey Data Examples

How often do you go to the cinema?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Every 6 months or longer	13.6%	15
Every 3-6 months	44.5%	49
Every 1-2 months	30.0%	33
At least monthly	10.9%	12
Never	0.9%	1
	answered question	110
	skipped question	9



How do you watch films at home? (tick as many as apply)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Netflix	63.6%	70
Amazon Instant	19.1%	21
Downloading (unpaid)	16.4%	18
iTunes	10.9%	12
Purchasing/renting digital copy elsewhere	5.5%	6
Accessing digital copy of purchased DVD	13.6%	15
Other free online service	35.5%	39
Television (paid for channel)	32.7%	36
Television (free channel)	56.4%	62
DVD	75.5%	83
DVD rental by post (i.e. Lovefilm etc.)	7.3%	8
Other (please specify)	2.7%	3
	answered question	110
	skipped question	9



How do you decide which films you would like to watch? (tick as many as apply)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
trailers online	82.7%	91
trailers in cinema	67.3%	74
will watch anything with certain actor/actress in it	40.9%	45
film reviews online	19.1%	21
film reviews in magazines/newspapers	10.9%	12
friend's recommendations	62.7%	69
IMDB	24.5%	27
television trailer	52.7%	58
television review	4.5%	5
Other (please specify)		7
	answered question	110
	skipped question	9

Appendix D Focus Group Questions

Favourite film and why?

Favourite character and why?

Least favourite character and why?

What is it about a film that makes you watch it over and over?

How do you watch films? Where and with whom?

How do you get to the cinema when you go?

How do you watch films: the whole thing or just certain scenes?

Do you buy DVDs or digital copies?

What do you think about age categories? Why would you want to watch a film classified older than your age?

How do you feel about films aimed at a teenage audience? Aimed at a teen girl audience?

Do you watch Disney films?

Do you feel that what you see in films has an effect in your life beyond entertainment?

What jobs do you remember female characters having in films you've seen recently?

Do you notice the relationships between women in film?

Do you think film characters can be role models?

Who are your role models?

Do you ever compare yourself to film characters? How does that feel?

Do films and/or characters ever lead to daydreams or fantasies of yourself in their role/position/life/looks?

What kinds of characters would you like to see in films?

Has a film ever influenced you to do something in your life (dress, act, find out information, set goals etc.)?

Do you talk about film, actors/actresses, etc. online? Where and what type of discussion?

Do you think films represent the world as it is? Should they?

What kinds of female characters do you like to see?

What kinds of female characters do you want to see?

Do you watch any older teenage films such as *Heathers*, *Clueless*, *Pretty in Pink*, *Breakfast Club*, etc?

What's the best thing about watching a film?

Are you interested in celebrity culture, i.e. the actors and actresses away from the films?

Does their off-screen life and persona affect how you view them in a film or whether you view a film?

Thoughts on *The Hunger Games*?

Appendix E Focus Group Information Tables

Table 1 – Breakdown of Participant Numbers

Age	Maple Academy	Willow Academy	Total
16	10	6	16
17	6	4	10
18	12	0	12
Total	28	10	38

Table 2 – Maple Academy Focus Groups

Group	Date	Age	# of girls	Names/Pseudonyms Used
1	20/3/2015	18	6	Recording failed, no direct quotes available.
2	27/3/2015	18	6	Sarah, Jenny, Caitlin, Maggie (1 participant did not speak and another left early without contributing)
3	2/6/2015	17	4	Rose, Sally, Naomi, Kate
4	9/7/2015	17	2	Emma, Andrea
6	27/11/2015	16	6	Emily, Jessica, Angie, Anne, Belinda, Nicole
7	27/11/2015	16	4	Rae, Ellie, Nora, Lizzie

Table 3 – Willow Academy Focus Groups

Group	Date	Age	# of girls	Pseudonyms Used
5	24/11/2015	16	3	Alison, Laura, Karen
8	1/12/2015	16	3	Donna, Michelle, Georgia
9	8/12/2015	17	4	Violet, Carol, Joanna, Samantha

Appendix F   Participant Information Sheet[12]

Information Sheet for Participants in PhD Research Fieldwork about Teenage Girls' Relationship to Popular Cinema

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a PhD. It is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve before deciding whether you would like to participate. Please read the following information carefully and talk to others about the study if you wish. Feel free, also, to contact me with any questions you may have.

The Purpose of the Study

As part of my PhD research I am required to undertake fieldwork to produce original information which adds new knowledge to the field I am studying.

The aims of this project are to learn the opinions and ideas of teenage girls (aged 16 to 18) about mainstream films. I am particularly interested in whether what you are viewing has any influence on your ideas of femininity. Although there is an assumption in the press and academic literature that media of all kinds have an effect on girls, there has been very little research into how, or whether, this actually occurs. This study aims to fill a small part of this gap and to try to re-open the discussion of young women and the media.

Who Can Participate?

[12] Please note that the fieldwork was undertaken prior to GDPR coming into effect, thus it is not mentioned within these documents.

Research will be conducted within two Northumberland High School 6th forms. The research is aimed at teenage girls aged 16 to 18. Participation in this project is purely voluntary.

What is Required of Participants?

There has been an initial anonymous survey completed online at school. This will be followed by group discussions of groups girls each separated by your year groups. Again, participation is purely voluntary.

All participation will take place within school hours but will not interfere with your lessons or schoolwork. You will take part only once in each level of research (i.e. one focus group or 1 survey completion).

There is no financial reward for taking part in this research. Discussions, however, may be of particular interest to those of you taking courses in Sociology, Media Studies, Film Studies and Psychology as subjects relevant to these fields may be discussed.

There are no physical or perceived emotional or mental risks involved with participation. Should you wish to terminate your participation for any reason at all you will be able to do so without providing a reason and without giving notice.

Data Collection and Usage

Data will be collected online via school computers for the survey. The responses will be inspected by myself and my supervisors only and all responses will be confidential, anonymous and password protected.

Audio recordings of focus groups and interviews will be made. These recordings will be transcribed by myself, at which time all comments will be anonymised within the transcript (i.e., your name and any personal information that could identify you will be removed). During discussion of the data and in writing using the data (including the final thesis, articles, conferences or any other means of sharing the findings of the project) participants will be referred to by their age and a pseudonym decided upon and kept confidentially by myself.

All data will be kept on computer and will be password protected. Any paper copies will be kept under lock and key and destroyed when no longer needed.

I will provide a copy of the findings to the schools upon completion of my project and also notify them of any published work containing the findings should you be interested in reading them. Should you have left the school before the results are finalised, I would be happy to email you a copy.

Who Am I?

My name is Anna Holt, and I am a mature student starting my 4th year of a 6-year part time PhD at Newcastle University.

If you have any queries about this research, please contact me at a.b.holt@ncl.ac.uk or on xxxxx.

Any complaints regarding this project should be addressed to: Professor Deborah Chambers, Media and Cultural Studies, School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University, Armstrong Building, Queen Victoria Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU. deborah.chambers@ncl.ac.uk.

Appendix G Participant Consent Form

Newcastle University

<u>Teenage Girls' Relationship to Mainstream Film Participant Consent Form</u>

I confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet dated _________________.	☐
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	☐
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	☐
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	☐
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	☐
6.	The collection of data via audio recording and the use and storage of this has been explained to me.	☐
7.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	☐
8.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	☐

Participant:

_________________________ _____________________________ _____________

Name of Participant Signature Date

Researcher:

<u>Anna B Holt</u>_____________ _____________________________ _____________

Name of Researcher Signature Date

Appendix H   Participant Debriefing Sheet

Debriefing Sheet - Teenage Girls' Relationship to Mainstream Film

Firstly, thank you for your participation in this research project. I have greatly enjoyed working with you all and getting to hear your ideas and opinions on film. I hope that you have enjoyed taking part.

Purpose of the project

The purpose of this project has been to find out what films teenage girls are watching and how they understand and relate to what is in them. Although is assumed by the press and in academic literature that all kinds of media have the power to influence teenage girls, there have been no direct studies until now into specific forms of media. This study has aimed to fill a small gap in this area.

How and When the Results Will Be Available

Should any of you be interested in discussing the results of this research, I would be more than happy to return to the school to talk to you about what I have found. Should this not be possible, I will supply a written summary of the findings.

Upon confirmation that my thesis has been accepted and that the PhD has been awarded, I will provide a copy of the thesis to the school. I will also provide copies of any published journal articles that contain information gained from this research.

Obviously, the time it takes for the thesis to be submitted exceeds the time remaining for you in the 6th Form. If you would like me to email you to let you know where you can read the findings or articles, please contact me at a.b.holt@ncl.ac.uk .

Feedback

I would love to hear your feedback on the research process and on my findings. You can contact me via email at a.b.holt@ncl.ac.uk .

Dissemination of the Information

As stated, the information from this research will be used in my PhD thesis, journal articles and, perhaps, talks given at academic conferences. Within all these forms your identification will remain confidential and any comments you make will be presented in an anonymous way so that you cannot be identified.

Questions, Concerns or Complaints

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns via email; a.b.holt@ncl.ac.uk

Any complaints regarding this project should be addressed to: Professor Deborah Chambers, Media and Cultural Studies, School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University, Armstrong Building, Queen Victoria Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU. deborah.chambers@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix I NViVO First Coding Themes

Actors Mentioned

Actresses Mentioned

Career Plans

Celebrity

Choosing What to Watch

Cinema

Disney

Divergent

Female Characters

Female Relationships on Screen

Feminism

Films Mentioned

Harry Potter Films

Hermione Granger

Influence of Film

Influences Not Film

Katniss Everdeen

Media Awareness

Mothers

Motherhood

Race

Ratings

Reasons for Viewing

Repeat Viewing

Romance

Talking to Others About Film

Teen Film

The Hunger Games

Twilight

Where/How Watch

Who Watch With

Women's Jobs on Screen

Appendix J Actresses and Actors Discussed in Focus Groups

	Age	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Amanda Seyfried	31	x	x							2
Angelina Jolie	41		x	x						2
Anne Hathaway	34		x							1
Audrey Hepburn (i)	32								x	1
Bella Thorn	19								x	1
Bethany Hamilton	27						x			1
Cara Delevingne	24								x	1
Cate Blanchett	47				x					1
Daisy Ridley	24		x							1
Dakota Fanning	23								x	1
Ellen Page	30						x			1
Emily Blunt	34		x							1
Emily Browning	28				x					1
Emma Watson	26	x							x	2
Halle Berry	50						x			1
Jennifer Aniston	48						x			1
Jennifer Lawrence	26	x	x			x			x	4
Jennifer Lopez	47		x				x			2
Julie Walters	67					x				1
Kate Winslet	41		x							1
Kristen Stewart	26	x	x						x	3
Maggie Smith	82					x	x			2
Megan Fox	30		x							1
Melissa McCarthy	46		x							1
Meryl Streep	67					x	x			2
Miley Cyrus	24						x			1
Rachel McAdams	38	x								1
Rebel Wilson	37									1
Reese Witherspoon	41	x	x				x			3
Sandra Bullock	52					x				1
Scarlett Johansson	32		x	x						2
Viola Davis	51					x				1
Winona Ryder	45								x	1
33 total		6	13	2	2	6	9	0	8	

	Age	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Aaron Taylor Johnson	26				x			x		2
Adam Sandler	50								x	1
Andrew Garfield	33								x	1
Andrew Scott	40							x		1
Anthony Michael Hall	48							x		1
Ben Stiller	51						x			1
Benedict Cumberbatch	40	x	x							2
Brad Pitt	53		x							1
Bradley Cooper	42						x			1
Chris Evans	35	x	x							2
Chris Hemsworth	33				x					1
Chris Pratt	37					x				1
Christian Bale	43			x						1
Christian Slater	53								x	1
Dan Stevens	34	x								1
Daniel Craig	49							x		1
Daniel Radcliffe	27					x		x	x	3
David Tennant	45	x								1
Ed Westwick	29								x	1
Eddie Murphy	55								x	1
Evan Peters	30							x		1
George Clooney	55					x				1
Heath Ledger (ii)	28							x		1
Hugh Grant	56	x								1
Ian McKellan	77				x					1
Jesse Eisenberg	33								x	1
Joel Egerton	42								x	1
Johnny Depp	53		x	x	x				x	4
Judd Nelson	57							x		1
Keanu Reeves	52		x							1
Leonardo DiCaprio	42		x	x					x	3
Liam Hemsworth	27						x			1
Luke Evans	37	x								1
Martin Freeman	45	x			x					2
Michael Cera	28								x	1
Morgan Freeman	79	x							x	2

Orlando Bloom	40	x								1
Robert Downey Jr.	51		x							1
Tom Brodie-Sangster	26					x				1
Tom Hardy	39					x			x	2
Tom Hiddleston	36				x	x				2
Will Ferrell	49		x							1
Will Smith	48					x				1
43 total		9	8	3	6	7	3	8	13	

All information collected from IMDb. Ages are at time of analysis, March 2017.

Notes:

i. Age at time she appeared in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, the film discussed in relation to her.

ii. Age at the time of his death.

Appendix K   Films Discussed in Focus Groups

	Year	Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
10 Things I Hate About You	1999	12						x		x		2
50 First Dates	2004	12A						x				1
50 Shades of Grey	2015	18	x									1
The Addams Family	1991	PG			x							1
Alice in Wonderland	2010	PG			x							1
The Amazing Spider-Man	2012	12A									x	1
American Sniper	2014	15		x					x			2
American Ultra	2015	15									x	1
Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging	2008	12A		x				x			x	3
August Rush	2007	PG		x								1
***The Avengers* (i)**	2012	12A		x	x		x		x			4
The Back-up Plan	2010	12A							x			1
The Basketball Diaries	1995	18									x	1
Batman Begins	2005	12A			x	x						2
***Beauty and the Beast* (Live Action)**	2017	PG		x								1
Beetlejuice	1988	15									x	1
Billy Elliot	2000	15						x				1
Brave	2012	PG		x								1
Breakfast at Tiffany's	1961	PG					x					1
The Breakfast Club	1985	15	x	x				x	x	x		5
The Break-Up	2006	12A							x			1
Bridesmaids	2011	15			x							1
Brother Bear	2003	U					x					1
The Brothers Grimm	2005	12A			x							1
Cake	2014	15							x			1

***Captain America: The First Avenger* (ii)**	2011	12A		x	x		x					3
Carrie	2013	15		x								1
***Carry On* (iii)**	50s - 70s	U-PG			x							1
Cars	2006	PG			x							1
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	2005	PG				x						1
***Cinderella* (Live Action)**	2015	U		x								1
Clueless	1995	12	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	7
The Conjuring 2	2016	15									x	1
Crimson Peak	2015	15						x				1
Cry-Baby	1990	12									x	1
The Curious Case of Benjamin Button	2008	12A							x			1
Dear John	2010	12A		x	x							2
The Devil Wears Prada	2006	PG			x						x	2
Die Hard	1988	18									x	1
Dirty Dancing	1987	15							x			1
Dirty Harry	1971	18							x			1
***Divergent* Trilogy**	2014	12A	x	x	x		x			x	x	6
The DUFF	2015	12A									x	1
Edward Scissorhands	1990	PG			x						x	2
The Evil Dead	1981	18			x							1
The Expendables	2010	18									x	1
The Fast and the Furious	2009	15			x							1
The Fault in Our Stars	2014	12A	x	x	x				x		x	5
Ferris Bueller's Day Off	1986	15	x									1
Finding Dory	2016	U		x								1
***Flowers in the Attic* (TV Film)**	2014	n/a							x			1

***The Flying Scotsman* Documentary (iv)**	?	?				x						1
The Fox and the Hound	1981	U			x							1
Frozen	2013	PG	x	x		x					x	4
The Game Plan	2007	U						x				1
Gangs of New York	2002	18									x	1
Get Rich or Die Tryin'	2005	15									x	1
Girl, Interrupted	1999	15							x		x	2
Greased Lightening	1977	A						x				1
The Great Gatsby	2013	12A			x	x						2
Grown Ups	2010	12A									x	1
Guardians of the Galaxy	2014	12A			x			x				2
The Handmaid's Tale	1990	18		x								1
The Hangover	2009	15							x			1
Hannah Montana The Movie	2009	U			x							1
***Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone* (v)**	2001	PG	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	8
Heathers	1988	18	x					x			x	3
The Help	2011	12A						x				1
Hercules	1997	U			x		x					2
HH Holmes: America's First Serial Killer	2004	15									x	1
***High School Musical* (TV Film) (vi)**	2006	U		x		x		x			x	4
***The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (vii)**	2012	12A		x	x		x					3
Home Alone	1990	PG							x			1
Horns	2013	15						x				1
Horrible Bosses	2011	15			x							1

The Horse Whisperer	1998	PG							x			1
The Hunger Games **(viii)**	2012	12A	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
I Love You, Man	2009	15									x	1
If I Stay	2014	12A								x		1
Inbetweeners	2001	15									x	1
Inception	2010	12A	x					x			x	3
Inside Out	2015	U						x				1
Insidious **(ix)**	2010	15			x	x						2
Into the Wild	2007	15	x			x						2
Into the Woods	2014	PG		x								1
Jawbreaker	1999	15									x	1
Jennifer's Body	2009	15			x							1
John Tucker Must Die	2006	12A		x							x	2
Jungle Book	1967	U		x								1
Juno	2007	12A							x			1
Jurassic World	2015	12A			x	x	x	x			x	5
Kick-Ass	2010	15					x					1
Kill Bill Vol. 1	2003	18			x							1
Kill Your Darlings	2013	15								x		1
Kingsman: The Secret Service	2014	15									x	1
Knock Knock	2015	18			x							1
The Lady in the Van	2015	12A						x	x			2
Lara Croft: Tomb Raider	2001	15			x							1
The Last Song	2010	PG			x				x			2
Legally Blonde	2001	12		x				x				2
Legend	2015	18									x	1
The Little Mermaid	1989	U	x									1
The Lizzie McGuire Movie	2003	U				x						1
LOL	2012	12A							x			1

***The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (x)**	2001	PG		x	x	x	x		x		x	6
The Lost Boys	1987	15	x									1
Love Actually	2003	15		x				x				2
Love, Rosie	2014	15	x		x					x		3
Lucy	2014	15			x							1
Mad Max: Fury Road	2015	15			x							1
Magic Mike	2012	15				x						1
Mamma Mia	2008	PG		x								1
The Martian	2015	12A									x	1
Matilda	1996	PG		x								1
The Maze Runner	2014	12A	x									1
The Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials	2015	12A								x		1
Mean Girls	2004	12A		x	x	x					x	4
Men in Black	1997	PG					x					1
Million Dollar Baby	2004	12A							x			1
Minions	2015	U	x	x								2
Miss Congeniality	2000	12		x								1
Monsters Inc.	2001	U								x		1
Mulan	1998	PG		x		x	x	x				4
My Sister's Keeper	2009	12A		x					x			2
The Notebook	2004	12A	x	x			x				x	4
Notting Hill	1999	15		x								1
The Other Woman	2014	12A									x	1
Pan	2015	PG						x				1
Paper Towns	2015	12A									x	1
The Perks of Being a Wallflower	2012	12A	x		x							1
Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl	2003	12A			x							1

The Pirates! Band of Misfits	2012	U		x								1
Pitch Perfect	2012	12A	x		x							2
Pocahontas	1995	U		x								1
Pretty In Pink	1986	15	x							x		2
The Princess Diaries	2001	U		x							x	2
Project X	2012	18							x			1
PS I Love You	2007	12A							x			1
Rocky	1976	12			x							1
The Runaways	2010	15									x	1
S. Darko	2009	15									x	1
The Secret Life of Walter Mitty	2013	PG							x			1
The Shawshank Redemption	1994	15	x									1
Shutter Island	2010	15			x			x			x	3
The Silence of the Lambs	1991	18	x									1
The Silver Linings Playbook	2012	15						x				1
Sixteen Candles	1984	15	x									1
Sleepless in Seattle	1993	PG					x					1
Some Kind of Wonderful	1987	PG				x			x			2
Soul Surfer	2011	PG							x			1
The Sound of Music	1965	U							x			1
Spectre	2015	12A				x	x	x	x		x	5
Spy	2015	15			x	x						2
St Trinian's	2007	12A				x						1
Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace **(xi)**	1999	U			x				x			2
Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope **(xi)**	1977	U			x				x			2
Step Brothers	2008	15			x							1

Straight Outta Compton	2015	15									x	1
The Strangers	2008	15									x	1
Taken	2008	18							x			1
Tarzan	1999	U			x							1
Ted 2	2015	15				x						1
Thor	2011	12A		x				x				2
The Time Traveller's Wife	2009	12A		x								1
Titanic	1997	12			x							1
Troy	2004	15			x							1
***Twilight* (xii)**	2008	12A	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	7
Unbroken	2014	15		x								1
Van Helsing	2004	12A			x							1
The Vow	2012	12		x								1
Warrior	2011	12A						x			x	1
We Bought a Zoo	2011	PG									x	1
The Wedding Planner	2001	PG			x							1
What's Eating Gilbert Grape?	1993	12									x	1
Wild	2014	15							x			1
Wild Child	2008	12A				x		x				2
The Wizard of Oz	1939	U							x			1
The Wolf of Wall Street	2013	18				x						1
The Woman in Black	2012	12A						x	x		x	3
World War Z	2013	15			x							1
X-Men: First Class	2011	12A					x	x				2
			25	44	54	25	19	33	36	12	51	

All information collected from IMDb.

Notes:

i. *The Avengers* were discussed primarily as characters rather than individual films, therefore only the first film is listed.

ii. Captain America was mainly discussed in terms of the actor portraying the character or more generally within the Superhero genre, rather than by individual film titles, thus only the first film is listed.

iii. The *Carry On* films were mentioned as a collective group rather than by an individual title.

iv. I was unable to locate the details of the documentary discussed by a participant.

v. *Harry Potter* films were discussed as a single entity, thus only the first film is listed.

vi. *High School Musical* films were discussed as a single entity, thus only the first film is listed.

vii. *The Hobbit* trilogy was discussed as a single entity, thus only the first film is listed.

viii. *The Hunger Games* trilogy was discussed as a single entity, thus only the first film is listed.

ix. The *Insidious* films were discussed as a single entity, thus only the first film is listed.

x. The *Lord of the Rings* trilogy was discussed as a single entity, thus only the first film is listed.

xi. The first and second *Star Wars* trilogies were discussed as single entities. thus only the first film of each is listed.

xii. The *Twilight* films were discussed as a single entity, thus only the first film is listed.

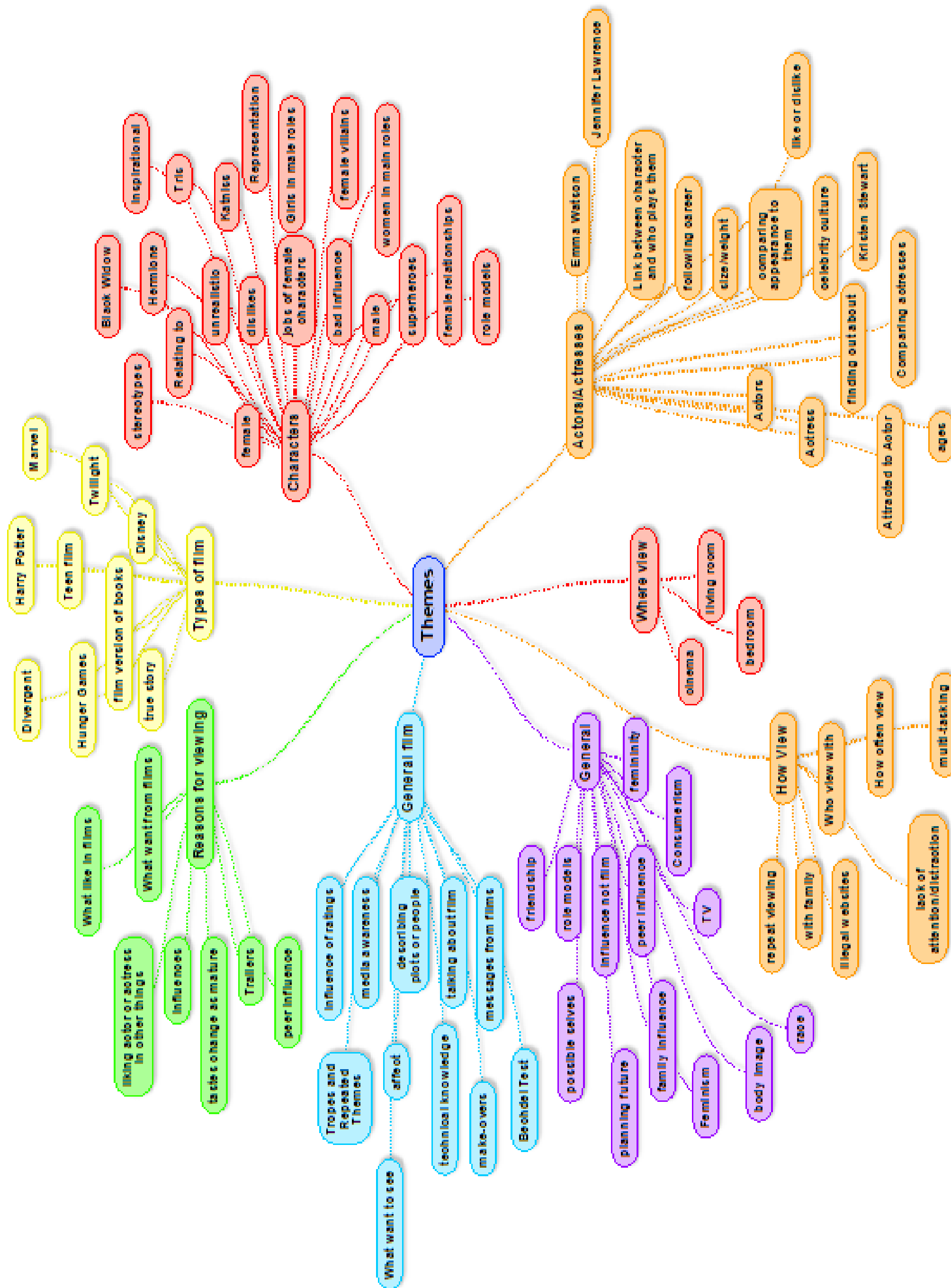
Appendix L Hand Coding Themes by Group

Theme	**2**[13]	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	
Actors	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Actresses	X		X	X				X	4
Body size/weight		X		X				X	3
Books	X	X		X	X	X			5
Choosing films	X			X	X	X	X	X	6
Cinema	X	X	X	X					4
Comparing physical appearance	X	X	X					X	4
Describing actor/actress	X		X	X	X	X		X	6
Disney		X	X	X		X	X		5
Distracted Viewing	X	X			X	X	X		5
Family viewing	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	7
Female characters	X	X		X	X	X	X		6
Female jobs in films	X	X	X				X	X	5
Feminism	X			X	X	X		X	5
Harry Potter and Hermione	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	7
How watch (including where)	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	7
The Hunger Games and Katniss	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Influence not film	X	X	X	X	X		X		6
Influence of film	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Peer Influence	X	X				X		X	4
Planning future	X	X			X	X		X	5
Plot discussion		X	X			X			3
Race				X	X				2
Ratings		X	X		X	X	X		5
Repeat viewing	X	X	X		X	X		X	6
Representation	X	X			X				3
Role models	X	X		X			X	X	5
Romantic relationships in films	X	X	X				X	X	5

[13] There was no transcript from the first group, only my handwritten notes, thus that group is not included here.

Seeking information on actor/actress	X		X		X		X		4
Stereotypes	X				X	X		X	4
Superheroes	X	X			X	X			4
Talking about film with friends	X	X	X				X	X	5
Teen film		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
True Stories			X		X				2
Twilight	X	X	X	X	X			X	6
Who view with	X	X	X	X			X	X	6
Why view	X			X	X	X		X	5

Appendix M Sorting Data into Wider Themes: Examples



Organising themes into the questions of where, what, why and how.

Where	What	Why	How
Cinema	Disney	Actor/actress	Second screen/distracted
Bedroom	Teen film	Maturing tastes	Repeat viewing
Family space	Particular characters	Books and films	Who view with
	Superheroes	Discussing film	Regular viewing
	Trailers	Peer influence	Consumerism
	True stories	Emotional release	How watch
	Television	Reassurance/comfort	Illegal downloads
		How choose	

Appendix N Book and Film References

***Harry Potter* Books**

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (Rowling, 1997)
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (Rowling, 1998)
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (Rowling, 1999)
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (Rowling, 2000)
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (Rowling, 2003)
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (Rowling, 2005)
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallow (Rowling, 2007)

***Harry Potter* Films**

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone (Columbus, 2001)
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (Columbus, 2002)
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (Cuaron, 2004)
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (Newell, 2005)
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (Yates, 2007)
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (Yates, 2009)
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1 (Yates, 2010)
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2 (Yates, 2011)

***The Hunger Games* Books**

The Hunger Games (Collins, 2008)
Catching Fire (Collins, 2009)
Mockingjay (Collins, 2010)

***The Hunger Games* Films**

The Hunger Games (Ross, 2012)
The Hunger Games: Catching Fire (Lawrence, 2013)
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1 (Lawrence, 2014)
The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2 (Lawrence, 2015)

Twilight Books

Twilight (Meyer, 2005)
New Moon (Meyer, 2006)
Eclipse (Meyer, 2007)
Breaking Dawn (Meyer, 2008)

Twilight Films

Twilight (Hardwicke, 2008)
The Twilight Saga: New Moon (Weitz, 2009)
The Twilight Saga: Eclipse (Slade, 2010)
The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1 (Condon, 2011)
The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2 (Condon, 2012)