

'Do you think she's pretty?' Femininity, feminism and teen film: an analysis of The Hunger Games and The DUFF

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Abstract:

This paper examines the packaging of lead female characters in teen film as *feminist* icons to be idolised despite their adherence to idealised *femininity*. Undertaking a semiotic analysis, including *mise en scène* study, of *The Hunger Games* (Color Force, 2012) and *The DUFF* (CBS Films, 2015), this examination draws on feminist theory focusing on key depictions of female heroines as *feminist*, *feminine* or an *amalgamation* of both. It is revealed that teen films rely on tropes, such as the makeover, to establish an imitation of maturity throughout the narrative. Females in teen films succumb to the *hegemonic* ideologies associated with *heteronormative femininity*. The genre continues to display the negation of *feminism* for *femininity* as a requirement for conceived females to achieve their 'happy endings'. Characters such as Katniss Everdeen (*The Hunger Games*, 2012) and Bianca Piper (*The DUFF*, 2015) either reluctantly or enthusiastically accept their destinies as models of *femininity*.

Keywords:

Feminism, Femininity, Teen Film, Semiotics, The Hunger Games, The DUFF

INTRODUCTION

“Through films and television, and most especially through the teen genre...many of us are acquainted with an adolescence that has nothing in common with anything we actually experienced. The boys...handsome, the girls...beautiful even the...geeks and losers”

(Kaveney, 2006, p.1-2)

Adrian Martin (1994, p.66-67) defines the teen genre as “very elastic...it refers not to biological age, but...a mode of behaviour, a way of being” – stars of teen films are often fully-fledged adults, sometimes portraying characters almost half their age. It is no wonder then that adolescents become desensitised to mature *hyperreal* appearances on screen – characters are never truly ‘unattractive’, at worst unconventionally good-looking, playing characters branded as ‘ugly’. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the dissimilarity between films marketed at males (youth films) and those purposed for female audiences (teen films). Youth films are packed with rebellious subcultural prestige (*The Basketball Diaries, Into the Wild, Kids*) – identified with boys, whereas teen films are centred on the institutional life of adolescents at home and school – identified with girls (*The Princess Diaries, Save the Last Dance, Mean Girls*) (Driscoll, 2011). Teen films do not hold the same level of esteem as youth films because of their reliance on tropes such as the ‘makeover’ and ‘prom’ – all of which reinforce attitudes that women should adhere to *femininity* rather than *feminism*. Female heroines, like teen films, are confined to the *quasi-sexual ritual* of *heteronormative* high school romance, reinforcing notions that girls seek a man to complete them. Teen films hail their female lead characters as feminist

heroines to be idolised; despite illustrating, reflecting and presenting cultural characteristics associated with the post-feminist aesthetic – a return to femininity, primacy of romantic attachments, female pleasure and the value of consumer goods (Ferriss and Young, 2008). Spectators of these films are offered a representation of the ‘average’ female pubescent, which characterises girls as emotional beings striving for the attentions of male ‘heartthrobs’.

Włodarczyk (2010, p.3) defines post-feminism as the “critique of feminism’s rigid stance on identity politics” – drawing connections between feminism and other philosophical ideas, “postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism”. The antithesis to the preceding second-wave – which held a close connection between theory and activism – post-feminism is the understanding that the goals of feminism have been achieved and therefore the gains of the 70s and 80s are redundant (Faludi, 1992; McRobbie, 2009; Włodarczyk, 2010). The ideologies of post-feminism were reinforced and achieved the greatest cultural visibility in popular media – in particular film and television – officiating gender equality and then cataloguing its “ills...the stresses and strains” (Whelehan, 1995, p. 221; McRobbie, 2009). Post-feminist ideology plays a big role within the teen film genre, paradoxically encouraging the uptake of makeovers in an attempt to dominate through a form of subordination.

In terms of cinema, teen girl audiences emerged as a powerful demographic of the late 1990s, creating surprise box office hits such as low-budget romantic comedy *Clueless*, *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She's All That*. To clearly understand the context of teen films it is essential to recognise the significance of John Hughes’ 1980s films: such as *Sixteen Candles*, *The Breakfast Club* and *Pretty in Pink*. Still considered classics, Hughes’ films were at the time interpreted as *feminist*; despite insisting on the persistence of the *feminine* – frilly bedrooms, make-up and pink hair

ribbons (De Vaney, 2002; Bleach, 2010). For instance, *The Breakfast Club* attempted to demonstrate aspects of contemporary *feminist* themes; Claire, stereotyped as ‘The Princess’ and the most powerful female, acts an agent of transformation helping less powerful Allison (‘The Basketcase’) gain the attentions of ‘The Jock’ through the trappings of *femininity*. Although this scene can be interpreted as *feminist* because of Claire’s selfless attempt to empower another female; the latter reading fails to acknowledge empowerment lies in control of the *male gaze*, only obtained by conforming to the *feminine ideal* – a theme which is illustrated in many post-feminist franchises of the last two decades (*A Cinderella Story*, *The Princess Diaries*, *Mean Girls*).

Laura Mulvey (1992, p.342) states in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*:

“film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle”

She identifies this concept as the *male gaze* – the way female images are constructed around a masculine viewer; women are turned into objects of display to be looked at and gazed at by men (Mulvey, 1992; Cowie, 1997; Thornham, 2000; Gillis et al., 2004). While teen films are a good illustration of the *male gaze* (“Short, decent rack, kind of a Chelsea Clinton thing going on” Zack, *She’s All That*, 1999), it stands to reason that because a majority of teen films target a young female demographic it would be more appropriate to discuss the relevance of a *female gaze* (Stacey, 1987). The rationality being a reversed *male gaze* must exist, and films therefore can be enjoyed from different gendered positions. Although this argument adds further depth to Mulvey’s theory, it nevertheless implies the *male gaze* and *female gaze* are equally

matched, a reality inconsistent with portrayals of gendered *gazes* in teen film. Despite being liable to cinematic scrutiny, males are not subject to the same degree of eroticism as females. An explanation for female identification with the *male gaze* may be the systematic conditioning of girls to align themselves with the male spectating position to decode the intended interpretation, such as the need for a ‘makeover’ (Bignell, 2002). This paper will often refer to the *male gaze*, rather than *female gaze*, as a culmination of the objectification of female characters by men, as well as the scrutiny by female spectators taking on a male viewpoint. Teen film capitalises on voyeuristic pleasure, presenting in clear opposition ‘males’ (active/seducer) and ‘females’ (passive/seduced) in a way which reassures and pleases the masculine spectator – reiterating the sexual imbalance female viewers experience in real life (Brunsdon, 1986; Mulvey, 1992). The lens of a camera performs the role of ‘white male spectator’, producing women as *objects* rather than *subjects* – distorting reality and reflecting an inverted image, which benefits the *hegemonic* society (Mulvey, 1992; Jones, 2003).

Where previous motion pictures have not addressed changing interpretations of gendered behaviour, recent teen films – *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Juno* – have featured girls who represent an amalgamation of traditional dichotomised gendered behaviour. Possessing “masculine and feminine characteristics”: their female bodies brand them as women, with elements of emphasised femininity, while their actions hold elements of *hegemonic masculinity* (Woloshyn et al., 2013, p.152). In sci-fi adventure *Divergent*, Tris in a physical sense is *masculine*, however it is her love for Four (her instructor) that makes her *feminine*. Like Four, Tris eventually renames herself in a numerical fashion as Six – binding her to Four and relinquishing her previous identity in a way which mirrors modern marriage.

Regardless of specifics, females in teen films are often relegated to playing the same roles of past female characters. Often fitting the *feminine ideal* – physically attractive and able to maintain it, they are viewed more favourably than unattractive females. Characters such as Regina George (*Mean Girls*) are beautiful, ‘plastic’ and envied – and therefore powerful (Cecil, 2008). The construction of the *feminine ideal* also results in the production of girls of inferior status, less powerful and consequently less enviable (Bartky, 1993). Girls “who contest heteronormativity...do so at their own risk” – depicted to be less attractive, strange and unpopular amongst their peers; Kat (*10 Things I Hate About You*): a ‘shrew’, Mia (*The Princess Diaries*): a ‘freak’ and Laney (*She’s All That*): ‘scary’ (Woloshyn et al., 2013, p.151). These female challengers must submit to *femininity* to reach their goals, winning the ‘heartthrob’.

Compared to a ‘Regina George’ other females are deficient and must make themselves appealing to the *male gaze*. “The ‘art’ of make-up...presupposes that a woman’s face, unpainted, is defective” (Bartky, 1993, p.228). A long tradition of teen films is the ‘makeover’ of an unattractive girl into an attractive girl, who wins the boy she pines for. Makeovers contain a complex ideology that, paradoxically, emphasises effemimation of female characters who display masculine traits whilst also attempting to convey they were ‘perfect’ all along, requiring no change. Fashion and make-up become more than just a tool of physical transformation but a driving force in the character’s internal moral evolution (Ferriss, 2008). A form of self-imposed therapy, heroines are depicted as ‘incomplete’ struggling with internal issues easily solved through beautification. Lamm (2009) defines *manifest femininity* as the “essentialist belief that, at the core of their being, all women want to be pretty...popular, and...have a man”.

“Give her the right look, the right boyfriend, and bam! In six weeks she's being named prom queen”

Zack (*She's All That*, 1999)

Non-conforming females, who do not fit the *feminine ideal*, are depicted as only having been diverted from the yearnings of *manifest femininity* due to family trauma (Lamm, 2009). In *10 Things I Hate About You*, Kat's lack of a maternal figure rationalises her angry *feminist* persona and lack of *femininity*. Female characters whose actions fuse aspects of masculinity and femininity are therefore ‘damaged’ – unable to fulfil their desires of *manifest femininity* unless given a makeover, in an effort to return them to their true feminine path.

Contemporary teen films imply the presence of a male spectator within the consciousness of most girls. The bodies of females are subjected because they are *dominated*, made to conform through a form of *panopticism* – the *male gaze* (Foucault, 1979). Despite the vast amount of research present and its significance on film, few have investigated the recent popularisation of female leads within teen film considered to be amalgamations of *femininity* and *masculinity* and their eventual return to femininity. In this regard, this paper examines the representations of *feminine* and *feminist* ideals characterised by females within teen films. The study undertakes semiotic analyses of two successful teen films: *The Hunger Games* (Color Force, 2012) and *The DUFF* (CBS Films, 2015). These films were chosen because of their lead female characters and the reception received by viewers, all of whom recognise the attempt by writers to fuse *masculinity* and *femininity* – depicted as modern *feminists*. For the purpose of clarity, this paper analyses teen films featuring female protagonists under the age of 18 in a Hollywood blockbuster, released within the last five years.

SECTION ONE

The Hunger Games

The Hunger Games (Color Force, 2012) is the film adaption of Suzanne Collins's popular book trilogy about a dystopian world and its 16-year-old heroine, Katniss Everdeen played by Jennifer Lawrence (see Figure 1). The film takes place in the fictional country of Panem – formerly North America – “where a high-tech city, The Capitol, is ringed by 12 districts” (Dubrofsky and Ryalls, 2014, p.397). As a form of restitution for a past failed uprising against The Capitol, citizens from the 12 districts must forfeit two ‘Tributes’, one girl and one boy between the ages of 12 and 18, to compete in an annual pageant, ‘The Hunger Games’ – a fight to the death with only one winner (*The Hunger Games*, 2012).

INSERT FIGURE 1

The Hunger Games (THG) film franchise (2012-2015) earned over \$1.4 billion, and as result of its success Katniss Everdeen is lauded as a more inspiring female role model than her predecessor, Bella Swan from *Twilight*. Glorified as the strongest and most unique female protagonist of any recent book or film. Within popular culture she is often acknowledged as a heroine who embodies the characteristics of a “masculine and atypically gender-defined hero” (Balkind, 2014, p.39). Unlike other female-led franchises which often *hypersexualise* their female protagonists through the use of tight clothing and masculine qualities – *Sucker Punch*,

Guardians of The Galaxy, Lucy. Katniss is not as obviously sexualised; and when she is, it is framed as a means to her survival.

The first view of District 12 is a shot of the desolate landscape, Prim (Willow Shields) – Katniss’s younger sister – wakes from a nightmare. The heroine, Katniss, is presented with her back to the camera with Prim’s hands clasped around her, seeking comfort; the camera lens then moves higher to show Katniss soothingly stroking Prim’s hair – acting as a *mother* (see Figure 2). Though motherhood is often depicted as a means to fulfilment for women, “mothering is not without its costs, requiring...sacrifice” (Rittenour and Colaner, 2012, p.352). Although Katniss gains pleasure from supporting her sister it is evident throughout the narrative her innocence was bartered for *motherhood*. Due to her lack of parental figures, Katniss is forced to take on the role of mother and father – presuming the position of head of household, caring for her sister and hunting to provide an income for the family. The plot of the franchise hints at the traumatic loss of her father and the emotional absence of her mother as the reason for her independence and strength. The rendering of a visual binary between Katniss’s supposed two sides (*provider/feminist* and *carer/feminine*), both in stark contrast, is not an unusual trope in teen film – used as an attempt to add depth to her characterisation (Saussure, 1959; Mulvey, 1992, Bettany et al., 2010). The key problem of this stereotypical depiction of Katniss as a ‘soft’ surrogate mother is the franchises clear attempt to pave the way for her eventual return to *femininity*; in the form of her natural motherhood – she is situated within a *feminine* identity by her need to protect and nurture Prim.

INSERT FIGURE 2

The dim lighting and Prim's nightmares of being 'reaped' for the Games create an ominous mood in the scene, foreshadowing Prim's selection as the 74th female tribute of District 12 and Katniss's obligation as her protector and mother figure to 'volunteer' in her place.

Prim: Mom?

Katniss: Aww look at you! You look beautiful. But you better tuck in that tail, little duck.

(*THG*, 2012)

There are various parallels between Katniss and Gale (Liam Hemsworth), her best friend and hunting partner, as heads of their households in the absence of a strong paternal figure. Unlike Gale, Katniss's need to protect her family is attached to her highlighted *femininity* (Lamm, 2009; Woloshyn et al., 2013). All scenes featuring Katniss and a young girl – Prim and Rue – hint at her potential as a mother. The audience from the outset is prepped for the last scene in the franchise, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2*; in which Katniss is surrounded by her eventual husband Peeta (Josh Hutcherson), and two children – far from her distinctly *feminist* proclamations in the first film ("I'm never having kids"). Katniss defies her *heteronormative femininity* because of her circumstances, when these barriers are eventually overcome – the overthrow of the Capitol and end of the Hunger Games – she must to lay down her weapons and return to the feminine behaviours which, as depicted, come naturally to her.

INSERT FIGURE 3

INSERT FIGURE 4

The ‘reaping’ ceremony, a significant moment, positions Katniss as a *feminist* figure and eventual leader of the rebellion against the Capitol. Teens between the ages of 12 and 18 enter the Town Hall compound, wearing the same monochromatic palette, a high-angle shot of their entrance emphasises the lack of power held by the District children as well as the authority of the viewer. Short glimpses of multiple camera crew stress the *panoptic* surveillance of the District children by the Capitol, the spectator can in this sense assume they are viewing the same images seen by the citizens of Panem (Foucault, 1979). This is one in many instances the spectators of the film and the Capitol citizens are aligned in their viewing pleasure, a *postmodern* observation – viewers watch Panem citizens watch Katniss. Not immediately visible in the scene; Katniss is one of hundreds also repressed by the Capitol.

As the ceremony commences and Primrose Everdeen is announced as the female tribute, the camera then swiftly cuts to a close-up of Prim’s expressionless face and Katniss’s visible distress; Mrs. Everdeen is shown to be watching stoically. Here Mrs. Everdeen displays a lack of maternal instinct discordant with her appearance; in terms of physical performance she is a model of *femininity*; yet emotively she lacks the basic passion expected from a mother. It is Katniss who displays the hysterical response viewers expect from a mother figure; her courage and need to protect Prim from the Games distinguish her from other girls, and even boys, of her age – she is the first volunteer from District 12 (see Figure 3 and 4).

Her agency in this scene, one of the few times she acts without male instruction from a mentor (Haymitch) or stylist (Cinna), produces a powerful connotation referred to throughout the franchise as a pivotal moment – a display of “selfless courage” (Archer, 2014). However, this interpretation does not fully consider

Katniss's *motherhood* – she is expected to protect her pseudo-child (Prim) from any and all kinds of abuse, even if that requires her to negate “the stereotyped passive, submissive female role” (McIntyre, 1981, p.463). It is not Katniss's opposition to injustice that results in her joining The Hunger Games; but her obligation as a *mother*. Ultimately framing what appears to be a *feminist* stance, a selfless rebel openly disobeying tradition, within a *feminine* characteristic – that of *protector*.

INSERT FIGURE 5

The construction of appearance plays an immense role throughout *THG*; Katniss deliberately represses her emotions during the Games. It is common knowledge Tributes who display weakness – greater *emotionality* – during the ceremony are “marked as an easy target”, picked off by the stronger Career Tributes – those with greater *rationality* (Collins, 2008, p.23). The Tributes in this sense are divided into two camps: the *feminine* – emotional; and the *masculine* – rationale (Fischer, 1993).

And yet despite the need for internal sense rather than sensibility, female Tributes are subject to an external *heroine softening* – a conscious effort to reduce their agency and encourage submission as sexual objects (Cowie, 1997; Jacey, 2010). Once within the Capitol Katniss is immediately taken to a prep team – sprayed, scrubbed, trimmed and waxed – so her team may “show [her] off to the world” (Cinna, *THG*, 2012). This theme parallels the cultural importance of appearance in the 21st century, *THG*'s hyperreal depiction of the *beauty ideal* – Capitol beauty – and Katniss's reluctant acceptance of this process could be considered a feminist rejection of patriarchal ideologies, she has no desire to conform to *heteronormative femininity*

(Woloshyn et al., 2013). Yet, this analysis of the scene does not acknowledge the connoted implications of Katniss's passiveness; she neither fully rebuffs nor basks in the prep team's administrations. She is not traditionally *feminist* or *post-feminist* – and instead suffers in silence, despite Capitol citizens operating as her captors. As Haymitch affirms to Katniss and Peeta, getting 'sponsors' is synonymous with winning the Games, "and to get sponsors, you have to make people like you". The underlying message being: contest *heteronormativity* at your peril. For Katniss to gain sponsors and power she must, and willingly does, yield to the Capitol's notions of the *beauty ideal* – opposing would be literal suicide. The film draws attention to a forced *gender performativity* which encourages feminine behaviour as a means to survival; it could also be argued *THG*'s illumination of this reality acts a discussion point outside of the film, inciting critique (Butler, 1988). Demonstrating the authenticity of Katniss's struggle to both perform and hold onto her true identity allows opportunity for her to stand in direct opposition to the practice later in the franchise. Nonetheless, at no time in the plot does this become the case – Katniss constantly performs in all four films for either the Capitol, the Rebels or herself.

In addition, it is important to understand the gravity of the *cinematic gaze* and its enforcement of patriarchal approval. Once again the camera introduces her to the scene by showing her body, *fetishised* through visual emphasis in the reflection of the mirror. There is a conscious effort through the film's *mise en scène* to highlight her body and the role her appearance will play as she attempts to acquire sponsors.

In this paper, *fetishism* refers to the eroticised representation of women as objects, resulting in their transformation into sexual signifiers (Cowie, 1997). Often within the film Katniss's costumes are fetishised. Dressed in a red dress; a colour associated with danger, blood and power, as well as passion and love – Katniss

embodies her epithet, “The Girl who was on Fire” (see Figure 5). Her label and dress, an attempt to give her a sense of power, reduces her to *femininity* – she essentially remains a ‘girl’. Cinna is the first one to speak in the scene, branding Katniss “Amazing”. The viewers’ attention is directed by the camera to Cinna’s position. His stance and all-black clothing situate him as *dominant* in comparison to Katniss who, despite standing and possessing a higher position in the scene, is *subordinate* – Cinna epitomises the *patriarchal gaze*. Within the sequence Katniss seeks Cinna’s approval; their relationship parallels *Cinderella* and her *Fairy Godmother* – Cinna (fairy godmother) is able to bestow the gift of beauty. “The lack of feminine collaboration perpetuates patriarchal values” – Cinna acts as a comforting figure who minimises Katniss’s frustration, which would be a cause for personal agency (Parson, 2004, p.138). Once again she is told how to act (“Just be yourself” Cinna, *THG*, 2012), the *mise en scène* and Cinna’s reassurance accentuate the value of male approval. Katniss is not confident until she finds approval from various male characters (Haymitch, Cinna, Peeta) and yet there is no conscious effort to seek support from females, they instead fall into two categories *dependent* (Prim, Rue) or *foe* (Mrs. Everdeen, Glimmer, Clove, Foxface).

INSERT FIGURE 6

INSERT FIGURE 7

Katniss’s maternal inclinations are not explicitly apparent until she allies herself with Rue, a female tribute from District 11 who like her sister was reaped at age 12. Her relationship with Rue takes on a distinctively motherly role, drawing on

aspects of Katniss's depiction as the ideal mother. It is this surrogate mother-daughter relationship that results in Katniss's rebellion in the form of silent protest, a memorial of flowers placed around Rue's corpse, and her use of District 12's 'three finger salute' (see Figures 6 and 7; Hansen, 2015). Her actions result in a powerful moment in the trilogy, Katniss's defiance against the Capitol spark 'The Rebellion' seen at the end of *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. This is a pivotal moment in the film, emblematic of the teen film genre – Katniss's adoption of the *feminine* maternal role and resulting anger is undeniably justified and yet her rebellion makes her a defiant and strong *feminist*. Fans of *THG* are prompted to understand her reluctance to play the role of 'The Girl on Fire', a distinctly *feminine* impersonation. Katniss's actions are an amalgamation of both *femininity* and *feminism*, at no other point is she nearly as powerful.

Katniss handles Rue's death in a way unlike previous action heroines. The scene displays a dichotomy of gendered responses to injustice – she kills Marvel in a display of instinctual anger, her detached acknowledgement is a *masculine* trait. In contrast, Rue's death culminates in Katniss's display of hopelessness and despair, atypically *feminine* (Balkind, 2014; Hansen, 2015). As a mother, Katniss cannot articulate her anger; she must step out of her culturally circumscribed role to express her rage at the injustice of Rue's death (Hirsch, 1989). Katniss's act of rebellion sits within the constraints placed upon her by her environment, her lack of control means her insurgency takes the form of unadulterated animalistic anger – she becomes an angry *feminist*. "Rue's death is key, enabling Katniss's seamlessly ethical and virtuous character to shine" (Dubrofsky and Ryalls, 2014, p.401). All her future actions are framed as 'noble' and the film allows no room for viewers to question her motivations.

INSERT FIGURE 8

The resolution of the film takes the form of an interview with Caesar Flickerman following Katniss and Peeta's victory. Prior to the interview Katniss is advised by her mentor to act as if she was spurred by her love for Peeta rather than a need to disobey. Once again, Katniss is coached by a male to exhibit *greater emotionality* than she would naturally; impersonating a 'silly girl' so in love "the thought of not being with him was unthinkable" (Fisher, 1993; Haymitch, *THG*, 2012). This *gendered performance* securely binds her to a restricted *femininity* – she becomes an average girl in love with a boy. To this end all of Katniss's *feminist* achievements are redefined as requirements to save her love interest, a distinctly *feminine* goal which echoes Lamm's (2009) *manifest femininity* concept. Katniss is expected to display good-natured tolerance in the face of the Capitol's voyeurism, playing the role expected of her; certainly not the first or last time she is urged to present an imitation of herself – stylised as 'Girl on Fire', 'Star-crossed lovers of District 12' and 'The Mockingjay' – within *THG*'s narrative (Bleach, 2010).

On the same stage as her first televised interview, Katniss wears a pale yellow gown – *prima facie* she appears to be delicately doll-like (see Figure 8). Seen in this light, Katniss is a model of *femininity* – conditioned to wear dresses in soft colours – alien to previous images of her in the arena (scarred, dirty and savage). Caesar and Peeta both lean in and gaze at Katniss intensely as the camera pans round and then cuts to the audience, revealing the whole of Panem's undivided attention. As Katniss declares that she "couldn't imagine life without him", viewers of the film are presented with shots of Peeta and Caesar's positive reactions. Her negation of *feminist*

traits in favour of *feminine* qualities is met with visible approval. *THG*'s insistence on Katniss's reluctance to perform for the Capitol and the constant evidence of her surveillance, reinforce that she is controlled by a largely *patriarchal* system. The film, as a whole, acts as an analogy for how formidable *patriarchal* society can be when shaping the identity of young women, Katniss is unable to break away from the Capitol's enforced *femininity* and therefore succumbs.

SECTION TWO

The DUFF

The DUFF (CBS Films, 2015), like *THG*, is a film adaption of a young adult novel by Kody Keplinger set in a suburban high school – see Figure 9. Bianca Piper (Mae Whitman) is content with her life as a high school senior; however, her world is shattered when she learns other students refer to her as 'The DUFF' (Designated Ugly Fat Friend) to her prettier, more popular friends (CBS Films, 2016). Stunned by this realisation, she enlists the help of her 'frenemy' Wesley (Robbie Amell), a 'jock', to help transform her image and seduce her crush Toby (Nick Eversman). Ferriss (2008, p.42) identifies that within the long-held tradition of the makeover films, "transformation typically occurs for a man"; as this paper will clearly demonstrate *The DUFF* in no way disproves Ferriss's conclusion – instead it reinforces *Pygmalion*-like narrative within the genre by having Wesley orchestrate Bianca's metamorphosis.

INSERT FIGURE 9

Considered a financial success (\$35 million) the film is described as more of a “middle-of-the-road rom-com than a teen-spirit sendup”, with a widely held view *The DUFF* weaves a mix of silly and serious aspects of high school life (Linden, 2015; IMDb, 2016). However, it is hard to avoid the backlash the acronym and peddled “rhetoric of independence” receives from feminists (Hornaday, 2015). A consensus amongst some parties being the film promotes contradictory messages of autonomy and male approval. Despite these negative responses, *The DUFF* presents Bianca as a female with distinctly *masculine* traits – not an amalgamation in the same sense as Katniss (*THG*, 2012), Bianca’s physical appearance is consciously changed to make her *feminine*. The majority of the film focuses on Bianca’s appearance and typically feminised behaviours rather than an ‘inner’ *femininity* – as displayed by her desire for a makeover and male attention.

From the onset the film establishes a *cinematic gaze* which positions the ‘beautiful’ female characters as objects of male *voyeuristic* pleasure (Mulvey, 1992). A group of male characters, despite being nameless, are given a symbolic power by initiating the first scene within Malloy High School – from the outset *male approval* holds more weight in the film than female opinion. A school bell rings as one of the males pronounces that it is “showtime”; framing their anticipation of what can only be described as a *pageant* of ‘hot’ girls strutting the halls. What commences next is a profile of each of the main female characters.

INSERT FIGURE 10

INSERT FIGURE 11

The camera focuses on the girls' feet as they turn into the hallway; there is a deliberate emphasis on their shoe choices, reflecting their contrasting personalities. The composition of the scene prompts viewers to compare all three girls, Bianca being the odd one out. A tilt shot is used to present each girl, unveiling them from the toes up. The hallway in this sense acts as the prologue to the film, introducing each of the key players and setting the scene for later confrontations between Bianca and several other students (Moseley, 2015).

Viewers are briefly given an overview of each relevant character through a series of hashtags (see Figures 10 and 11) – Jess: #*TheKindOne*, Casey: #*TheToughOne*, Bianca: #*TheOtherOne* – accompanied by a series of short clips, summarising their personalities. Jess and Casey are both *feminine*, ‘Anglo-American Girls’ – reduced to a *femininity* which celebrates physical *feminine* power rather than intellectual power (Bavidge, 2004). Both Jess and Casey are repeatedly shackled to their hashtags, restricted to the roles of #*TheKindOne* and #*TheToughOne* in their attempts to help Bianca overcome her DUFF-ness, through the trappings of *femininity*.

In contrast to Jess and Casey – Bianca does not conform to feminine beauty ideals. Wearing loose fitting dungarees, an oversized jumper and presenting undeniably *unfeminine* mannerisms (see Figure 11). A criticism of *The DUFF*'s depiction of Bianca, explored further throughout this section, is the film's reliance on the visual representation of *femininity* without agency – very different to *THG*, whereby Katniss had agency from the beginning. Bianca is reduced to the “bodily signifiers of femininity” (Kennedy, 2002a).

The binary at work positions Jess and Casey as beautiful/*feminine* and Bianca as non-conforming/*feminist*; Bianca acts as their antithesis, *unfeminine* and rough. It

is a common consensus amongst critics that Mae Whitman's wardrobe choices are required to make her 'ugly', a cinematic trope that echoes teen films such as *She's All That* and *The Princess Diaries* (Ferriss, 2008; Driscoll, 2011; Duca, 2015; Zimmerman, 2015). Whereas boys' clothing decisions are framed with a discourse of free speech and therefore autonomy; girls' clothing choices are subject to scrutiny, their selections problematic, requiring intervention and regulation (Duits and van Zoonen, 2006; Gill, 2007). Bianca's clothing choices do not conform to the ideals of *femininity*, her punishment for disobedience takes the form of her label as the DUFF. As seen in later points of the narrative, her appearance is within her control and it is, consequently, her responsibility to submit to the pressures of the combined *male* and *female gazes*.

Before the film reveals Jess's profile, there is an interjection by one of the 'nameless' boys who states that he "would bang her so hard [they'd] both need helmets" – drawing on other teen slapstick comedies, such as *American Pie*, *Porky's* and *EuroTrip*; which feature less 'attractive' boys proclaiming their intent should they have a chance with a 'hot' girl. With these statements filmmakers reaffirm *hyperreal* notions of sexuality through the fetishisation of both girls – Jess and Casey are objects to be desired and the intent of male characters to 'bang' them is acceptable because it is humorously proclaimed (Ashcraft, 2003). As stated in the introduction to this paper, women observing must "align themselves with a masculine spectating position" to decode the boys' statements (Bignell, 2002, p.190). *The DUFF* produces the same politics of gendered taming as other teen films of the past and present by propagating a pervasive *panoptic* outlook, a Foucauldian disciplinary system which establishes the ever-present gaze – male, female and cinematic (Foucault, 1979; Mulvey, 1992; Cowie, 1997; Bihlmeyer, 2005). The viewer is encouraged to judge Bianca's

appearance in comparison to her friends, the resulting verdict being she is ‘ugly’, ‘fat’ and therefore powerless. Rather than *feminism* affording her freedom, it is met by hostility from male characters who embody the *hegemonic patriarchal* ideology. Bianca is unable to command the same level of respect as her more attractive friends.

“D-U-F-F. Designated Ugly Fat Friend...every group of friends has one...”

Wesley (The DUFF, 2015)

After Wesley reveals that Bianca is a DUFF (Designated Ugly Fat Friend), she struggles to deny the truth. Her appearance places her in *binary opposition* to Jess and Casey – Bianca is a *feminist* (powerless) in opposition to Jess and Casey’s *femininity* (powerful). Feminine power in teen films is located and articulated through the appearance of female characters. An application of Riviere’s *masquerade* concept asserts those whom submit to *femininity* (Jess and Casey) are afforded greater levels of agency, despite modern discourse suggesting otherwise; *femininity* allows freedom but only within the patriarchal world (Riviere cited by Kuhn, 1992, p.214). “Cinema itself can be seen as a prime statement of the masquerade”, inscribing a fantasy of femininity (Heath, 2000, p.57). According to Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1959) concept of *negative differentiation*, things are defined negatively in contrast with other objects within the same system. After viewing several photos from their childhood, Bianca comes to the realisation that Jess and Casey *define* her – she is *negatively differentiated* against them – and without them she ceases to be. “My best friends made me the DUFF and that made me...Angry” (Bianca, *The DUFF*, 2015). Her anger takes the form of defiance against high school norms – she dresses abnormally to prove a point, she is the DUFF and therefore has been given the ‘gift’ of invisibility, “a license to not give a shit” (Bianca, *The DUFF*, 2015).

A low angle shot of Bianca's feet on the top of her staircase creates an impression of *dominance*, she wears crocs with mismatched socks tucked into pyjamas – as her mother Dottie (Allison Janney) crisply concludes, she looks 'crazy' (see Figure 12). *Bad Reputation* by Joan Jett & The Blackhearts – notorious for challenging conventional masculinity and femininity – plays as she descends the stairs (Kennedy, 2002b). At this point in *The DUFF* Bianca has been transformed completely into an angry stereotypical *feminist*, who wears 'baggy' clothing to hide her *feminine* shape (Klepp and Storm-Mathisen, 2005). As a consequence of not being able to *fit* in, Bianca must then justify her outsider status by completely rejecting patriarchal ideals of beauty, reconstructing it as her choice. Her eventual surrender to *feminine* identity is made even more momentous as she is forced to *negate* her *feminist* persona entirely.

INSERT FIGURE 12

Regardless of *The DUFF*'s attempts to align Bianca's behaviour and dress as being more *feminist* than *feminine*, it is hard to avoid unmistakable manners in which Bianca is singularly defined by her interest in romance. Although she displays a willingness to resist certain dominant norms, the donning of tight-fitting clothing, Bianca leaves other normative discourses of femininity in place – her goal to win Toby, #MyFutureBabyDaddy (Klepp and Storm-Mathisen, 2005; Willis, 2008). Her romanticism of the 'heartthrob' emulates a *quasi-sexual ritual* attributed to and practised by female protagonists in high school films who adhere to *manifest femininity* (Lewis, 1992). Bianca's goals, in this sense, all centre around the opinion of men – it is Wesley who opens her eyes to her insignificance and her attempts to

makeover her appearance are in the effort to win the heart of Toby or Wesley. Although she initially appears to be a strong role model, she is constrained by *hegemonic heteronormatively feminine* ambitions to get ‘the guy’ (Butler, 1993; Smith, 2013).

“Step one, first impressions matter.”

Wesley (*The DUFF*, 2015)

INSERT FIGURE 13

INSERT FIGURE 14

Despite apparent superficiality, makeover films – such as *Mean Girls*, *The Princess Diaries*, *A Cinderella Story* – have the power to transform women’s lives, external changes resulting in internal moral transformation (Ferriss, 2008). The ‘unattractive’ Bianca sports a frumpish wardrobe which signals her independence, but leads boys to shun her. To overcome her self-inflicted ‘unattractiveness’, Bianca must seek the help of male ‘bad boy’ Wesley Rush (#FootballCaptain) to reform her to a *heteronormative female*. They first venture to the mall to fix Bianca’s “uni-boob”. Her chest becomes a focus in this scene, reflecting the 20th century obsession with the shaping of a woman’s breasts, vital to gender differentiation and positioned as a source of power (Fields, 2007).

In spite of being the most *hegemonically masculine* male within the film, there is a conscious effort to ensure Wesley exhibits behaviours outside of the ‘jock’ norm: he watches “a lot of Project Runway” (Wesley, *The DUFF*, 2015). Wesley’s negation of the ‘jock’ archetype, although unusual, does not invalidate his status as an

exemplar of *hegemonic masculinity*, whose fashion expertise trumps Bianca's (Woloshyn et al., 2013). Despite Wesley's slight gender reduction, he still has the power to reconstruct Bianca from 'undesirable' to 'desirable', a conformist of idealised *femininity* (Jantzen et al., 2006; Fields, 2007). Similar to scenes in *THG*, the *mise en scène* confirms the gravity of Wesley's judgements – he sits while Bianca must parade several outfits for his final verdict, he is the *male gaze* personified (see Figure 14).

Within teen films a male's glamourous characteristics are not subject to the same degree of scrutiny as the female protagonist (Mulvey, 1992). Wesley is established to be "more perfect... more powerful" than Bianca (Mulvey, 1992, p.347). Therefore, Wesley's opinion, like most male characters, is given a prominence which precedes that of the female protagonist. As pointed out in the introduction to this paper, female viewers are required to align themselves with the male spectator's (Wesley) position when evaluating Bianca (Bignell, 2002).

'Step two' of Bianca's metamorphosis comprises of showing "the world who [she is]", Wesley declares that Bianca's choice of clothing gives no indication of who she is. There is an underlying message that Bianca's 'true' self is *feminine*, hidden beneath *masculine* clothing. This scene, noteworthy not only for its mimicry of similar teen film sequences, authenticates Bianca's arrangement as an object of the combined gaze of the spectator and various male and female characters. Her attempts to accordingly subscribe to *manifest femininity* highlight her 'to-be-looked-at-ness' – cinema builds her into a spectacle for viewing pleasure, see Figure 13 (Mulvey, 1992; Cowie, 1997; Lamm, 2009).

Among the conventions of teen film's contemporary portrayals of high school life is the significance of 'coolness'. Bourdieu's concept of *cultural capital* describes

how taste and style combine to establish a person's class (Bourdieu, 1984). *Cultural capital*, either acquired or inherited, is central to the makeover trope as it explains how taste functions as a social orientation (Driscoll, 2011). Thornton (1995; Forman, 2004; Driscoll, 2011) theorises that 'coolness' is related to forms of adolescent *cultural capital* – characters exhibit an inherent awareness of their status and that of others in the social order. Prior to becoming aware of her rank, 'DUFF' – a class dependent on better looking friends – Bianca happily basked in her ignorance. Subsequent to her realisation, however, Bianca is unable to disregard her lack of identity and attempts to develop her *cultural capital*. Nonetheless, not everything can be easily taught and despite a new bra and clothes, Bianca is still incapable of seducing her crush in the same way other female characters, who have inherited *cultural capital* are qualified to. Her lack of instinctive *femininity* and identifiable *feminism* in this sequence is attributed to her *low cultural capital*, resulting in her characterisation as 'ugly', 'fat' and 'uncool'. The inherent message in this scene is, *femininity* is an attainable form of *cultural capital* coveted by those who lack it – Bianca's neglectful mother is at fault for failing to dispense this knowledge (*feminine* values) to her daughter and now Bianca pays the price for her mother's indifference (Lamm, 2009; Driscoll, 2011).

The film's denouement takes the form of homecoming, a rite of passage which makes explicit the gendering of sex and romance within its narrative – a privileged space of gender interpellation (Driscoll, 2011; Smith, 2012). Despite Bianca's assertions that homecoming is "just another night where you feel pressure to find the perfect date, the perfect outfit, and have the perfect evening", it is clear from her mannerisms she is unhappy because she doesn't have the 'perfect' date or outfit and as a consequence of this will never have the perfect evening.

Rather than stay at home as she pledged to do at the beginning of the film, Bianca is convinced by her best friends and mother to “be the best weirdo [she] can be”, a ‘better looking’ weirdo. Jess and Casey’s feminine talents and *cultural capital* are used to alter one of Bianca’s old favourite flannel shirts into a short prom dress which displays her figure. The transformation of Bianca’s *masculine* clothing, an oversized shirt, to a distinctively *feminine* dress acts as a metaphor for Bianca’s supposed growth from DUFF to [pretty] alternative popular girl (see Figure 16).

INSERT FIGURE 15

INSERT FIGURE 16

Once again all three girls are presented first by their feet, highlighting Bianca’s full circle evolution (see Figure 15). While in the first few sequences she wore large chunky boots, she now struts down the halls in heels. “There is strong contemporary association between high heels and female sexuality” – while women who wear flat shoes can be mistaken as *masculine*, those who wear heels are unmistakeable *feminine* (Morris et al., 2013, p.176). As she walks in tandem to Jess and Casey through the halls of Malloy High, a site of desire; the spectator is left in anticipation of Bianca’s makeover and unveiling of ‘the dress’. The subjective view of the camera captures the reactions of fellow students, all of whom are in awe of her look, enabling the audience to vicariously experience the admiration Bianca’s makeover has achieved. She is finally recognised as an independent being. There is a triple identification between the spectator, the film and the protagonist – all of which sympathise with the male viewing position, females acting as objects for this gaze.

Despite *The DUFF*'s emphasis on transformation via makeover, paradoxically there is an attempt to reassure viewers that Bianca was perfect all along and Wesley simply needed to see her (Ferriss, 2008). In a speech to Madison ('mean girl') Bianca asserts that: "There's always going to be somebody prettier or more talented or richer than you", yet "none of this matters". Essentially declaring that every girl is substandard to a prettier, more *feminine* girl – no-one is safe from being subpar. It is by virtue of her makeover that Wesley finally recognises her as a potential love interest, rather than collect his Prom King crown he instead gets 'the girl', making it "the greatest night of [her] life" (Bianca, *The DUFF*, 2015). 'The dress' acts as the *deus ex machina* of the narrative, solving Bianca's problems and neatly resolving the plot (see Figure 16). The implied postscript imparts on the viewer that the means of gaining *feminine* recognition are easily within her reach and under her control. In conclusion, Bianca undergoes a physical transformation which asserts her new status as a model of *femininity*. Like Katniss Everdeen (*THG*, 2012), Bianca's dress changes from a mix of *masculine* and *feminine* to what is undeniably, and more importantly, traditionally *feminine*.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper has reviewed how adolescent heroines are confined to a *heteronormative femininity*, publicly packaged as *feminist*. Katniss Everdeen (*THG*, 2012) and Bianca Piper (*The DUFF*, 2015) experience a *heroine softening* which attempts to mollify their *masculine* traits through physical makeover and dress, promoted as a means to internal epiphany. In the first few scenes of *The Hunger Games* and *The DUFF*, both female leads express opinions aligned with the *feminist*

aesthetic – Katniss: “I’m never having kids”, Bianca: “Honor Roll Student”. However, it is not long before they are required to *feminise* their behaviours to survive (Katniss: the Hunger Games, Bianca: high school), resulting in a transformation from model *feminists* to exemplars of *femininity*. These narratives have an implied connotation – Katniss and Bianca have always sought *manifest femininity* and it was their unconventional childhoods which have obstructed their goals. Katniss’s irregular childhood experience and eventual ‘reaping’ are depicted as barriers to her destined role as a *mother*; likewise, Bianca’s lack of *feminine* qualities and gendered education – needed to attract her male ‘heartthrob’ – is attributed to her inattentive mother. In other words, *femininity* is a natural state and those who identify with *feminism* are abnormal and need to be rehabilitated to their ‘true’ *feminine* states (Lamm, 2009; Driscoll, 2011).

As discussed above, Katniss and Bianca seek male ‘fairy godmothers’ to redirect them on the right path to *femininity*; rather than request the help of fellow female characters, a *feminist* attribute. An undeniably post-feminist philosophy, the makeover trope promotes consumption to ameliorate physical appearance and obtain power. Paradoxically, Katniss and Bianca are encouraged to submit to the *male gaze* in order to control it; a notion popular within the teen genre. It could be assumed that because of Katniss’s later actions she is afforded more agency than Bianca; as this paper has demonstrated however, Katniss’s agency sits within the restraints placed upon her by patriarchal society. In comparison, *The DUFF* relies on visual depictions of *femininity* and *feminism* rather than physical action, and so Bianca’s lack of agentic behaviour is neglected in the effort to win the ‘guy’ (Toby/Wesley) and fulfil her desires of *manifest femininity*.

THG features key scenes in which Katniss displays aspects of *feminism*, unusual for the teen genre (volunteering for Prim, killing Marvel). Her reluctance to willingly accept feminisation receives critique as well as acclaim from the media, despite her eventual negation of *feminism* for *femininity*. In contrast, *The DUFF* does not particularly stand out in the genre; instead it follows the template of teen films of the last few decades: Bianca transforms from a model of *feminism* to fit ideal *femininity* – a narrative which is met by scorn from feminists. From previous discussion, Katniss's storyline despite ending in submissive manner is lauded because she rejects the attentions of male characters, until *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2* when she finally chooses Peeta. *The DUFF* is unable to reach the same level of acclaim because of its reliance on tropes familiar to fans of the genre, Bianca is ‘ugly’, receives a makeover, goes to Prom and gets the ‘guy’ – a *Cinderella*-like fairy tale ending, stereotypical and unlike real life.

Although there is a clear polarity exhibited in the *denouements* of both films – Katniss reluctantly accepts her destiny as a *feminine* object, Bianca basks in its supposed benefits – both females succumb to the *hegemonic* ideologies associated with *heteronormative femininity*. Regardless of modern discourse attempting to establish that the goals of feminism have been achieved, it is this paper's opinion that teen films continue to display that the negation of *feminism* for *femininity* is required for females to achieve their ‘happy endings’.

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FIGURE 1



Figure 1 - *The Hunger Games* poster, UK, 2012

FIGURE 2

Figure 2 - Katniss comforts Prim, *THG*, 2012

FIGURE 3

Figure 3 - Katniss volunteers for Prim during the 'reaping' ceremony, *THG*, 2012

FIGURE 4

Figure 4 - Citizens of District 12 salute Katniss's bravery, *THG*, 2012

FIGURE 5

Figure 1 - Katniss models her dress for Capitol citizens, *THG*, 2012

FIGURE 6

Figure 6 - Katniss lays flowers upon Rue's body, *THG*, 2012

FIGURE 7

Figure 7 - Katniss salutes to the cameras, *THG*, 2012

FIGURE 8

Figure 8 - Caesar Flickerman interviews with Katniss and Peeta post-Games, *THG*, 2012

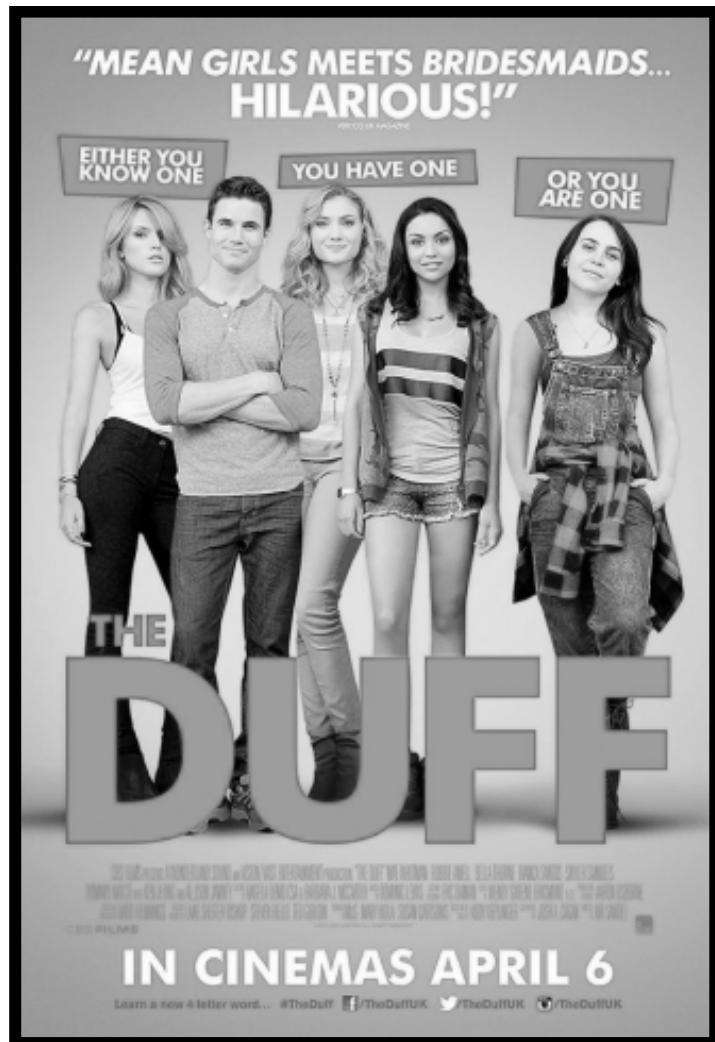
FIGURE 9**Figure 9 - *The DUFF* poster, UK, 2015**

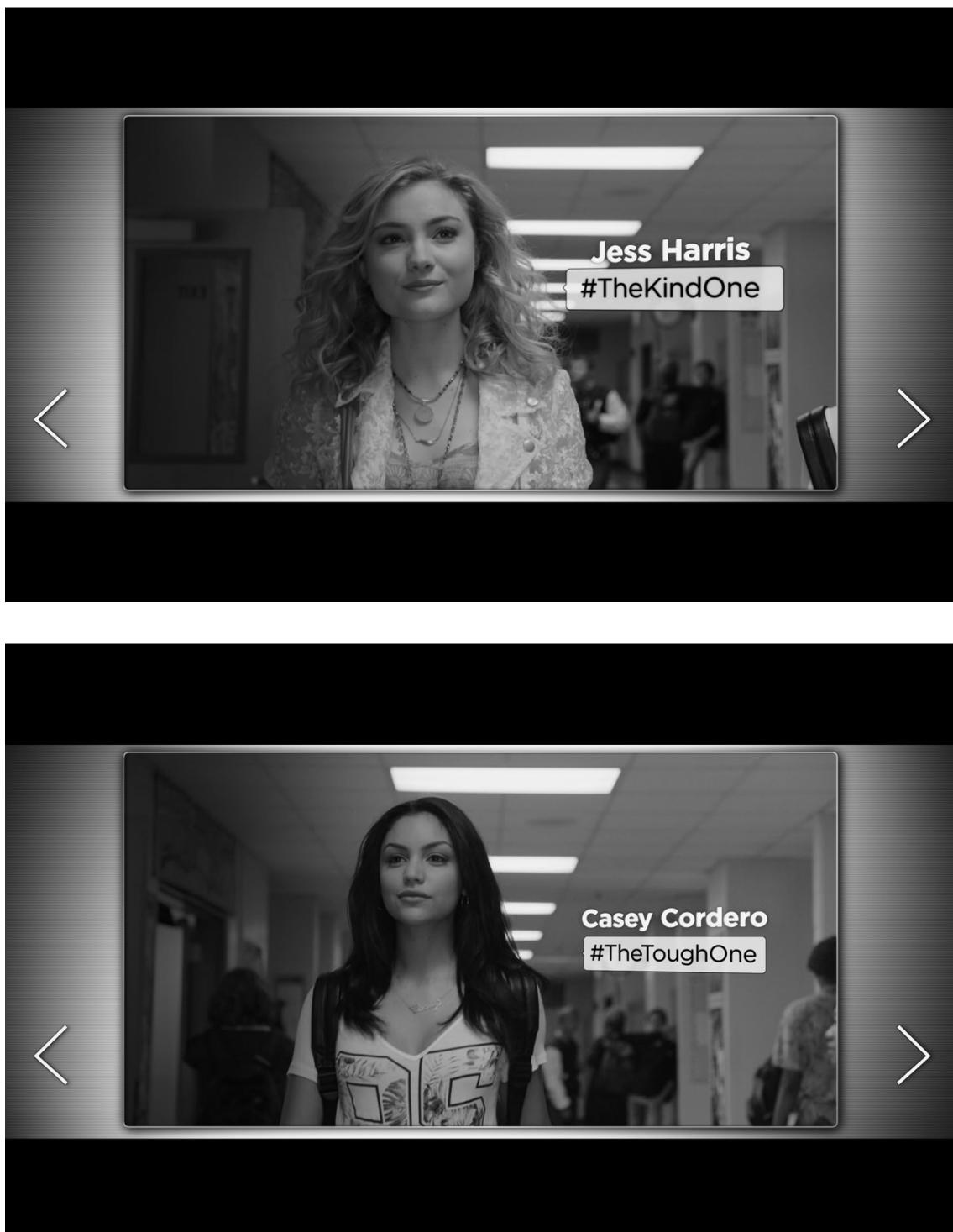
FIGURE 10**Figure 10 - Jess and Casey, *The DUFF*, 2015**

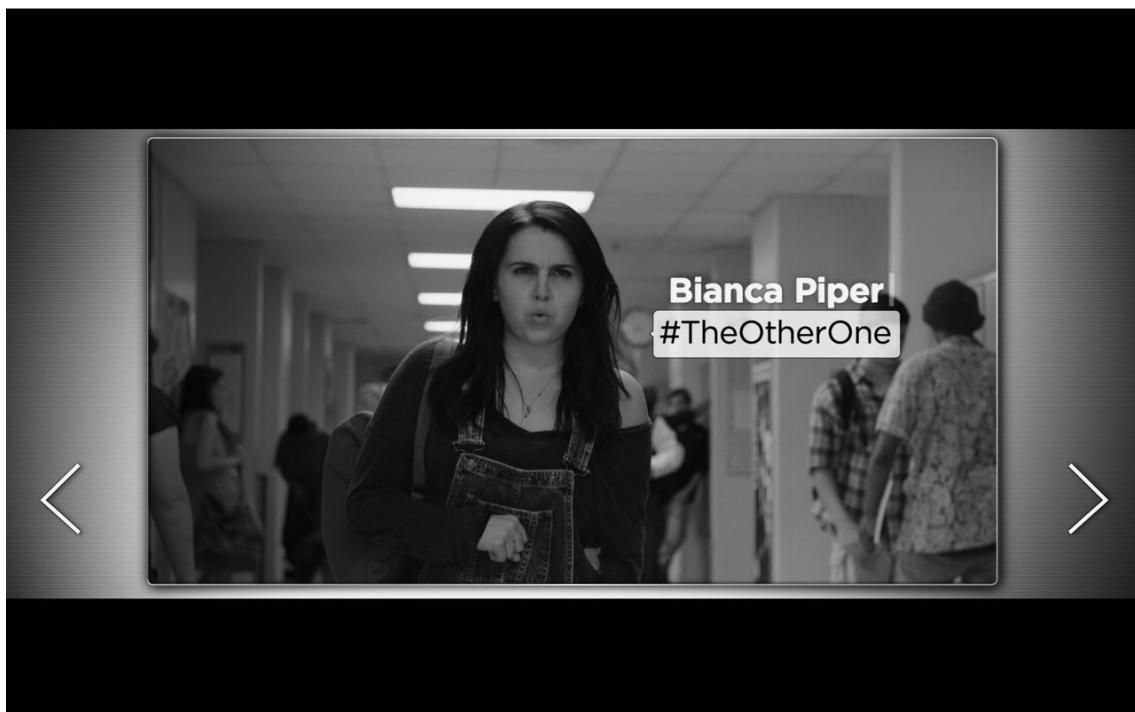
FIGURE 11

Figure 11 - Bianca, *The DUFF*, 2015

FIGURE 12

Figure 12 - Bianca wears pyjamas in an act of rebellion, *The DUFF*, 2015

FIGURE 13

Figure 13 - Bianca's makeover is made comical through her discomfort in clothing,
The DUFF, 2015

FIGURE 14

Figure 14 - Wesley observes as Bianca models various outfits, *The DUFF*, 2015

FIGURE 15

Figure 15 - Bianca, Jess and Casey strut down the hallway as fellow students look on,
The DUFF, 2015

FIGURE 16

Figure 16 - Bianca's homecoming dress, *The DUFF*, 2015