

**Shaping Girlhood:
Patriarchy's Impact on Girlhood in two Teen Chick
Lit Novels**

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Master's Thesis

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In my thesis, I analyse two teen chick lit novels *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging* (1999) by Louise Rennison and *Mates, Dates and Inflatable Bras* (2001) by Kathy Hopkins. I analyse their depiction of girlhood and discuss the role of patriarchy as an actor that shapes the main characters' experience of it. I set my analysis against the backdrop of two competing feminisms: third-wave feminism and postfeminism. I analyse how postfeminist values have been instilled in the female characters through the discourse of Girl Power and how these values compete with the values of the Third Wave.

The analysis and discussion are divided into three major categories: the Body, sex and love, and platonic relationships. First, I analyse how patriarchal society affects how the characters view their bodies and how their sense of self is tied to The Body. Then, I discuss how female sexuality is exhibited in the two chick lit novels and analyse how the opposite sex values the girls. Finally, I discuss the role of female peers and family in shaping girlhood.

My analysis shows how strong the effect of the patriarchal society is in the shaping of girlhood in the two novels. The novels illustrate how strongly the female characters' value as humans is tied to the way boys and men view them. Their girlhood consists of constant scrutiny over themselves and other people by peers, parents, boys, and the girls themselves. In my thesis, I argue that the postfeminist Girl Power movement has affected the girls' ability to view the everyday sexism they face, but nevertheless, I claim that these teen chick lit novels showcase the struggles of third-wave girls in a patriarchal world.

Key words: girlhood, chick lit, teen chick lit, young adult, young adult fiction, postfeminism, Girl Power, third-wave feminism, patriarchy

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1 Introduction

Adolescence is a time of rebellion, self-doubt, and transformation, yet for young girls, this period is made more difficult by the patriarchal society that scrutinises them and insists on defining them in a way that is often limiting and oppressive. Walby (1989, 228) states that there are two forms of patriarchy, private and public, of which the public one dominates in British society. In public patriarchy, women are not excluded from certain areas of society, unlike in private patriarchy, but “rather subordinates women in all of them” and thus it makes the appropriation of women collective rather than individual (ibid.). Adolescence is also a time of rebellion against authorities as teenagers try to test limits and find their places in society. During this time, it is important to have some guidance. However, as Johnson (2006, 146), whose work I largely use in my thesis when discussing the teen chick lit genre, states in their essay “Chick Lit Jr.: More Than Glitz and Glamour for Teens and Tweens”, this is also a time when teenagers tend to ignore their parents’ advice. How do teenagers then find their way around adolescence? The answer lies in their peers and the media they consume. One form of informative media that caters to teenage girls in particular is the teen chick lit novel. This sub-genre of the popular chick lit genre has one important function that is “to send positive and helpful messages concerning coming of age” (ibid.).

The novels describe their existence in a Third Wave world in which postfeminist ideas of Girl Power are being pushed on them. Girl Power, or Girl Culture as it has also become known as, rises above the shoulder-padded masculinity of the Second Wave by embracing girliness and by reclaiming the word “girl” the way many marginalised communities have done (Karlyn 2011, 34). Third wave feminist also recognise this “rejection of femininity and many of the pleasures of female culture that have long been trivialized by the culture at large, from shopping and dressing up to gossiping” (ibid.) However, postfeminist “girlie girls” see Girl Culture “as a site of feminist agency and resistance,” – as a reclamation of some of these aspects of female culture “be it Barbie, housekeeping, or girl talk . . . that were tossed out with sexism during the Second Wave” (Baumgarder and Richards in Karlyn 2011, 34). Although there is power in reclaiming female culture, those who embrace Girl Power or Girl Culture tend to forget how they gained the ability to choose to engage in some of these aspects of female culture. Postfeminism is described as “an era that is past patriarchy” (Siegel 2007, 7). Chick-lit novels are written and set in an era where gender-equality is assumed, but yet they actively showcase the ways in which patriarchy actively affects the young female characters. Third Wave feminism embraces popular culture as a “site of identity formation and empowerment,” which “provide an opportunity to sort out the relation between a highly commodified Girl Culture and the real empowerment of girls” (Karlyn 2011, 34).

In my thesis, I study two representatives of the teen chick lit genre: *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging* (1999) by Louise Rennison and *Mates, Dates and Inflatable Bras* (2001) by Cathy Hopkins. As the titles suggest, the two novels deal with very similar subject matters: friendship, romance, and coming of age. I chose these particular novels as the primary material for my thesis as they were both published around the same time – at the turn of the millennium. The modern teen chick lit had a boom during the early 2000s and multiple teen chick lit book series were published then. Although it has been argued that girlhood as a concept is “heterogeneous, inclusive, intersectional, discursive, contested, contingent, and very fluid” the main characters in the two novels have very similar white, middle-class Southern English backgrounds which make it more likely that their experience of girlhood is similar (Forman-Brunell 2019, 332). I have divided my analysis of the two novels into three parts: the body, sex and love, and relationships. I find that these three categories cover most of the key elements that together shape the experience of girlhood. Sometimes these parts overlap as, for example, sex and the body.

I have chosen this particular genre, because it often gets dismissed in the academic setting. As Johnson (2006, 141) states: “Cut the word literature down to lit and suddenly you have implied lower quality of work”. Change the main character into a teenage girl and you have garnered “academic disdain” (ibid.). My thesis aims to fill the existing gap of academic study of the teen chick lit genre. Some say that the genre truthfully depicts the modern woman’s life with its ups and downs (Gormley in Machado 2017, 96). Others state that chick lit novels are “formulaic, vapid, and, moreover, anti-feminist” (Gormley in Machado 2017, 96–97). I argue that (teen) chick lit novels depict women and girls’ lives in their most authentic form and that is why they are fruitful for the study of girlhood. They depict a third-wave feminist world in which the young female characters are internalising postfeminist values through the Girl Power rhetoric. My thesis can be condensed into three main questions: (1) How does the chick lit genre, which aims for authenticity, showcase girlhood? (2) How does the patriarchal society of the time shape the main characters’ experience of girlhood? (3) How do the novels blur the line between postfeminist Girl Power and Third Wave feminist empowerment?

To conclude the introduction, I give a brief summary of the two novels I study in this thesis in sections 1.1 and 1.2. I set up my theoretical framework in chapter 2 by first looking into third-wave feminism and the postfeminist Girl Power movement in section 2.1 and linking them to the teen chick lit genre in section 2.2. Then, I analyse the novels and discuss them in relation to my thesis questions in three consecutive chapters that give a comprehensive exploration of the girlhood portrayed in the novels. First, in chapter 3, I explore the body and the ways in which society and the characters themselves scrutinise them. In chapter 4, I look into female sexuality and the romantic relationships that are explored in the two novels. In chapter 5, I highlight the importance of platonic relationships, such as

female friendship and the influence of families. Finally, I conclude my thesis and summarise my findings in chapter 6.

1.1 *Mates, Dates and Inflatable Bras*

Mates, Dates and Inflatable Bras (2001, henceforth *Mates*) by Cathy Hopkins is the first book in the “*Mates, Dates*” series. The main character of the first novel is Lucy Lovering. She is one in a group of four friends who live in North London: Lucy, Nesta, Izzie, and TJ, who joins the group in the later books. The subsequent novels follow the other girls alternately. The novel is told in first person and it alternates between past and present tense. In the first book, Lucy’s class is given a task to write an essay about who they want to be when they grow up. Lucy struggles to write the paper because she has no idea who she is and even less about who she wants to be. On top of her identity crisis, her best friend Izzie has befriended the new girl Nesta, and now Lucy feels left out.

Nesta is everything Lucy wants to be: cool, attractive and experienced in the boy department. 14-year-old Lucy, who looks closer to 12, has no experience with boys but one day she sees her dream guy through a car window. She tries to “accidentally” run into the mystery boy with the help of Izzie and Nesta until it is revealed that he is actually Nesta’s half-brother Tony. Lucy is hesitant to confess this fact to her friends and grows animosity towards Nesta who tries to keep the two apart. When the mystery boy’s identity is revealed to Lucy’s friends, Nesta explains that she was only trying to protect Lucy from her brother, who she knows to be a bit of a womaniser. This brings the two girls closer to one another. During the novel, Lucy starts to get into designing and making clothes. She has finally found something that she is passionate about. Her friends encourage her new hobby, and, at the end of the novel, her talent gets noticed by a famous designer. Through some trial and error, Lucy can find her passion in life, get closer with Nesta, and even steal some kisses with the half-Italian Tony.

1.2 *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging*

The young adult novel *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging* (1999, henceforth *Angus*) written by “the queen of chick lit jr.” Louise Rennison, as named by Johnson (2006, 143), is the first in a 10-part series called “*Confessions of Georgia Nicolson*”. The novel is written in diary form, which gives it a personal feeling. In the novel, Georgia writes about her life, sometimes in bigger chunks, recalling a particular event, and sometimes in little minute-by-minute snippets that tell the reader what is happening in the present time. The first novel in the series is divided into different events in Georgia’s life during her second year at an all-girls secondary school.

Georgia Nicolson is a 14-year-old working class girl who lives in an unnamed town in the South of England. She is a head-strong teenager who sometimes comes off as mean and vain. Her biggest concerns in life, at the beginning of the novel, are her looks, her little sister, who she adores, and the fact that she embarrassed herself by going to a party dressed as an olive. In the first book, Georgia meets the boy of her dreams Robbie or, as Georgia names him, The Sex God. Unfortunately, it turns out that Robbie is already dating another girl called Lindsey, who is in an upper class at Georgia's school. Georgia decides to experiment with her sexuality by meeting and 'getting on' with different boys, all the while trying to keep Robbie out of her life. At the end of the novel the two start getting closer and Robbie ends up leaving Lindsey. In the last scene, Robbie and Georgia end up sharing a kiss and decide to try out a relationship.

Georgia is part of a friend group with four other girls: Jas, Rosie, Jools and Ellen. Jas is her best friend but Georgia often treats her poorly. Georgia is often jealous of her and this causes tension throughout the novel. Together the girls go to parties, have sleepovers and cause havoc in school. Georgia lives with her mum, dad, a cat called Angus and her little sister Libby whom she adores. In the first novel, Georgia's dad is struggling to find work in England, and he ends up getting a job offer in New Zealand. He leaves for New Zealand to see about the job and even though Georgia claims that she is happy to not have him around, she seems to struggle with it, especially when she starts to think her mother is cheating on him with her decorator. Georgia does not want to move to New Zealand and leave her life in England behind but when, at the end of the novel, she feels that she has messed everything up with Robbie and her friends, she agrees to go just a day before Robbie agrees to start dating her.

2 Theoretical Framework

For my analysis of the patriarchal influences of the experience of girlhood in my thesis, I utilise feminist theory with an emphasis on third-wave feminism which emerged around the same time as the two novels were published. In section 2.1 I give a brief introduction to the emergence of the Third Wave and its relevance to my thesis. I also consider the postfeminist Girl Power movement, as it has an undoubted effect on the female characters and their way of navigating girlhood. In the section, I use Deborah Siegel's work *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild* and Kathleen Rowe Karlyn's book *Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers: Redefining Feminism on Screen* as my main sources. The former gives a comprehensive look at the period of transition between the waves, while the latter connects the themes to popular media of the time, such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001). Additionally, in section 2.2, I introduce teen chick lit as a genre where these two feminisms collide.

2.1 Third-Wave Feminism and the Postfeminist Girl Power Movement

Feminist theory, unlike some other theories, has an undeniable connection to the literary world. Because the feminists of the time deemed women and men to be ultimately similar beings and thus entitled to similar rights, the first wave focused on achieving equality between men and women (Ehlers 2016, 349). Some feminists began to critique the earlier theories and thus began the second wave of feminism (Grant 2016, 227). Second-wave feminists focused on identity (Ehlers 2016, 349). They asked two questions: Is identity an essential characteristic of a woman, something that is inherent to the experience of womanhood, or is it something that is shaped by social and cultural expectations (ibid.)? In my thesis, I claim that the main characters' experience of girlhood is shaped by the expectations of the patriarchal society. It is often better to talk about multiple feminisms rather than one all-encompassing feminism. For example, when talking about experience, an integral part of girlhood, Anglo-American feminisms began to look at how women's experience acts as a tool to fight patriarchy (Grant 2016, 228). Alternatively, those who used French feminisms started by looking at power imbalances caused by patriarchy and how they shape the female experience (ibid.). In my thesis, I utilise the latter idea.

The starting point of the Third Wave is dated back to 1993 (Siegel 2007, 16). There is some debate about the term Third Wave, its time frame, and relevance to feminist history, but Siegel (2007, 16, 139) draws attention to the fact that had the Second Wave succeeded in bringing equality, there would not have been any need for the Third Wave. The Third Wave then continues what the Second Wave started by bringing forward issues that were not solved by the Second Wave:

The new wave of young feminist writers articulated very personal reasons why young women still needed a movement, and how feminism would help: Feminism was the frame that would help young women struggling with anorexia or HIV, rape survivors, and pregnant teens see their experiences in a broader and political light. (Siegel 2007, 132)

Most of these problems already existed during the Second Wave, but they had not been fully addressed then (*ibid.*). Young women also brought up new issues such as “[r]elationships, marriage, bisexuality, STDs, abortion, [...] access to education, racism as manifest by white women befriending black women to get over their white guilt, [...] depression, and body image” (Baumgardner and Richards in Siegel 2007, 132). The Third Wave also became known for its intersectionality which set it apart from “the whiteness and the academic elitism” of the Second Wave (Siegel 2007, 142; Karlyn 2011, 32). Siegel (*ibid.*) recognises women of colour, such as Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde, as central to the defining of the Third Wave and its aims.

During this period of transition, the Third Wave offered an alternative to postfeminism which gained the attention of the women who during the 1990s were “confused by the illusion of progress” (Siegel 2007, 132–133) Karlyn (2011, 25) names two factors that contributed to the regression of the women’s movement during the late 1990s. Firstly, older women were working harder than ever with no free time to enjoy domesticity, which made them feel like they were not enjoying the benefits of the economic boom (*ibid.*). Secondly, younger women who were not familiar with the history of feminism began to feel uncomfortable with the term, although they usually agreed with its basic principle (*ibid.*). Whereas third-wave feminists “helped women make sense of the unfairness of sexism by reminding them of the difference between political injustice and personal failure,” postfeminism emphasised individual responsibility (Findlen in Siegel 2007, 132). Whilst the Third Wave claimed that there was still progress to be made, postfeminists felt that the Second Wave had already done enough for women. Karlyn (2011, 26) describes postfeminism as more of a

cultural condition than a movement by which popular culture “undoes” feminism while appearing to offer a well-intentioned response to it. Beginning with the premise that individuals are free to choose any life they wish, it makes heavy use of the tropes of boldness, entitlement, and choice, along with the practices of self-surveillance and monitoring fostered by teen magazines and self-help TV and literature aimed at women. At the same time, postfeminism shows little interest in the inequities that constrain an individual’s choice. Nor does it consider the implications of expressing choice largely in the realm of the sexualized body, normative femininity, and consumer culture.

One particular genre of literature that gained popularity during this era is chick lit, which takes up many of these themes. I discuss the genre in more detail in the following section.

The rise of postfeminist ideation can be connected to the popularisation of the Girl Power movement. Around the 1990s, teenage girls began to have “rising power as a demographic group to be reckoned with” (Karlyn 2011, 2). Karlyn (ibid.) recognises the Second Wave as something that began this tradition named by cultural critics as “‘Girl Power’ or ‘Girl Culture’”. The name derives from the all-girl underground punk band movement called the Riot Grrrl (Karlyn 2011, 2; Siegel 2007, 146). The movement, which initially was more tied to the Third Wave’s ideas of female empowerment, quickly became associated with consumerism and postfeminism (Karlyn 2011, 2; Siegel 2007, 146; Pomerantz et al. 2013, 185, 187). The turning point was the popularisation of the term by the Spice Girls, who called for sisterhood through songs like “Wannabe” (Karlyn 2011, 5-6, 89). According to Karlyn (2011, 6), “the Spice Girls challenge familiar representations of femininity by affirming female friendship, agency, and physical power”. However, “[t]he original feminist intentions of this youthful movement [...] were stripped away once marketers began cashing in on female empowerment as an easily digested form of pseudo-feminist branding” (Pomerantz et al. 2013, 189). The movement lost its collective power and became associated with the white middle class as well as postfeminist “individualism and personal responsibility” (Gonick in Pomerantz et al. 2013, 189). Pomerantz et al. (2013, 187, 189) argue that “[a]s a discourse of individualized female empowerment, Girl Power has contributed significantly to the current postfeminist landscape in North America and to the belief that girls now live beyond sexism” and in turn it has led to girls having no tools to recognise sexism in their environment. These postfeminist ideas were equally present in the United Kingdom – the Spice Girls’ home country.

As Karlyn (2011, 89) states, “the reclamation of girly femininity and sexuality may not be as uncomplicated as it seemed in the Spice Girls’ upbeat anthems of female friendship and

power”. Referencing the teen movie *Mean Girls* (2004), Karlyn (2011, 89) points out that to hold power within the Girl World, one must be able to attract men, which “keeps girls locked into old dependencies on male validation and fantasies of romantic love”. One must also have “a hot body”, which “reinforces girls’ unhealthy belief that their worth is based on unattainable goals of physical beauty while encouraging them to limit their sense of identity to the sexual” (ibid.). And, finally, one must “follow rather than lead and to internalize misogynistic and hypocritical attitudes toward themselves and each other” (ibid.). These are all aspects of the postfeminist narrative, in which women are encouraged to deal with their problems individually, which ultimately causes a separation between women. They are themes that show up in both *Angus* and *Mates* and that I look into in the following analysis chapters.

2.2 (Post)feminism and the Chick Lit Novel

Chick Lit started to emerge as a new genre of fiction around the late 1990s (Cabot in Ferriss and Young 2006, 3). In *Chick Lit: The New Woman’s Fiction*, the genre is defined by its characters – single twenty and thirty-somethings – and its subject matters – relationships, careers and generational challenges (ibid.). Ferriss and Young (2006, 4) trace the emergence of the genre back to one singular novel: *Bridget Jones’s Diary* by Helen Fielding (1996) which takes inspiration from Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). It does not come as a surprise that critics have dismissed the genre as trashy as even the term ‘chick lit’ was first used to mock the genre (Ferriss and Young 2006, 1, 3). This is certainly not the first instance of women getting judged for reading books written by women, about women, for women. The chick lit genre, then, is feminism in action. Despite the harsh critique, there is much interest in the genre. The first two novels in Louise Rennison’s series “Confessions of Georgia Nicolson”, for example, were adapted into a film called *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* in 2008. The appeal of the genre lies in its relatability (Ferriss and Young 2006, 3). The chick lit novel presents the main character with all her flaws and insecurities which makes it easier for the reader to relate to her (ibid.). The chick lit protagonist is, then, a representation of the modern woman.

The chick lit genre emerged in a postfeminist era and it has been sometimes referred to as “evidence, if not the cause, of feminism’s debilitation” (Harzewski 2011, 8). Themes such as appearance anxieties, heterosexual struggles and conservative ideologies regarding the career-woman are handled through “through the ‘stylistic alibi’ of irony” (Negra in Harzewski 2011,

9). Like postfeminism, which is connected with white, middle-class values, so does the traditional chick lit novel centers girls and women who belong to this demographic.

Harzewski (2011, 21) argues that the genre acts as “an implicit commentary on feminism’s gains and deficiencies”. They state that

[c]ommercial postfeminism portrays feminism as a bad or embarrassing mother. It positions itself in relation to earlier feminism through inexact oppositions: private pleasure/grassroots politics; humor/dour seriousness; a stylish, polished appearance/dowdiness; desire for marriage and security/mistrust of the male gender. (ibid.)

I argue that despite these postfeminist themes, the chick lit novel cannot be completely removed from the Third Wave world.

The genre’s relatability is strongly dependent on its audience. Chick lit started out as an overwhelmingly young, white, and middle-class genre, a factor which closely relates it to postfeminism. However, the genre has since become more diverse (Ferriss and Young 2006, 3). The novels that I study in my thesis are very much of the former formula. Thus, they appeal best to readers who themselves belong to this demographic. The chick lit novel makes use of the first-person narration to connect with the reader (Ferriss and Young 2006, 3). It sometimes employs mixed-media aspects, such as diary entries, text messages or emails, as is done in both *Angus* and *Mates*. *Angus*, written entirely in diary entries, is very reminiscent of ‘the mother of the genre’ *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. Both of these aspects of narration make the reader feel as if they are there with the character, experiencing the moments with her, which in turn enhances the relatability aspect.

Since its beginnings, the chick lit genre has split into multiple sub-genres, one of them being teen chick lit, to which *Angus* and *Mates* both belong. Johnson (2006, 141) names Louise Rennison and Cathy Hopkins, among others, as leading writers of the genre. The teen chick lit genre emulates its adult counterpart in many ways. As Johnson (2006, 142) writes: “Both try to affirm flawed women, acknowledge insecurities involving physical attributes, and give lessons in negotiating relationships (usually by showing the wrong way first)”. The teen version focuses on the growing pains that come with adolescence by showing through humour how the young female characters struggle to find their identities (ibid.). The teen chick lit novel acts as a sort of self-help book for the adolescent female. The trials and errors the characters go through can be affirming to the young reader who herself might be struggling in life (Johnson 2006, 142, 148). Johnson (2006, 146) argues that the teen chick lit genre is

removed from the feminist argumentation as it does not aim to “change” the world but rather show how the main character “negotiates” with. It aims to show the teenage reader how they can navigate through their adolescence and acts, thus, as a sort of humorous field guide for their teenage years by often showing what not to do. Teen chick lit has its roots in the traditional 19th and early 20th century girl literature such as L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) or Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868) (Johnson 2006, 143). The main characters in these novels are shown to suffer from similar issues as the young girls in the modern teen chick lit novel: relationships, appearances, and self-actualisation.

Because the genre consists of literature written by women that centralise female characters, there is debate about how it should handle certain topics. Some say that chick lit novels should be purely feminist and showcase empowered women that rise above the patriarchy (Ferriss and Young 2006, 9). Others claim that they should depict women’s lives in their most realistic form, meaning they should show both the good and the bad of being a woman in a patriarchal world (ibid.). Additionally, another notable distinction of the genre is its humorous nature. Ferriss and Young (2006, 9) suggest that the humorous tone might be one of the reasons why feminists and critics alike do not consider the genre to be noteworthy when it comes to its place in the feminist movement. I believe it is anti-feminist to think that women are not able to laugh at themselves. To find humour in the current state of the world and women’s existence in it is arguably an empowering act. Writing about it and relating to it is what brings women together, something that has historically been considered dangerous.

As Ferriss and Young (2006, 9) state, “ambiguity lies at the genre’s core”. For instance, two common topics in chick lit novels are sex and romantic relationships. Where former women’s fiction traditionally had a romantic relationship with one man, the chick lit novel diverts from that tradition (Ferriss and Young 2006, 3). It “offer[s] a more realistic portrait of single life, dating, and the dissolution of romantic ideals” (ibid.). This is enacted in scenes that at first glance may appear as sexist portrayals of women as subordinates to men, but which may actually be seen as a way of showing sexual agency in a humorous way (Ferriss and Young 2006, 10). The same goes for the topic of the body. The female characters in chick lit novels often struggle with their self-image, particularly their weight (Ferriss and Young 2006, 11). The conversations around looks are often linked to their ‘market value’ in the dating scene (ibid.). Some might say that these depictions set the feminist movement back, but I argue that they highlight the struggles of women and girls who live under constant scrutiny of their

bodies. They highlight the need for feminism in a society that some deem postfeminist. In the chapters that follow, I delve deeper into these ambiguities and discuss the underlying feminist aspects that exist in teen chick lit novels despite their sometimes-grotesque depictions of girlhood.

3 The Body

The Body is under constant scrutiny in the two novels. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* ([1993] 1995, 166), Bordo states that women are spending much more time on disciplining and shaping their bodies than before. This is because the ideal feminine form is constantly changing, and women have to constantly adapt to the frequent and often minute changes in fashions in order to adhere to societal expectations (ibid.). The feminine body is, thus, in a constant state of observation and discipline, which leads to “the convictions of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough” (ibid.). This is possibly the only form of gender oppression that transcends all women, and it is thus the ideal form of social control (ibid.). In this chapter, I look at the different ways in which the expectations of the patriarchal society are reflected in the female characters’ treatment of their bodies and, furthermore, how these expectations shape their experience of girlhood. I use Bordo’s book as a major basis for my analysis and arguments in this section. First, I look at how media depictions of female bodies affect the way the girls view their own bodies. Then, I discuss how looks affect their sense of self and how peers can heighten these appearance anxieties. Finally, I discuss how the female characters aim to enhance their looks through beautification.

3.1 Slender Silhouettes

To better understand the discussions around the body in the two novels, I begin this section by looking at the discourse around women’s bodies at the turn of the millennium. As Bordo mentions, the rise of visual media, especially movies and tv series, has changed how female bodies are regulated: “we learn the rules directly through bodily discourse: through images that tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expressions, movements, and behaviour are required” (Bordo [1993] 1995, 166). This change can be seen through the main characters and the way they discuss and experience their bodies. After close reading, it is clear that the female characters in the two novels have acquired these rules of femininity and, thus, are constantly trying to change their bodies and their ways of being to fit those rules. These rules they have acquired from the people around them and the different forms of visual media they consume. In this section, I analyse the way that media images affect how the female characters experience the body.

Both of the novels include frequent mentions of different celebrities and magazines. Although they are perhaps now losing popularity among young people due to the rise of the internet and social media, magazines used to play a big role in women's lives. There is debate among feminists about the way that these magazines work to advance feminism (Currie 1999, 9). Some argue that they are the pawns of patriarchy that work to conform women "to patriarchal definitions and standards of femininity" (ibid.). Others think that they are "a legitimate arena of women's fantasy and pleasure" through which women "negotiate meanings in their everyday lives, often in opposition to patriarchy and capitalism" (ibid.). The latter argue that simply the act of reading a magazine meant for women and centring women is feminism in action (ibid.). The characters in the two novels look to magazines to find inspiration and information. When Lucy is having a crisis because she feels lost and confused, she decides to cut her hair and looks for inspiration in a women's magazine (*Mates*, 99). Lucy feels as if she has no control over her life and cutting her hair is a way for her to at least gain control of her body. Similarly, Georgia reads her mother's *Cosmopolitan* magazines to get dating advice and yoga plans for "inner peace and confidence" (*Angus*, 54).

In *Angus*, the harmful effects of these magazines are acknowledged: "I was glancing through *Just 17* and it listed kissing techniques. [...] I wish I had never read it, it has made me more nervous and confused than I was before" (*Angus*, 30–31). Like the teen chick lit genre, girls' and women's magazines aim to guide the reader through adolescence. They are what girls looked to for advice instead of their parents at the turn of the millennium, as previously mentioned. Unfortunately, these magazines often included harmful content for such an audience, and their advice was often taken as strict rather than loose guidelines (source, expand). The characters do seem to recognise the ridiculous nature of these magazines. After reading an article in *Cosmopolitan* called "What men say and what they mean", Georgia writes in her diary: "I am going to become a writer for *Cosmo* – you don't have to make any sense at all" (*Angus*, 123–124). This could also imply that she does not yet understand the intricacies of the adult dating world.

Teenagers often look up to the celebrities they idolise. The characters in the two novels want to wear the clothes they see on celebrities, as is mentioned in a scene where Lucy makes herself a new top to impress her friends: "It's like one I saw Jennifer Aniston wearing in one of the mags" (*Mates*, 85). They want to look like the celebrities they idolise: "I'm going for the young Brigitte Bardot look" and even behave the same way as these celebrities: "It's up to

you, Jas, but I know what Sharon Stone would do” (*Angus*, 18, 48). Through imitation, the girls can attempt to look or even be like the celebrities they idolise (Van Slooten 2006, 229). However, this quickly becomes an issue when the people or the traits that they want to emulate are unattainable or unhealthy. As Bordo ([1993] 1995, 170) mentions, the extremely slender body was the culturally conditioned ideal for the contemporary woman. Women and girls cannot escape the images of ultra-thin bodies. They are everywhere: in magazines, advertisements and movies to name a few. The 2006 song “Everything’s Just Wonderful” by Lily Allen includes the lyrics: “I wanna be able to eat spaghetti bolognese / and not feel bad about it / for days and days and days / In the magazines, they talk about weight loss / If I buy those jeans, / I can look like Kate Moss / I know it’s not the life that I chose, / but I guess it’s just the way that things go”. The song comes from her debut album, in which she discusses life as a young woman living in London. In the song, she self-deprecatingly sings about matters that affect her as a young woman, such as living in a patriarchal society that idolises thinness. She does not approve of the matter but realises she alone cannot change society and ends up grudgingly accepting her current reality. The song is, then, very representative of its time. The themes that appear in Allen’s song are also apparent in *Angus* and *Mates*.

Both of the novels include mentions of dieting. In *Mates*, the side character Nesta has ambitions of becoming a model. Perhaps that is the reason why she retorts: “Diet again on Monday,” when she is offered ice cream at Lucy’s place (*Mates*, 15). Hearing Nesta’s words Lucy thinks: “I can’t believe she diets. She’s as thin as a rake” (ibid.). Lucy cannot believe that someone who already has the ideal hyper-slender body would control what they eat. In her mind, those actions are reserved for people who have yet to achieve the ideal body type. Lucy’s thoughts can also be interpreted as having a hint of admiration for Nesta’s slenderness and her commitment to upkeep it. One cannot discount the effect of women’s magazines on the diet epidemic. The ads, which take up half of the pages in these magazines, can be linked to the success of the diet industry (Barker in Currie 1999, 8). These dieting ads that glamorise the thin look often include slender models who themselves suffer from eating disorders (ibid.). Young readers, such as the girls in the two novels, who are still in the process of building their self-image, see these unrealistic images of women in the ads of girls’ magazines as something to be imitated.

Lucy is quick to judge Nesta for her dieting habits, but later in the novel, she seems to be participating in similar behaviour. During a lesson in school, Lucy and her classmates distract

themselves by thinking about their so-called “death meals” – a death meal being the last meal you would have if you knew you were going to die right after (*Mates*, 121). What follows is a portrayal of diet culture in action: “That set us off dreaming for a while. All the lovely things we could eat and not have to worry about the calories or dieting” (*ibid.*). Some of the mentioned foods are undoubtedly unhealthy if consumed in excess, such as burgers and chocolate but, nonetheless, foods that an average teenage girl should be able to eat without feeling guilty. However, they also mention normal home-cooked meals, such as roast chicken and spaghetti Bolognese, that are part of a normal and healthy diet. As Bordo ([1993] 1995, 171) states: “[T]he control of female appetite for food is merely the most concrete expression of the general rule governing the construction of femininity: that female hunger—for public power, for independence, for sexual gratification—be contained, and the public space that women be allowed to take up be circumscribed, limited”. This highlights the public patriarchy that still holds space in their society.

In *Angus*, the diet culture element is taken from words to actions. The main character Georgia is, for example, mentioned to have very small meals: “Prepared a light lunch of sandwich spread and milky coffee. There’s never anything to eat in this house. No wonder my elbows stick out so much” (*Angus*, 24) From the quote it may seem that she does not actually desire the hyper-slender body as she mentions not liking her thin arms. The issue is, of course, not only the desire for slenderness but the constant need for the perfect body, whatever shape of it is currently in fashion. Additionally, in a later scene, there is a portrayal of body checking which is “the habit of seeking information about your body’s weight, shape, size, or appearance” (Stanborough, 2020) “In Jas’s bedroom we did our vital statistics with her tape measure” (*Angus*, 152). From the context and the wording, it seems that this is a common occurrence for them, which means that the body checking is leaning towards the unhealthy compulsive kind (Stanborough, 2020).

When it comes to dieting, it is often considered a form of self-control. It is a means to an end – a slender body, one seen in magazines, advertisements, and other forms of visual media. Although it might give the characters a sense of power, according to Bordo ([1993] 1995, 182), the constant need for body-checking and controlled eating actually strips them from it and eventually the obsession around slenderness starts to control them – the controller becomes the controlled. Although it includes mentions of diet culture and unhealthy relationships with food, there are no explicitly fatphobic comments in *Mates* unlike in *Angus*.

The sense of power over one's body also comes into play when the characters speak about other people's bodies. The characters assume that people who are not slim have lost that power. They are unable to take the necessary steps to achieve the perfect slender body and, thus, in need of outside help. This is shown in a scene in *Angus* where Georgia mentions that her father is too lazy to get up from the sofa: "He's getting very chunky. I may have to mention it in a caring way" (*Angus*, 81). This mocking statement disguised as a humorous quip highlights how society sees people who are not the ideal size as something to be controlled or at least guided to the right direction.

Bordo ([1993] 1995, 186) notes that media representations of eating disorders, such as binge eating, can cause audiences to separate themselves ("the normal ones") from those who struggle ("the freaks"). This can easily translate to real life as is showcased by Georgia's description of the head teacher at her school: "Headmistress Slim (so-called because she weighs twenty-five stone [159 kg] ... at least. Her feet cascade out of her shoes) [...]. Slim shook herself. [...] It made her look like a jelly with shoes on" and later: "She was all shaky and jelly-like, her jowls were bouncing around like anything" (*Angus*, 44, 90). The dehumanising depiction of the head teacher showcases the internalised fatphobia of the main character. It also shows how mean teenage girls can be. It is easier for them to talk about the headmistress this way because they do not see her as a human being. One explanation for why they do this is probably due to her being the head teacher and them being students, but another reason for it is her size. Because she is overweight, the normal rules of basic human decency do not apply to her. She has essentially "made herself other" by gaining weight.

There is no doubt about the fact that the desire for slenderness has its roots in the patriarchal society. Accordingly, Bordo ([1993] 1995, 204) claims that women are more affected by the "contemporary slenderness ideal". She states that women are more likely to be judged for their bodies by their partners, more likely to see themselves as too fat and more prone to practise "crash dieting" (ibid.). In *Mates*, Nesta dreams of becoming a model. She desires to join an industry that values extreme slenderness. Her dieting habits, then, come from her desire to become a model. She manages to get noticed by a modelling agency, but her parents forbid her from signing with them as they think she is too young. Similarly, in *Angus*, there is a mention of the ultra-thin model shape. When Jas wants to get a boy to notice her at a party she thinks: "I wanted that anorexic model look, like I've been up partying all night. I want Tom to think I've not been thinking about him" (*Angus*, 128) Similarly, when Georgia tries to

get with Robbie, who thinks she is too young for him, she writes in her diary: “If I starved myself to death I wonder if Robbie would think I was grown-up enough?” (*Angus*, 230). Based on her comment, I argue that Georgia equates thinness and the self-control that is required in dieting to growing up from a teenager to a young adult. She sees images of older models, actors and musicians and thinks that acquiring a slender body is a sort of rite of passage.

3.2 Appearance Anxieties

In *Mates*, Lucy has to write an essay on the topic “What makes me ‘me’?”. Her first instinct is to describe her looks: “I’m small and don’t look my age. People always think I’m in Year Seven or Eight” (*Mates*, 11). This indicates that she considers her looks to be a significant part of her identity. She is defined by her small size and youthful looks. At the beginning of the novel, she also describes herself as “the typical ‘English rose,’ pale, blond and boring. I’d rather be a tropical flower like Nesta, all exotic and colourful” (*Mates*, 11). She is quick to compare herself to Nesta, the new girl who has recently started hanging out with Lucy and her best friend, Izzie. Lucy sees Nesta as a cooler and more interesting option for Izzie to befriend and is often jealous of the two’s newfound friendship. It is evident how easy it is for girls and women to start comparing themselves to others and eventually start feeling inferior. When the three go hang out at a local hotspot for teenagers, Lucy continues to compare herself to her friends: “They both look like grown-ups who’d let their kid sister tag along” (*Mates*, 36). Lucy later mentions that she is not usually like this. She is not used to feeling second best (*Mates*, 64). This implies that she has only started to feel this way after Nesta entered her life. It is not in her nature to compare herself to other girls or try to change herself to appear more attractive to boys. It is at this age when adolescents start to view themselves through other people’s perspectives and internalise their opinions as well as becoming more introspective which all ultimately lead to the decline of global self-esteem (Harter in Harter 2012, 102–103). It is, then, no surprise that she is starting to feel more self-conscious.

Harter (2000, 133) found perceived attractiveness to be the highest predictor of global self-esteem. She also found that girls’ perception of their own attractiveness continuously declined through grades 3 to 11, whereas for boys, it stayed the same (Harter, 2000, 134–135). Additionally, her studies showed that, for most girls, perceived appearance preceded one’s feelings of self-worth (Harter 2000, 136). In other words, most female adolescents feel that their insufficient looks are the reason why they dislike themselves. The girls who establish

“their self-esteem on their appearance [...] feel worse about their appearance, have lower self-esteem, and were more depressed than girls for whom self-esteem preceded judgements of appearance” (ibid.). Both of the main characters seem to fit into this majority. The standards for women at the time were as follows: “[O]ne must be tall, very thin, weigh very little (around 110–115 pounds), have ample breasts, and of course a pretty face and stunning hair, an unattainable combination for more than 90% of the female population” (Harter 2012, 93). Harter’s acknowledgement of the unattainable nature of these standards is not something that the characters themselves consider. Instead, they continue to pursue the ideal look whilst ignoring its costs because they believe that it will bring them happiness.

Breasts, or the lack of them, is something the characters constantly scrutinise: “Small, flat-chested, not the slightest evidence of a bust. And that’s another thing. Izzie and Nesta both have breasts [...]. But me, nothing. Pinpricks. Pimples. I have the body of a nine-year-old boy” (*Mates*, 62–63). I argue that teenage girls’ obsession with having bigger breasts is a direct influence of the patriarchy. Although they might not be conscious of this, it is clear from the characters’ talk that one of the reasons for their self-consciousness is the scrutiny of their bodies by males. Having breasts appears to be a measure of womanhood as well. The bra acts as a symbol of womanhood in the two novels. At the beginning of *Angus*, Georgia writes in her diary: “I am fourteen years old [...]! I am bursting with womanhood, I wear a bra! Ok, it’s a bit on the loose side and does ride up round my neck if I run for the bus... but the womanly potential is there” (*Angus*, 7). If womanhood is defined by having big enough boobs to fill a bra, wearing a bra, even one that is too big, must then be a shortcut to it. Most girls probably remember buying their first bra and starting to wear a bra acts as a sort of rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood. If they do not grow naturally, breasts can be enhanced in different ways. Hopkins’s novel’s name highlights three topical things in a teenage girl’s life: *Mates*, *Dates and Inflatable Bras*. The title refers to the blow-up bra Lucy’s friends buy her, knowing of her insecurity. The option of plastic surgery is also mentioned when Lucy is worrying over her small breast size: “They’ll grow soon enough. And if they don’t, you can always have silicone” (*Mates*, 117).

As previously mentioned, the predecessor of the teen chick lit genre is the older girl novel (Finnish: ‘tyttökirja’) which includes many of the same elements as its successor. One of these common themes is the preoccupation with one’s looks. In *Angus*, Georgia is often mentioned to be insecure about the size of her nose. One night, before going to bed, she writes

in her diary: “I wonder if I slept with a peg on my nose, like Amy in *Little Women*, if it would make it smaller?” (*Angus*, 64). Georgia’s statement shows two things: that she, like many other young girls, has acquired at least some of her understanding of girlhood from reading girl books, and that the struggles of girlhood have stayed very similar despite the passage of time and rise of feminist thinking. Later in the novel, Georgia continues to agonise about her nose: “I wonder if Mum would pay for me to have plastic surgery...?” (*Angus*, 93). Sarwer et al. (in Harter 2012, 167) detected “a dramatic increase” in cosmetic surgeries “from approximately 2 million in 1997, to 5.5 million in 2000, and almost 8.5 million in the year 2001”. Harter (ibid.) notes that “[h]eightened body dissatisfaction, frequently accompanied by low self-esteem, is the primary motivation for seeking cosmetic surgery”. From these findings, I conclude that body dissatisfaction was on the rise during the late 1990s and the early 2000s.

When talking about the role of social comparison when it comes to perceived appearance, Harter (2012, 170) claims that women who spend time comparing themselves to media images and other women subject themselves to negative evaluations of their own attractiveness. The main characters in both novels constantly compare their appearance to celebrities as well as their friends. In Lucy’s case, especially, these are upward comparisons. Quoting Harter (ibid.), “the judgments of others can have a dramatic impact on one’s self-perceptions. [T]he “outer self” is always on display for others to evaluate. Peers constitute an important and very prevalent class of others who can be relentless and sometimes cruel, in their evaluations of attractiveness”. The main characters constantly hear comments on their own or other people’s looks from their peers. Often, they themselves also partake in these discussions. Hearing comments from your parents, friends and boys can easily affect one’s self-esteem. The comments make the characters more self-aware of their flaws and validate their own negative feelings about themselves.

In *Angus* (104), the girls decide to “mark each other out of ten for physical attractiveness”. They each make a list of body parts, which they then pass around and their friends anonymously give them points. Georgia notes that she “more or less gave everyone near top marks for everything... even in the face of obvious evidence to the contrary” (*Angus*, 105). She recognises that giving low scores would have an impact on her friends’ self-confidence and refrains from doing so. When it is revealed to her that Jas has given her mouth the score of six and a third, Georgia is appalled. Her best friend has decided to give her an honest

answer instead of saving her from embarrassment. When Georgia asks about the score, Jas answers: “Well when you smile, because your mouth is so big...’ [...] ‘Well, it sort of splits your face in half and it, well, it spreads your nose out more’” (*Angus*, 107). Georgia, who is already self-conscious about her nose, is getting reinforcement for the idea that it is flawed.

Nevertheless, friends can also help to boost one’s self-esteem. Lucy and Georgia’s friends offer them different ways of coping with their appearance anxieties – some of them better than others. Lucy’s friends offer her compliments and otherwise aim to raise her self-confidence on multiple occasions. Gifting an inflatable bra might not be the best way to fix Lucy’s chest-anxieties, but it helps her make light of her situation. When Lucy’s hair is ruined, they console her and offer to help her fix it. They help her deal with her insecurities by self-deprecatingly expressing their own flaws. Nesta says: “Not like my feet. [...] Look. Massive. Horrible” and Izzie seconds that: “Try having my thighs” (*Mates*, 117). This makes Lucy understand that she is just one of many girls who are struggling to fit into the standards dictated by society. Finally, at the end of the novel, when Lucy has been able to gain more confidence through her journey of self-discovery, Izzie states: “I reckon you could get anyone you want looking like you do now” (*Mates*, 130). In Izzie’s statement, the reason behind their appearance anxieties is explicitly revealed and the happy ending comes when Lucy is able to rise up to the standards of the patriarchy.

3.3 Beautification

When envisioning a teenage girl’s room, the image often includes a room with a dresser full of makeup and clothes strewn all over the place. Many of the female characters’ pastime activities include self-enhancement. ‘Getting ready’ is a popular girlhood activity that, at least for Georgia, requires hours of planning and work. For Georgia, preparing for the first day of school includes some light yoga, milk baths, face masks and outfit planning. In Gurrieri and Drenten’s (2021, 236) article “The Feminist Politics of Choice: Lipstick as a Marketplace Icon”, lipstick serves two purposes – “lipstick as a playful and empowering beauty practice that should be celebrated” and “lipstick as a normative and oppressive feminine ideal rooted in patriarchal expectations”. In my analysis, I take the discussion and analysis from lipstick to a broader context. Getting ready often causes stress for the characters. Lucy worries that she will be left in her friends’ shadow: “What am I going to wear? Nesta and Izzie always look fab so I’d better make an effort” (*Mates*, 27). Her thoughts can also be interpreted as her being worried about embarrassing her friends by looking out of place. Georgia’s anxiety over her

looks inspires her to try out all kinds of things from sellotaping her fringe to shaving her eyebrows to enhance her looks. Her desperate attempts at achieving the ideal look appear to the reader as humorous but I argue that they highlight how desperately girls feel the need to achieve society's standards for women's appearance.

For many people, doing one's makeup can be a creative outlet – a way to have fun.

Unfortunately, as Bordo ([1993] 1995, 253) states, it has become a necessary step for many in one's daily routine. Something one has to do before they go out into the world, even if one is only taking out the trash. Wearing makeup is not only limited to the female experience, yet they have been the target audience for most makeup advertisements in recent history. I argue that because wearing makeup is not the cultural norm for other genders, they are not as likely to feel pressured to wear it. For women, however, it is something that is expected and even required. Cahill (2003, 42) argues that “while beautifying may be a positive experience for women, being viewed as a beautified object in current Western society is almost always opposed to women's equality and autonomy”. But why is it that, when a male glam rock or punk artist wears makeup, it is considered to be a liberating form of resistance but when women wear it, it is usually put in the context of patriarchal oppression? It would be naive to ignore the context. As Cahill (2003, 42) puts it, “the empowering characteristics of beautification [...] are difficult and perhaps impossible to represent in a sexist context; therefore, while beautifying may be a positive experience for women, being viewed as a beautified object in current Western society is almost always opposed to women's equality and autonomy”. In order for wearing makeup to be a purely optional and enjoyable practice, according to Gurrieri and Drenten (2021, 236), it first needs to be “decoupled from patriarchal standards of ideal feminine beauty for women”. Before this is done successfully, women and girls wearing makeup is, then, always teetering the line of being just one of the ways that they have internalised the standards of the patriarchal society.

An interesting theme that arises, especially in *Angus*, is the obsession with natural makeup. In the context of the novel, natural makeup is not natural in regards to its ingredients but, rather, it looks natural, when applied to the face. The word ‘natural’ often appears when the female characters are talking about makeup or other self-care items or processes. The “no-makeup” movement gained new popularity in the late 2010s when people started posting pictures of themselves with bare faces online (Smith et al. 2022, 324). As Smith et al. (2022, 334) found in their study, the no-makeup movement increased the sales of makeup products, people who

posted “no-makeup” selfies were often found to be wearing makeup, and those who were actually wearing makeup received “a higher attractiveness score and more likes”. From these findings they concluded that “constructing naturalness is an effective self presentational strategy” (ibid.). On Friday, the 28th of August, Georgia writes in her diary: “Jas phoned and wanted to go shopping – there’s some new make-up range that looks so natural you can’t tell you have got any on” (*Angus*, 27). Consumers desire to shop for products that fit the natural and effortless look they see on other people (Smith et al. 2022, 334). The girls are willing to pay for makeup products that make them look as if they do not have anything on. This undoubtedly has a lot to do with the fact that they are not allowed to wear makeup at school but are always trying to find ways to do so anyway. It can also be associated with the findings of Smith et al. (2022, 334), according to which “the appearance of low (vs. high) effort tends to lead others to augment (vs. discount) an individual’s attractiveness”. The girl characters may be aware of this cost and, thus, desire to wear natural-looking makeup. There is, however, a sense of self-awareness in the writing. When Georgia and Jas are trying to snoop on Jas’s love interest, Georgia mentions in her diary: “Jas popped to the loos to make herself look natural with panstick etc” (*Angus*, 46). The apparent irony in wearing panstick, which is a very heavy foundation, while trying to look natural, comes across to the reader as foolish.

As mentioned, Georgia’s school does not allow the students to wear makeup. Georgia and her friend often try to bend the rules and not get caught because they cannot imagine leaving the house without any makeup on: “I cannot possibly risk walking to school without make-up on. [...] I will be bound to bump into the Foxwood lads” (*Angus*, 37) It is clear that the potential of meeting boys has a lot to do with their desire to wear makeup. Because of this rule, the girls have to try and find new ways of getting around the rules: “I have perfected putting a little bit of mascara on so that you can’t tell I have got any on” (*Angus*, 60). As Smith et al. (2022, 335) mention, “consumers are willing to put in significant effort to appear effortless to others”. It seems that it is enough for Georgia that she knows she is wearing makeup even though others might not be able to detect it. For her, makeup is a sort of comfort blanket that makes her feel at ease and gives her a confidence boost. Despite her diligence in preparing for the first day of school, Georgia ends up oversleeping and misses her opportunity to take her time getting ready. Instead, she arrives at school flustered and half-asleep: “Worst fears confirmed – I am Mrs Ugly. Small, swollen eyes, hair plastered to my skull, HUGE red nose. I look like a tomato in a school uniform” (*Angus*, 57; emphasis in the original).

4 Sex and Love

The two novels, especially *Angus*, have a refreshing take on female sexuality which regulation “is deeply ingrained in our culture to hold the structures of patriarchy and heterosexuality in place” (Karlyn 2011, 32). Although, the novels portray female characters who are not afraid to claim agency of their sexualities, harmful aspects of postfeminist individual sexual freedom are also illustrated. In them *Angus* and *Mates* both include a plotline where the main character meets her dream boy. In both cases the boys are older and unavailable: in Georgia’s case taken and in Lucy’s case her new friend’s older brother. Through trial and tribulations the main character’s end up getting closer with the boys and the books end in a kiss and a promise of more. In this section, I analyse how the potential and current romantic relationships of the female characters affect their sense of self. First, in section 4.1, I look at how the main characters’ experience of girlhood is shaped by the opposite sex. Then, in section 4.2, I take a look at female sexuality and how the novels portray it.

4.1 Girlhood Shaped by Boys

While writing her article “What Teenage Girls Write to Agony Aunts: Their Relationships, Perception, Pressures and Needs”, Williams (2004, 324) discovered that the most common topic on these forums was relationships. Agony Aunt, as described in “Georgia’s Glossary” in *Angus* (238), is “[a] woman in a magazine who gives you advice if you are a sad person with no one else to talk to”. Williams (2004, 328–329) identified the following four sub-themes that were of interest to the young inquisitors: how to recognise that someone is interested, what to do when you have a crush, how to make a move on a crush, and how to manage a relationship whilst maintaining friendships. These are all questions that come up in the two novels. As is common for the teen chick lit genre, *Angus* and *Mates*’ plotlines heavily revolve around the meeting and pursuing of a love interest. Most of the main characters’ actions in the novels are driven by these crushes, and many of the conflicts also arise from the girls’ struggles with their feelings for these boys. In this section, I delve into the romantic and sexual relationships the main characters, as well as the other female characters, have in the novels.

At the beginning of both novels, the main characters do not seem to be heavily involved with boys. In her article *Forces of Patriarchy: Adolescent Experiences of Sexuality and Conceptions of Relationships*, van Roosmalen discusses how patriarchy shapes girls' understanding of their sexuality and romantic relationships. Through analysing girls' letters on *Teen Magazine's* advice column, she was able to conclude that "[h]ow girls identify themselves within the social order is dependent on relations with boys, how they relate to boys, and how they can get a boy into their life" (van Roosmalen 2000, 211). They often feel pressure from their peers to be involved with boys, preferably in a relationship with one of them. At the beginning of *Mates* (16), Georgia retorts: "I can already feel myself getting fed up with boys and I haven't had anything to do with them yet". This comes after she has turned up at a costume party dressed up as a stuffed olive. Her friend Jas implies that boys do not look for girls like Georgia, who make jokes and wear silly costumes – girls who act in a way that breaks the rules of the dating world (*Angus*, 15). I argue that girls enforce these 'rules of patriarchy' by guiding their friends to act or look a certain way. Although they might act out of good intent, they end up forcing their own internalised misogyny on other girls. This ensures the continual power that the patriarchy has over women. After this conversation, Georgia becomes significantly more aware of how she looks and acts around boys. Jas has shown her that getting the attention of boys is important, which in turn inspires Georgia to have a growing interest for them despite her initial annoyance and indifference.

As the novels progress, getting attention from boys becomes more important to Lucy and Georgia. They consider the lack of attention from and experience with boys to be shameful. Van Roosmalen (2000, 207) argues that romantic relationships are one of the biggest driving forces for young girls, and becoming someone's girlfriend gives life meaning. It comes, then, as no surprise that a lot of Lucy's time in *Mates* is spent on stressing about the fact that she is not as experienced with boys as her friends are: "Boys never notice me even when I'm doing my best flirtie gertie act" (*Mates*, 37). By calling her attempt at flirting an act, Lucy implies that it does not come naturally to her. Flirting is something that she has had to learn to do from the people around her, and when her attempts at attracting the attention of boys do not work, she ends up feeling embarrassed and alienated. Her friends encourage her by telling her that she does not have to put on a flirtatious act to get boys' attention because they are naturally attracted to her easy-going nature. Lucy, who has grown up with older brothers, seems to find it easy to talk with boys, but she feels that boys are only interested in talking to

her because they want to get to know her friends. She claims that she is like “everyone’s kid sister. One of the lads. They never take me seriously” (*Mates*, 37).

In *Mates*, Lucy and her classmates are tasked with writing an essay on who they are. The assignment sends Lucy on a path of self-discovery as she struggles to figure out who she is, what her goals are, and who she wants to be when she grows up. She constantly compares herself to her friends, who seem to have their lives together, especially when it comes to boys. She lists “lack of kissing experience” and the fact that she has “never had a proper boyfriend” as things that make her feel inferior to her friends who already have some experience with boys (*Mates*, 101). As van Roosmalen (2000, 208) notes, girls are afraid that other girls will judge them if they reveal their inexperience. Accordingly, Lucy feels ashamed to admit to Nesta that she has never kissed a boy, immediately bringing up that she just has not met anyone interesting enough yet. Her excuse is a valid one, but it shows that she feels that she has to have an acceptable reason for her inexperience. One day, however, Lucy sees her dream boy through a car window: “It had happened. At last. Love at first sight. [...] I felt elated. I had a goal. Meet that boy” (*Mates*, 45). Deciding to pursue this mystery boy gives her a sense of purpose – something she can work for. When she eventually runs into the boy, who turns out to be Nesta’s older brother, she is disappointed to find that he is already dating someone. Tony thinks Lucy is sweet, and when Nesta delivers the message to Lucy she retorts frustratedly: “I don’t want to be sweet. I want to be a Babe. A Boy Magnet” (*Mates*, 62). She once again feels like the kid sister, who no one pays any mind to.

The desire for the admiration of boys is a running theme in both of the novels. Karlyn (2011, 35) states that “postfeminism places a high premium on sex and romance as an aspect of identity formation”. They argue that popular works of fiction, such as *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, “treat a young woman’s coming of age primarily in terms of finding the right mate,” and note that they always have a happy ending (*ibid.*). Lucy’s ponderings about her identity come, then, as no surprise: “What makes me ‘me’? What are my interests? Nesta’s brother, Tony. What do I want? To snog Tony. What are my goals in life? To snog Tony” (*Mates*, 81–82). However, when all your life has been leading up to becoming someone’s girlfriend, the end results might be disappointing. This becomes apparent to Georgia, who accidentally ends up in a relationship: “So it looks like I have sort of got a boyfriend. Why do I feel so depressed then?” (*Angus*, 87). Georgia bases her happiness on having a boyfriend, which ends up backfiring on her when she finds herself to be less satisfied with one. In *Mates*, the happy

ending comes in the form of self-realisation when Lucy is able to finish writing her essay: “[N]ow, boys look at me as well. And not just the nerdy ones that no one else wants. Some quite cute ones have given me the eye” (*Mates*, 132). Following postfeminist ideation, she feels that the male gaze has completed her.

As the name suggests, *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging* is a humorous novel. Georgia’s laugh-out-loud quips and wild escapades are what make the novel so enjoyable and relatable to the reader. For Georgia, there is nothing worse than ending up alone. She would rather become a lesbian than end up without a partner. That is why, throughout the novel, Georgia and her friends end up carrying out some absurd plans to gain attention from boys. For example, Lucy and Georgia both engage in some “boy-stalking”, in which the goal is to not-so-accidentally run into their crush in order to have a chance to talk to them. When girls realise that they are not able to attract their desired boys with their own looks, one solution can be to change something about oneself.

Blonde hair is something that Georgia strives to have in *Angus*. She talks about wanting to dye her hair throughout the whole novel, but her parents will not allow her to do so. It has been discovered that gentlemen do, in fact, prefer blondes, and according to women’s own experiences with hair colour change, going blonde can cause men to pay more attention to oneself (Synnott 1987, 386–387). Georgia mentions wanting to look like Brigitte Bardot, who is famous for her bright blonde hair. Most girls are also familiar with the hyper-feminine Barbie doll, whose blonde hair has become a trademark of sorts. These images of femininity are then instilled in girls’ minds from a very early age. Georgia wants to appear more mature to her crush Robbie, who has mentioned being too old for Georgia. She ends up finding some peroxide and bleaches a streak into her hair. The hair ends up falling out when Georgia tries to woo Robbie by flicking her hair and running her hands through it. This can be seen as Georgia’s failed attempt at ideal femininity. When the option to change oneself is not there, they settle for deception: “Well, the boy behind the counter in the hire shop was really good-looking [...], so I lied about my size – I got a size ten catsuit instead of twelve” (*Angus*, 11). Georgia’s best friend, Jas, feels that she is not desirable because of her size and attempts to appear smaller by ordering the smaller size.

Robbie is not the only boy in Georgia’s life. As she struggles with her feelings for the “Sex God”, she embarks on a journey of self-discovery. She takes a kissing lesson, which I delve into in the next section, and dates other boys. One of these boys is Mark, whom she initially

meets at Bonfire Night. She later runs into him, and the two start dating for a moment. For the first time, Georgia feels like she can be herself and does not feel like she has to look a certain way: “It’s funny, he’s one of the only lads I don’t feel like I should rush off and cover myself in make-up for. I don’t even flick my hair so that it covers half my face (and therefore half my nose)” (*Mates*, 109, emphasis in the original). This could be a moment of realisation that she does not have to act or look a certain way to attract boys. It could also be a sign that she feels comfortable enough to be herself around Mark. Instead, her takeaway is as follows: “I suppose the reason I’m not too self-conscious in front of him is that he has a HUGE mouth” (*ibid.*). Georgia, who is self-conscious about her big nose, projects her insecurities onto him. She sees Mark as her equal looks and personality wise. They seem to be in the same ‘league’. It is also clear that Georgia is not quite as attracted to Mark as she is to Robbie. She continues to harbour feelings for Robbie which is revealed when Mark takes her to see The Stiff Dylans perform and Georgia bumps into him: “Robbie caught my eye and he smiled... I’d forgotten what a Sex God he is. He’s all muscly and dark and oohhhhh. I smiled back, a proper smile because I’d forgotten about my nose for the moment” (*Mates*, 128). The difference in the way Georgia speaks about the two boys and their looks is drastic and it highlights how differently she feels about them.

A recurring trope in both of the novels is an age-gap romance. Both the protagonists and the other female characters want or get attention from older boys or sometimes even grown men. When her mother questions Lucy about the age of her love interest Tony, Lucy does not hesitate to tell her his real age. Knowing that he is seventeen, which makes him three years older than Lucy, does not make her mum reconsider giving her advice and support to Lucy in pursuing the relationship. Her only response is: “Well, if he’s got any sense at all, he’ll like you too” (*Mates*, 75). It is unclear why her mother asks about his age in the first place, as neither the previous conversation, nor her reply, have nothing to do with their age gap. Bringing up Tony’s age in the scene only draws attention to the age difference the two have, without actually recognising the inappropriate nature of it. The scene highlights how little her mother, the authority figure, cares about the age difference, which ultimately gives the younger reader the impression that this type of age gap is normal and desirable.

In both of the novels, the love interests recognise the age gap as an inappropriate one to a certain extent. In *Mates* (133), when Tony finally makes a clear advance on Lucy, remembering Nesta’s warning, she tells him that she will have to think about starting anything

with him. To this Tony replies: “You’re probably too young for me anyway” (*Mates*, 133). He says this with a smile on his face which implies that he is mostly saying it to soften the blow. Similarly, in *Angus* (225–226), when Robbie is admitting his feelings to Georgia, he says: “I am attracted to you [...] but I can’t go out with you. [...] Because you are too young. I’m nearly eighteen – it would not be right, it would be like cradle-snatching”. Here the recognition is stronger, and the language reflects that. However, the age gap is quickly forgotten about as only a few days later Robbie meets Georgia to tell her that he is ready for a relationship with her. Teenagers who have an older partner tend to have sex earlier than those with younger partners (Carella et al. 2020, 1). Additionally, Oudekerk et al. (2014, 1245) found that “the wider the age gap between adolescents and their romantic partners, the more likely the adolescents were to experience physical, emotional, and sexual victimization by their partners over the course of the relationship”. There are, then, many risk factors when it comes to age gap relationships which the novels do not consider. The age gap becomes an issue for the boys when they realise the female characters are not ready to engage in all their desired sexual activities. To Georgia’s apparent relief Mark dumps her by saying: “I think you are too young for me. I’m going back out with Ella because she lets me do things to her” (*Angus*, 136). There is an implication that sex holds power and that girls who are not willing to use it end up losing in the dating world.

There are also some mentions of older men preying on the other female characters. Lucy mentions that their school does not require them to wear uniforms. However, sometimes Nesta decides to wear her own version of it. She describes Nesta walking down the street to meet her: “She’d hitched her skirt up and her legs looked fantastic. Cars were almost driving into lampposts as male drivers did double-takes” (*Mates*, 57). By the way that Lucy describes the situation, it is clear that she sees the reactions as desirable and there is even a sense of envy when she calls her “[e]very schoolboy’s fantasy babe” (*ibid.*). The school-girl outfit, which has become extremely sexualised, is, here, described as provocative. The drivers, who are, in fact, not underaged schoolboys, but adult men, are reacting to someone who is clearly a teenager. The attention the female characters get from older boys and men can give them a sense of power. By dressing, looking and acting a certain way they can gain favours from men. Karlyn (2011, 33) claims that “there are legitimate reasons to fear that sexual freedom has become reduced to one more way of exploiting girls”. Although it is here hidden under the guise of Girl Power, one of these is the exploitation of girls by much older men. For example, in *Angus* (72) Georgia’s school friend Jackie can gain access to the local night club

by hanging out with the men who work there: “I’ve got a date with the DJ at Loveculture – he’s so cool. I think he’s about thirty but I like mature men” (*Angus*, 72). Later someone from their school mentions: “You know that DJ she was raving about? Well he got drunk with his mates, came to meet Jackie and thought it would be very funny to give her a lovebite on the end of her nose” (*Angus*, 178). This sort of “branding” deters other possible younger boyfriend candidates away from her. It is just one of the ways that men attempt to hold power over young women’s sexuality which I discuss next in more detail.

4.2 Female Sexuality

When compared to its American counterpart, Meg Gabot’s “The Princess Diaries” (12 volumes since 2000), Rennison’s series stands out with its brash Britishness. Baker (2004, 685–686) notes how differently the two series handle the teenage girl’s sexuality: “Rennison has no need for transference: she’s not prudish, and she doesn’t worry about skittish American readers balking at her robust wordplay on sexual matters”. Georgia’s casual and humorous way of talking about her sexual urges and eventual encounters offer the young reader a safe and approachable platform for exploring their own sexualities. As is common with the chick lit genre, Georgia’s diaries show the reader the trials and errors that come with sexual exploration and help them avoid her mistakes. As Barker (2004, 686) summarises: “While Georgia’s constant sexual preoccupations are egocentric and shallow, they are part of the way Rennison portrays the vibrant solidarity of Georgia and her friends, all growing up with female bodies that are changing shape and provoking ‘strange urges’”. As an example, Georgia mentions “becoming sexually active” as she describes her steamy dream involving two famous actors (*Angus*, 176). Rather than feeling embarrassed, she is excited about the dream. Georgia’s unabashed sexuality gives comfort to the young female reader who might feel ashamed about her own urges. Meanwhile, In *Mates*, Lucy’s inexperience assures the reader that it is acceptable to take your time with things.

Out of the two main characters, Georgia is more outspoken about her sexual urges and fantasies. She does not shy away from writing about them in her diaries or discussing them with her friends. As Barker (2004, 685) notes: “Any sexual encounter, however trivial, Georgia and her friends discuss at length, just as they do the vague farewell greeting “see you later” if it is offered by a prospective boyfriend”. Similarly, in *Mates*, the girls discuss their interactions with boys together and offer each other advice. When Nesta is approached by a boy, she wonders out loud: “He did smile at me and say I’ll see you around. What do you

think he meant?”, to which Izzie replies: “See you around, like join the list of girls I’ve already got gagging for me. [...] Best play hard to get with someone like him” (*Mates*, 35–36). By giving her advice, she is trying to prevent Nesta from getting her feelings hurt. When Georgia hears from her friend Jas that another girl from school has already had sex, she gets the urge to gain some experience of her own. She decides to lay her numb arm on her chest as a way of experiencing having someone else’s hands on her body. She recounts the experience in her diary: “It was quite nice, but what do I know? I’m too full of strange urges to think properly” (*Angus*, 73). Her friends encourage her to take up kissing lessons from a local boy who is known for offering his ‘services’ to local girls. Georgia feels embarrassed about going but she claims to be desperate. After the lesson, she feels elated as the boy has called her “a natural” (*Angus*, 82). With some help and guidance from her friends, Georgia is more able to understand these “strange urges”. The importance of friends is, then, highlighted when it comes to exploring one's sexuality.

In both of the novels, there is an assumption that the boys are always more experienced than the girls when it comes to their sexualities. When trying to practise kissing on her hand Georgia wonders: “Do boys have this trouble or do they just know how to do stuff?” (*Angus*, 73). As mentioned, Georgia goes out with boys who are older than her and consequently have more experience. When she is going out with Mark, she is caught off guard by his sexual advances: “When I got near him he grabbed me and gave me a kiss right on the mouth, no messing about. I was surprised and also a bit worried... maybe the hand would sneak up to the breast for a bit of a rest... but no” (*Angus*, 127). Here she is referring to another occasion when Mark touched her chest. Georgia is clearly not comfortable with the pace in which Mark is moving. As mentioned before, this becomes an issue for Mark who ends up breaking up with Georgia. In *Mates*, Lucy is also interested in a boy who is much older and more experienced than her. When Tony hears that Lucy has never been kissed, he is quick to offer her one. The moment is ruined when Lucy finds out that Tony has a girlfriend. She realises that the moment, which was so special to her, was just one of many for him.

Despite their personal sex positiveness, the female characters exhibit some misogynistic ideas about other girls who are openly sexual. The main characters themselves participate in slutshaming, an act which aims to shame and humiliate women who engage or are perceived to be engaging in sexual activities. As Mercier (2025, 879) summarises, “slutshaming is a common form of sexism young women are confronted with and affects their sexual

autonomy, body image, and self-esteem; it also reinforces an unequal gender hierarchy in which cisgender, heterosexual men enjoy greater sexual freedom". Slutshaming is just one of the ways in which girls and women are controlled. This control is "exerted through the looks cast upon young women: the gaze of men who seek to put them in their place, that is, as objects of sexual desire, but also the gaze of others who consider them suggestive or not respectable precisely because they stimulate male desire" (Mercier 2025, 878) Lucy and Georgia do not explicitly state their opinions but the reader is able to hear them which can ultimately affect their own views on the matter. When a classmate of Lucy's jokes about wanting to be a lifeguard so that she can kiss all the boys, Lucy thinks to herself: "She's such a tart, Candice Carter" (*Mates*, 9). Similarly, in *Angus* (82), Georgia writes in her diary: "Jackie Mathews has got a huge lovebite on her neck. [...] I think it is so common. Why would you let someone bite you?" At this point, Georgia has not had any sexual encounters that the reader knows of, which might make her more judgmental of others who are already engaging in them. Later, when Georgia is getting some neck action of her own, she gets caught by Robbie who annoyedly says: "Don't you think it's about time you two went inside to the party?" Robbie's comment appears to the reader as a way of making Georgia feel ashamed of her sexual freedom. Reading the subtext, it becomes clear that Robbie is interested in Georgia, which is why he is disappointed to find her engaged with another boy. Nevertheless, his reaction makes Georgia feel ashamed and ultimately angry: "What business it is of his what I do behind trees?" (*Angus*, 86). Georgia's question echoes the contradictory nature of slutshaming.

The teen chick lit novel's informative function is very clearly employed in *Mates*. Lucy's teacher tasks them with caring for a raw egg for a week, which symbolises the responsibility that comes with parenthood. The task is supposed to deter them from having casual sex as their teacher states: "Everyone always says it won't happen to me but it only takes one time" (*Mates*, 90). Their teacher mentions that they have already had a class on sexual education, but she reminds them that the students can talk to her or their parents if they have any questions about it. Lucy is surprised that she is bringing this up to them and wonders if her teacher thinks that they are all "sex mad". This shows how little Lucy knows of the sexual lives of her peers. Their teacher emphasises the importance of using contraceptives, which prompts a discussion about safe sex among Lucy and her friends. Nesta claims to know all about it, but when Lucy asks her about oral contraception, she cannot offer her a real answer. Instead, she quips: "Talking your way out of it", to which Izzie replies: "You only have to say

one word [...]. No” (*Mates*, 92). Nesta and Izzie’s different outlooks on the matter are on display here. Nesta seems to feel that she, or girls in general, have to tactically talk their way out of having sex, whereas Izzie understands that a simple ‘no’ should be enough. Nesta has internalised the misogynistic idea that girls owe boys sex and that if they are not up to it, they have to have a good reason for it. When Izzie eventually ends up breaking her egg, Lucy realises that they are not yet ready for such a big commitment and makes a mental note of asking her mother for more information about different contraceptives.

Finally, I focus on the way gender and sexual minorities are handled in *Angus*. The subject of queer people might initially seem unnecessary to cover, as none of the main or secondary characters are queer. It is, however, appropriate to mention how queer people, especially queer women, are portrayed as it gives an insight into the kind of girlhood the novels represent – straight, white and middle class. The topic of same sex love is not discussed in *Mates* but it comes up very frequently in *Angus*. The main character Georgia often mentions being scared of being or becoming a lesbian: “Oh God, please, please don’t make me have to be a lesbian like Hairy Kate or Miss Stamp” (*Angus*, 17). She often portrays lesbianism as a choice that she might have to make if she is not able to find a boyfriend. The aforementioned Miss Stamp is a PE teacher at Georgia’s. Georgia, as well as her peers, believes that she is a lesbian and often refers to her as a pervert. When she walks into a room where Georgia is doing yoga, Georgia reminisces in her diary: “Well, I was upside down with my bottom sticking up in the air. Not something you want to do in front of a lesbian” (*Angus*, 150). Georgia is stereotyping gay women as people who are interested in every single woman, or in this instance, girls, they lay their eyes upon.

Georgia believes that if someone deviates from her understanding of a woman, they must be inherently different to begin with. Additionally, Georgia often mentions her having facial hair: “She really has got a moustache. Does she not notice?” (*Angus*, 92). The novel, thus, falls into the stereotype of the masculine lesbian (Savage 2004, 30). It is implied that queer women are not women in the same way as straight, cis gendered women are. This is underlined even further when Georgia thinks his father is “a transvestite” when she finds his Masonic apron and writes in her diary: “At least I’m a real woman” (*Angus*, 27). It is, of course, probable that girls who belong to gender and sexuality minorities experience girlhood differently, but just because their girlhood is not as closely linked to men as the novels’ characters, does not mean that they are not experiencing a form of it. The portrayal of queer

people in the novel is ultimately harmful and the narrative fails to portray girlhood as multi-faceted.

5 Platonic Relationships

Apart from the outside influences such as school and media, what, perhaps, has the strongest importance for the shaping of girls and girlhood are the close platonic relationships. These include friends and families. I begin this chapter by analysing and discussing how close female relationships shape the main characters' experience of girlhood in positive and negative ways. Then, in section 5.2, I analyse how families shape girlhood by looking at mother–daughter relationships, father involvement and the girls-as-homemakers stereotype.

5.1 Female Relationships

Friendship is a driving force for a lot of the actions in both of the novels. In the book *Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection among Girls* (2006), Brown discusses how and why girls fight with each other. I use Brown's book as a basis for many of my arguments later on in this chapter when I discuss girlfighting. However, Brown starts the book by highlighting the importance of friendship among girls. According to Brown (2006, 4), "girls depend on close, intimate friendships to get them through life. The trust and support of these relationships provide girls with emotional and psychological safety nets". The close female friendships encourage and allow them to do things they could not otherwise (ibid.). In this section I start first by looking into platonic female relationships in subsection 5.1.1. I look at how the main characters' experience of girlhood is shaped by their close female friendships. In subsection 5.1.2, I look at how women are often pitted against each other by, for example, analysing the 'mean girl' archetype and jealousy between women. Finally, in subsection 5.1.3, I consider how these friendships are maintained through constant communication.

5.1.1 Strong Sisterhood

The importance of female friendship is highlighted throughout both novels. Georgia and Lucy's friends are there for them through good and bad times. Harter (2012, 100) notes that during mid-adolescence (ages 14–16) teenagers often feel differently about themselves when they are with their peers compared to when they are with their parents. If they, for example, feel happy among their friends and depressed at home, they will opt to spend more time with their friends. Unlike postfeminism, which celebrated individuality and "posited sisterhood as weak", the two novels are built on strong female friendships (Siegel 2007, 124) Both *Angus* and *Mates* include a tight-knit group of friends that the main characters are part of. The

“Mates, Dates” series starts with Lucy having just her best friend Izzie, but the two are joined by Nesta and, later in the series, TJ. Both additions bring value to both Lucy and Izzie’s lives. Georgia, in *Angus*, has a group of friends that are a prominent part of the whole series.

School is a setting for many of the moments where the main characters interact with their friends. Lucy, Georgia, and their friends all attend secondary school, and they are at the age where they have to start focusing their attention on their future. This gives Lucy anxiety as I have discussed. Georgia is the complete opposite to Lucy. She, along with her friends, are not bothered about school. Their reason for going to school, which they have nicknamed Stalag 14 after German nazi camps, is the possibility of running into the boys from the neighbouring school. On the first day of school Georgia writes in her diary: “I’d forgotten how utterly crap school is” (*Angus*, 59). She thinks their head teacher is leading a “fascist regime” with all the rules such as the strict dress code (*ibid.*). Although common in most British grade schools, the dress code in Georgia’s school can be seen as sexist. The girls’ insistence to break the dress code by wearing makeup and remodelling their uniforms can be seen as a way of asserting power by breaking that mould. That is, if the most apparent reason behind it was not the audience of boys. Because Georgia attends an all-girl school, she does not face the day-to-day sexism that often takes place in school. Meanwhile, Lucy who attends a mixed school, as argued by Pomerantz et al. (2013, 185), might not be able to recognise the sexism that she and her friends might face in schools. This can have an effect on how well she is able to recognise the fact that she lives in a society that is still ruled by the patriarchy.

Georgia and her friends often get into trouble when they break the rules or cause other kinds of havoc. In the first novel alone, they manage to ruin the school photos, spread rumours about their teachers, and cause a ban on levitating during school hours to name a few examples. It is clear that she and her friends are known for acting out of order: “What a nightmare! Jas, Ellen, Jools and I are NOT ALLOWED to sit together at the back” (*Angus*, 59, emphasis in the original). Georgia is vocal about her disinterest towards school. In her diary she writes: “The main difficulty is that [the head teacher] imagines we are at school to learn stuff and we know we are at school to fill in the idle hours before we go home and hang around with our mates doing important things. Life skills, like make-up and playing records and trapping boys” (*Angus*, 95). I argue that, because of the single-sex environment, the girls are more inclined to behave badly. They are not being perceived by boys, which is why they can be their authentic selves, which, in this case, includes having fun with your friends

through the participation in mischievous activities. In a research by Pomerantz et al. (2013, 197) girls reported that boys who misbehave are often the ones receiving positive attention from both male and female teachers. When Georgia and her friends are disobedient, they are always punished, and their behaviour is constantly monitored. There is a clear double standard in schools according to which “girls are expected to try hard, do well, and follow rules, while boys are expected to flounder” (Pomerantz et al. 2013, 196). On one hand, the female characters have managed to break this stereotype, but on the other hand, it might be too early to celebrate as their indifference and the consequent underperformance might limit their future aspirations.

For both main characters there is one friend who stands out as their best friend. The one they are most likely to confide in and feel most connected to. For Lucy, this is Izzie: “Izzie’s my best mate. Or was. I’m not sure anymore. Not since Nesta Williams arrived at the end of last term. Izzie and I have hung out together since junior school. It’s always been me and Izzie. Izzie and me. Sharing everything. Clothes. Make-up. CDs. Secrets” (*Mates*, 6). Lucy has a difficult time coming to terms with the fact that her intimate relationship with Izzie has been disrupted by Nesta: “Since Nesta came, it’s like her and Izzie are friends and I’m the odd one out” (*Mates*, 75). Adolescence is a time when teenagers try to understand who they are and who they want to be. They are encouraged to partake in this self-exploration as is the case with Lucy and her school assignment. It is, then, no wonder that they feel the need to become individuals rather than a part of a mass of other teenagers. Sometimes this desire for individuality comes with a pressure to take a step back from intimate friendships, such as the one with a best friend (Brown 2003, 143). As Brown notes: “The affirmation that comes from sharing secrets and being validated threatens the wish to be, and to be seen as, independent and self-sufficient. Rather than work this out [...] separation seems the only avenue out of confusion and dependence” (*ibid.*). For Lucy, this separation is mostly involuntary unlike for Georgia who actively creates friction in her relationship with Jas.

Georgia calls Jas her best friend and they clearly have the most contact with each other in *Angus*. However, their friendship is not the most loving kind, and Georgia frequently expresses her annoyance toward Jas in her diary: “She really is a dim friend. It’s more like having a dog than a friend, actually” (*Angus*, 28). In the later section, I go into more detail about girlfighting between best friends. Here, I want to draw attention to the intimate nature of friendship among girls and how it simultaneously empowers them but also tears them

apart. In the article “Airheads”, Baker analyses chick lit novels’ representations of girlhood. They discuss the implications that puberty and the consequential sexual exploration has on female friendships:

While Georgia’s constant sexual preoccupations are egocentric and shallow, they are part of the way Rennison portrays the vibrant solidarity of Georgia and her friends, all growing up with female bodies that are changing shape and provoking ‘strange urges.’ Georgia and her friends are physically close [...] But this physical proximity brings its own anxiety: repeatedly, Georgia worries about lesbians, lesbianism, and her own sexuality (Baker 2004, 686).

This anxiety over lesbianism is widely recognised: “The label of ‘lesbian’, of course, has long been used to control women who seem to care too much for other women” (Karlyn 2011, 89). When discussing the use of insults in the teen movie *Mean Girls*, many of them “such as ‘slut,’ ‘skank,’ and ‘ho’ labels are liberally used,” yet “none are as devastating as being called a ‘lesbian’” (Kelly and Pomerantz 2009, 5). The term is used as a weapon which gains its power from the fact that girls use it against each other (Brown 2003, 142). When girls start using the term in a hateful way, they risk losing the intimacy which makes close female friendships so special. As Hay (in Brown 2003, 142) states, “the power of the word ‘lesbian’ to control girls is secured precisely because girls do experience their relations with each other as passionate”. This becomes apparent when Georgia looks for comfort in her best friend: “I held my breath and Jas’s hand. She whispered, ‘Get off, you lezzer’” (*Angus*, 188). I argue that the anxiety around lesbians and lesbianism arises from the heteronormative society which rewards women who cater to men. Mentally and physically intimate relationships among women do not serve the needs of the patriarchy and thus they must be policed – if not by men, then the girls themselves.

5.1.2 Girlfighting

The postfeminist aspects of teen chick lit novels are made clear through their avid portrayal of competition between girls, or “girlfighting” as Brown calls it and as I do subsequently. “Girls fight for a reason; they choose their battles and they choose their means of fighting for a reason,” states Brown (2003, 9). They claim that competition between girls rises either from their “desire to meet unattainable feminine ideals—to get a boy, to be loved—or their resistance to such ideals and their denigration of femininity—to be one of the guys, to be taken seriously” (ibid.). The former is definitely more apparent in the two novels, although

Georgia does exhibit some “tomboy-ish” qualities. Brown (2003, 5) goes further into detail about the repercussions of girls turning against each other:

[G]irls can be excruciatingly tough on other girls. They can talk behind each others’ backs, tease and torture one another, police each others’ clothing and body size, and fight over real or imagined relationships with boys. They can promote a strict conformity to the norms and rules of idealized femininity, threaten rejection and exclusion, and reinforce gender and racial stereotypes. In so doing they not only hurt other girls and get hurt, but in their search for power and visibility, they also unwittingly participate in and maintain our society’s largely negative views of girls’ and women’s relationships as untrustworthy, deceitful, and manipulative.

Many of the aforementioned forms of girlfighting are depicted in the novels. Jealousy is often the reason behind these quarrels.

Girlfighting is very apparent in mainstream media. One film that focuses on depicting girlfighting is the 2004 movie *Mean Girls*, which follows Cady Heron who tries to take down the school’s mean girl but ultimately ends up becoming the bully. The “mean girl” archetype is represented in the movie’s main antagonist Regina George who preys on other people to gain popularity. The movie has since become a cult classic and iconic for its representation of girlfighting and mean girls. Brown (2003, 19) comments on this phenomenon:

The problem is that the girlfighting girls see in the media is often enacted in their female relationships and is usually about containment of other girls rather than about testing physical limits. It’s likely to be motivated by desire for heterosexual romance, envy for male attention, or beauty competitions.

In the movie, girlfighting is closely linked to the aforementioned motivations. Similarly, in *Mates* there is a clear representative of this mean girl character called Josie Riley. According to Lucy, she is “a snotty Barbie lookalike from Year Eleven and well-known as a bully in our school, always picking on younger or smaller kids like me” (*Mates*, 34). In *Angus*, the mean girl is Lindsay, Robbie’s girlfriend. Notable is the fact that in all of my mentions, the mean girl is blonde, thin, tall, and attractive. They are a sort of embodiment of the perfect girl. I argue that the reason behind this is the fact that the patriarchal society wants women to hate each other because it makes them weaker as a group. It is easier to hate someone who embodies all the things that women and girls wish to have or be. Cady, Lucy, and Georgia all compare themselves to these mean girls, but even though they hate them, they also wish to become like them.

Georgia can often be quite flippant and sometimes she struggles to keep her mean thoughts to herself. She most often fights with her best friend Jas. It is not too surprising, as she is probably the most comfortable around her and not as hesitant to hide her bad side from her. Because of their intimacy, it is difficult for Georgia not to be jealous of her. As Brown (2003, 14) states, “[i]ntimacy is central to girls’ friendships and girls rely heavily on their best friends for love and support”. When they feel that they are not being supported by their best friend, they can turn cold. When Jas agrees to go for a coffee with Georgia’s crush Robbie, Georgia decides to give her the silent treatment: “Still not speaking to Jas, but things have gone horribly wrong in that she is not speaking to me either. I don’t know how this has happened as I was supposed to be in charge” (*Angus*, 165). Georgia uses passive-aggressive behaviour to hold power over her best friend and to control her behaviour. She does this to diminish her own feelings of powerlessness. Many of Georgia’s nasty thoughts of her best friend are initiated by her own internal competition for boys: “What the hell did she know about boys? God, she had an annoying fringe. Shut up, fringeey” (*Angus*, 15). Georgia refuses to accept the fact that her best friend has joined the dating world before her and mocks her attempts at attracting a love interest: “Oh yeah, so that’s what they want, is it? Boys? They want simpering girly-wirlys in catsuits?” (*Angus*, 7). Through media, Georgia and other girls have learned that in order gain their own happy ending they must sacrifice their close female friendships (Brown 2003, 21).

Girls can also create imagined threats for themselves. They have been taught to be wary of each other, so they are eager to imagine the worst of other girls. As Tamara, a teenage girl who Brown (2006, 30) interviewed for their book, states that “when a girl meets a girl for the first time, they automatically hate each other until they learn to like each other”. This happens in *Mates*, where Lucy is quick to judge Nesta who has recently joined her friend group. She expresses her dislike for Nesta multiple times throughout the novel. When Izzie mentions that Nesta has a desire to donate money when she eventually becomes rich, Lucy makes a snide comment: “What, Nesta? I wouldn’t have thought she ever thought about anybody but herself” (*Mates*, 49). In her mind, she has created an image of Nesta that is not accurate and she is hesitant to let go of it and see her for who she actually is. Later, she has to acknowledge that Nesta is not the ditsy bombshell that she has created in her mind: “I didn’t want to admit that Nesta’s idea was pretty smart. Nesta. Nesta. Nesta” (*ibid.*). Lucy’s hatred of Nesta is rooted in her fear of losing her best friend to Nesta, who she sees as her competitor.

The main characters Georgia and Lucy are not the only characters that are trying to explore their sexualities and gain experiences in the dating world. Their friends are going through the same phase of self-discovery and are also looking to meet and get with boys. As van Roosmalen (2000, 211) argues, finding a boyfriend is not only shadowed by the pressure to gain romantic and sexual experiences, but also by the competition that arises with one's friends. Lucy feels inferior to her more experienced friends. She thinks that her youthful looks coupled with that inexperience are the reason why her friends do not invite her to places where they are looking to meet boys. The competition for Izzie is not the only reason Lucy resents Nesta. She sees her as a threat to her chances of finding love. When Lucy formulates a plan to find her mystery boy, she is happy to find out that Nesta will not be able to join her and Izzie on the "hunt": "I have to say, I was relieved. Not wanting to be mean or anything, but she's what Lal calls a Top Babe and the chances were if He saw her, I wouldn't even get a look-in" (*Mates*, 55). Later, when Lucy finally meets Tony and she is pondering what kind of girls Tony is into, a thought occurs to her: "And oh! Worst of all. What if Izzie fancies Tony? She's bound to. He's so cute. Irresistible. Magnifique" (*Mates*, 61, emphasis as in the original). Her insecurities make her think that Tony would automatically choose Izzie over her.

Ultimately, girlfighting acts as a way for women to retain their place in the patriarchal society. Subjecting other girls to their anger is a learned way of dealing with the injustices that come with being a woman. Girlfighting gives the ones engaging in it a leg-up over those who choose to disengage from it. Whereas in the past, the girlfighter used to be a sort of outsider or "a tomboy", now, 'the new girlfighter' "places a desire for power and visibility firmly within the cultural definition of femininity" (Brown 2003, 15). As Brown (2003, 6) states: "Part of being an acceptable girl in a culture so deeply infused with white middle-class values, is to be, or at least appear to be, 'nice'". Girls who want to conform to this ideal, then, tend to hide their "bad" sides (*ibid.*). For instance, Georgia uses her diary to let out all her nastiest thoughts about the people closest to her, although she does not shy away from occasionally expressing her thoughts either. Lucy better fits the "nice girl" type. She only reveals her innermost thoughts when she comes to her breaking point after suffering multiple mistreatments by her friends. The two novels, then, differ on how explicitly they showcase girlfighting.

5.1.3 Keeping Contact

The two novels were written and take place before the major technological advancements of the late 2000s and the early 2010s. The characters keep contact with their friends through emails and telephone calls instead of social media and text messages. In *Angus*, Georgia uses the landline to talk to her friend often multiple times a day. She and her friends get frequently told off by their parents for hogging the landlines which, at the time, were used by the whole family. When Georgia's father leaves for New Zealand, she writes in her diary: "It's quite relaxing not having Dad around. No one bellowing, 'Get off that bloody phone!'" (*Angus*, 180). This imagery of an adolescent, middle class, white girl who is constantly on the phone to her girl friends or boys is not a modern one. It was popularised in the United States, all the way back in the mid-twentieth century (Kearney 2005, 568). As Kearney (*ibid.*) writes in her article about the trope, the telephone has long acted as a symbol of "social progress and social disruption". Thus, it was, and I argue that it still is, well suited for acting as a symbol of modern girlhood (*ibid.*). According to Kearney (*ibid.*), "the trope of the girl on the phone sensitized the American public to a new form of female subjectivity while at the same time helping to mediate the threat it posed to adult heterosexual patriarchy". Keeping contact through emails and phone calls is clearly a very important part of friendships as is highlighted by the way the two main characters react when there is a lack of it. Lucy gets upset when her friends do not answer her phone calls or emails, and Georgia is annoyed when her friends do not phone her as she dramatically writes in her diary: "Absolutely no phonecalls from anyone. I may as well be dead" (*Angus*, 17). One part of girlhood, then, is being there for your friends, even when you are not physically with them.

How the characters keep contact is obviously interesting to look at when talking about the modern teen chick lit. However, in my thesis I am even more interested in why it is important for girls to keep close contact with each other. One important form of communication among women has long been gossip. It has been a way for women to find out about things that might for example endanger their livelihood. As Brown (2003, 33) states: "If we don't trust each other, we won't talk. And if we don't talk, we won't put two and two together". The characters in the two novels also gossip among each other. They often talk about boys and their experiences with boys. In *Mates*, when Izzie and Nesta finally find out the identity of Lucy's mystery boy, Nesta informs Lucy about Tony's real nature: "But what about your brother? I thought you told him to stay away from me because you didn't like me." 'NoOO.

Only to protect you, Lucy. He thinks he's Casanova. A different girl every week. Once the challenge is over, he dumps them'" (*Mates*, 114, emphasis in the original). Nesta has tried to keep the two apart by trying to distance her brother from Lucy, but ultimately the gossiping is what makes Lucy understand her. She still shows desire to pursue something with Tony, but now, because of Nesta's gossiping, she can protect her heart and approach the situation differently. As Brown (2003, 158) states, gossiping is not simply a pastime activity: "It's been given a bad name and trivialized because it is associated with something threatening—girls and women getting together and talking, knowing things, naming things". Gossip could then be considered as one form of Girl Power.

There is also a darker side to gossiping, as it can be used as a way to put down other girls. It can easily lean on the side of bullying if it is done with malicious intent. As an example, Georgia writes about another group of girls at her school in her diary: "They were smoking and I must say they are common girls. [...] I think they take drugs. Horse tranquillizers, probably" (*Angus*, 60–61). Here, Georgia is making an assumption when she mentions the use of ketamine. It is not based on facts but on things that her and her friends have probably discussed. This kind of gossip about other girl groups acts as a way to make their own friend group tighter and separate their own group from other groups. Georgia and her friends are setting themselves apart from girls that smoke and use drugs. Later in the novel there is a rumour going around that Lindsay has developed anorexia because of her breakup with Robbie. This rumour is used to take down "the mean girl" when she is at her lowest. Gossiping is closely connected to girlfighting as it is just one of the ways girls keep other girls "in check" (Brown 2003, 157–158). Through gossiping, the girls establish 'the dos and don'ts' of girlhood. This sort of gossiping can quickly turn from girl power to internalised misogyny when the intention behind it is to put down other women. Georgia, for example, fantasises about informing her crush Robbie that Lindsay wears bra inserts to give herself a cleavage. In her mind, this would make him break up with her as she does not have the ideal bosom.

Another form of communication common amongst adolescent friend groups is the use of slang. As the teen chick lit aims to imitate current reality, it is common for it to include slang (Johnson 2006, 143). Usually, the slang is currently used amongst real life teenagers, but it can also be made up. For example, in *Angus*, Georgia's diary ends with "Georgia's Glossary", which includes more commonly used British slang words, such as 'tosser' and 'naff', as well

as completely new ones, like ‘nuddy-pants’, that are only used by Georgia and her friends. Georgia manipulates language to “make it more expressive of her feelings and character” (Baker 2004, 687). She does not let the language dictate her experience but rather moulds it to best describe her experience of girlhood. The glossary acts also as a way to help non-British readers understand the slang used in the novel. Additionally, it makes the reader feel as if they are part of Georgia’s friendship circle because they can now understand and speak the same language. Having their own slang acts as a sort of secret code, which the girls use to connect with each other and to separate themselves from other teenagers or their parents.

5.2 Families Shaping Girls

The role of the parent is vital when it comes to raising girls into competent and self-assured individuals. Researchers have discovered that, although the importance of peer approval increases during early adolescence, parental support continues to have a significant role in, for example, the global self-esteem of their child (Harter 2012, 86–87). However, as previously mentioned, teenagers are hesitant to rely on their parents for information and guidance and prefer to seek help elsewhere. During their quest of self-discovery, teenagers tend to distance themselves from their parents by, for example, keeping secrets from them (*ibid.*). In this section, I discuss the role of the parent in the building of the main characters’ self-image and validating their experience of girlhood. First, I discuss how the mothers speak to their daughters in ways that enforce the patriarchal ideals. Then, I consider the role of the father in the shaping of girlhood. Finally, I briefly discuss how the traditional gender roles are exhibited through housework.

5.2.1 Mother’s Daughters

The close bond between mothers and their daughters is on display in both of the novels. This closeness has a lot to do with the fact that they are of the same sex (Wodak and Schultz 1986, 4). The daughter identifies with her mother because she is a woman and mirrors her when she is developing her gender identity as female (*ibid.*). As summarised by Wodak and Schultz (*ibid.*): “In this way social norms of the female role are translated and reproduced, the mother embodying the role with which the daughter identifies primarily and to which she relates emotionally most strongly”. I argue that many of the damaging beauty standards and habits, among other things, are passed to the characters through their mothers. The mothers themselves have grown up in a society where patriarchy had an even stronger impact on

women. For instance, in *Mates*, when Lucy is getting ready to go out with her friends, who she already feels inferior to, she finds her mother's waxing kit. She is reminded of an incident where an Oscar-winning woman was bashed for having armpit hair and fears that she will also look like "a hairy reject" (*Mates*, 32). She wants to look her best in case she meets a boy that night and decides to use the wax. When things get sticky, she needs to get her mother to help. When they are finally able to get the wax out of her armpits, her mother quips: "Welcome to the world of you have to suffer to be beautiful" (*Mates*, 33). Rather than telling Lucy that she does not need to shave or wax to fit in, she goes with the cliché 'beauty is pain' mantra. Lucy's mother is equating hairlessness with beauty which will only instill these sexist values in her daughter's mind. Similarly, Georgia has her own mishap while shaving for the first time. The first shave acts as a rite of passage in a girl's life, the same way as getting their first bra. For many, this includes some trial and error which can be comforting to read about in a novel or a magazine. However, for many young girls, shaving feels like a must. If you do not shave, your peers will laugh at you, as Lucy has noticed.

In *Mates*, Lucy is getting reinforcement from her own mother for the toxic idea that as a woman you have to go to great lengths to be presentable to society. This kind of passing-down of toxic patriarchal ideologies is well summarised by Wodak and Schulz (1986, 3) who write that "the irony that on the one hand it is the patriarchal structure of society which is responsible for women's status, while on the other it is often the mother herself who passes on to her daughter a negative appraisal of the female role". When Lucy mentions wanting to change her hair, her mother is quick to interject: "Oh but not your hair. Your lovely hair!" (*Mates*, 65). This indicates that she views Lucy's long blonde hair as the ideal hair and does not want her to change it because anything different would be less feminine. Mothers tend to view their daughters as extension of the self (Wodak and Schultz 1986, 4) Lucy's mother, who herself has long hair, cannot imagine Lucy cutting her hair off. As Synnott (1987, 384) notes, for centuries, long hair on women has been "both a gender sign and a sex symbol in our society". Lucy is tired of being the cute little sister as she exclaims: "I don't want to be sweet anymore" (*Mates*, 64). Cutting her hair shorter can be seen as a moment of empowerment, a breaking of the sweet-girl mould. Lucy, an artist herself, similarly to Frida Kahlo in her "Self Portrait with Cropped Hair" as analysed by Yaari (2018, "Hair Rites and Wrongs), can be seen as using the hair cut as a "exploration not only of her own identity, but of the cultural fabrication of womanhood". However, when her hairstylist accidentally cuts her hair too short, Lucy starts to panic: "She'd totally ruined my hair. [...] I looked younger than ever.

Nine. Eight. A baby” (Mates, 106). After her haircut she wishes she had long hair like the girls she keeps seeing around her: “How could I have been so stupid? Thinking that if I chopped my hair off suddenly I’d grow confidence. Look amazing” (Mates, 107). The incident has made her realise that self-confidence has to be built through self-acceptance.

What Siegel (2007, 126) calls “the greatest irony of postfeminism” is the fact that women who thought they lived in a postpatriarchal society had actually just turned other feminists into an enemy: “Personal oppression became less about suppression under patriarchy and more about suppression under the sisters— meaning, for members of a younger generation, under the mothers”. In the two novels, this is illustrated in the way the mothers sometimes project their own insecurities on their daughters. Georgia writes about her concerns about the size of her nose in her diary: “In a rare moment I shared my nose anxiety with Mum. She said, ‘We used to use ‘shaders’. You know, light highlights and darker bits to create shadow’” (Angus, 49). Georgia is disappointed in her mother’s reply: “Wrong answer, Mum, the correct answer is, ‘You are gorgeous, Georgia, and there is nothing wrong with your nose’” (ibid.). By giving Georgia advice on how to make her nose appear smaller rather than telling her that her nose is fine as it is, she is essentially agreeing with Georgia that her nose could be improved. As Lucy notes in *Mates* (74): “Mums are peculiar species. Sympathetic when you don’t expect it and unsupportive when you do”. When Lucy is complaining about looking too young for Tony to notice her, her mother’s notes: “You’ll see that as a gift one day [...]. Believe me, when you’re thirty or forty you’ll be glad you look younger” (Mates, 135). Her supportive intent does not hide the message that an aging woman is an unattractive woman. Earlier in the novel, Lucy has also pointed to this notion: “I wish I was black. They have the best skin, even when they’re old. Like Nesta’s mum. [...] She’s ancient, at least forty, but she only looks about twenty” (Mates, 11). Her feeling of admiration does not hide the stereotyping of black women.

5.2.2 Daddy’s Little Girl

The involvement of the father in the rearing of the female adolescent main characters is also of interest when it comes to the shaping of girlhood. As noted by Corleis and Lesch (2024, 1), recent research into father–daughter relationships have discovered that “fathers indeed have the potential to empower their daughters and play a role in shaping daughters’ gendered beliefs, specifically when it comes to daughters’ confident engagement with themselves, romantic partners, and vocational and educational opportunities”. They then conclude that

“the father–daughter relationship should be viewed as a powerful site of gender construction that could be harnessed to enhance women’s empowerment” (ibid.). Both Georgia and Lucy complain about their unconventional parents, especially their fathers. Lucy’s father is a long-haired hippie who owns a health shop. Lucy wishes that he would cut his hair to look more like other fathers. Similarly, Georgia compares his father to those of her friends who have got “beards and sheds”: “Instead of DIY he talks about feelings and stuff. Why can’t he be a real dad? It’s pathetic in a grown man” (*Angus*, 22). Considering the humorous nature of the novel, there are definitely some satiric qualities in Georgia’s statement. Whilst it might sound like it is mocking men who openly share their feelings, I interpret it as the author’s attempt at drawing attention and disapproving of the traditional image of the emotionally unavailable working father. By breaking the mould of the traditional man, Georgia’s father creates a home that is devoid of the private patriarchy. This allows Georgia to freely explore her girlhood.

Georgia’s father has been made redundant and because there is so little job availability in England, he decides to go to New Zealand to try out a job opening. In her diary, Georgia mentions some arguments between her parents about his new job. Eventually they make up and there is a stronger sense of connection between the family members to Georgia’s discontent. When they return home from their last date before he leaves, they check up on their sleeping daughters: “horror of horrors DAD RUFFLED MY HAIR. I pretended even harder to be asleep” (*Angus*, 142, emphasis in the original). At first, Georgia talks and acts as if his father’s absence does not bother her. When her mother asks if she misses her his father, her answer is: “Who?” (*Angus*, 151). However, Georgia can clearly feel the absence in her daily life as she has to take on more responsibilities at home. Day and Acock (2004, 253) discovered that “an important consequence of having a father or father figure in the home is the validation of the role performance of the mother”. Georgia writes about her annoyance in her diary: “I was practically an orphan, for instance... and a substitute parent. It was all, ‘Will you babysit Libby?’ since dad had selfishly gone to the other side of the world” (*Angus*, 146). At this point, the blame is put more on the father. Later, however, she compares her mother to her friend’s mother who makes them snacks when Georgia is visiting: “Imagine my mum doing that?... Imagine my mum being in!” (*Angus*, 152). There is clear discontent with the mother’s involvement in the housework and family life after the father has left. Later, it becomes clear that Georgia does actually miss his father. When they talk on the phone, Georgia gets choked up when his father expresses how much he misses her. In her diary, she

quips: “I do wish my dad was here, then I could forget all about him!” (*Angus*, 223). Georgia can finally express her feelings, which is something she perhaps learned from his father.

Hutchinson and Cederbaum (2011, 533) mention that “[a]lthough fathers have often been left out of studies of parent–teen sexual communication and have been found to have lower rates of sexual communication and openness than mothers in other studies, father involvement, relationship quality, and communication have been shown to have crucial benefits for adolescent girls”. They discovered that most older teenage daughters found inadequacies in communication about sexuality and wished there had been more conversations (Hutchinson and Cederbaum 2011, 565). When Lucy makes herself a new going-out top and is proudly showing it to her parents, her father’s first reaction is to forbid her from wearing it out. His first excuse is that it is too cold outside, but when Lucy assures him that she will wear a jacket, he says with a frown: “It’s far too revealing for someone your age,” and later adds: “I don’t want you staying out late looking like that” (*Mates*, 28–29). In contrast, Lucy’s mother starts by giving compliments on Lucy’s handiwork and asks her husband to let her wear it. It is clear from Lucy’s father’s reaction that she is protective of her daughter. I argue that this protectiveness partly comes from the fact that he is aware of how his sex can act around teenage girls. I have previously highlighted some instances of gross behaviour of older boys and men towards the young female characters in the novels. The hesitancy to let his daughter wear a revealing top can also arise from the father’s unwillingness to let her daughter engage in sexual activities with boys. As Appel (2020, 59) puts it, “the father’s symbolic role as his daughter’s sexual gatekeeper” keeps him from engaging with her daughter in meaningful ways. In this case, the father dismisses his chance to encourage and acknowledge his daughter’s talents. In *Angus* (120), Georgia implies that she does not feel comfortable to share her sexual escapades with his father. In her diary she writes: “[Dad], you will never know about the hand on the breast scenario even if hell freezes over”. This is in line with the findings made by Hutchinson and Cederbaum (2011, 565).

5.2.3 Traditional Roles at Home

Postfeminist rejections of the working-woman lifestyle are portrayed in the novels. As mentioned, through the use irony, conservative ideas of retreating from the work force and returning back to traditional roles at home are illustrated in the chick lit novels (Negra in Harzewski 2011, 9). *Mates* and *Angus*, are both teen chick lit novels, so these ideas are perhaps not as central, but through close reading, they can be seen. Georgia sometimes

fantasises about becoming a trophy-wife: “I don’t think he’s very bright but he might turn out to be a brilliant footballer like Beckham and then I could marry him and be kept in luxury” (*Mates*, 125–126). The two competing feminisms are illustrated in Georgia’s statement. On one hand, she recognises that marriage is an option that she can choose for herself, whereas on the other hand, she is rejecting “feminist-inflected working-women career paradigms” (Negra in Harzewski 2011, 9).

In *Angus*, Georgia has a three-year-old little sister called Libby. Libby is a typical toddler. She pees the bed, mis-uses words like “tosser” and causes other kinds of havoc (*Angus*, 140). Still, Georgia often expresses her love for her sister in her diary entries. Because Georgia is much older than her sister and the only older sister to her, she is sometimes tasked with babysitting her. Babysitting is included in one of the common girlhood practices (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2009, v). Women have been placed in the role of mothers and homemakers long throughout time, so it is no wonder that they are expected to perform those duties already as children and teenagers (Forman-Brunell 2019, 333–334). Playing with dolls is also one of the girlhood practices mentioned by Mitchell and Reid (2009, v). Georgia is too old to show interest in dolls, but she seems to love taking care of her toddler-aged sister. When Libby is suffering from the flu, Georgia is eager to look after her. She allows her to sleep in her bed and reads her bedtime stories. She expresses almost motherly affection towards her little sister: “Poor little thing, I really love my little sister” (*Angus*, 42). In *Mates*, Lucy does not have any younger siblings, hence, there is no talk of babysitting in the novel. She has two older brothers, but the reader does not get to find out if they were once tasked with looking after their little sister.

The notion of girls as homemaker clearly still persisted at the turn of the millennium when *Angus* was written. It is a remnant of the private patriarchy that was mostly left behind during the Second Wave. Georgia, herself, is aware of the domestic burdens of women. She writes in her diary: “I wish my mum could be emancipated, a feminist, a working mother etc. And manage to do my ironing” (*Angus*, 37). She equates housework with the domestic mother oppressed by patriarchy and acknowledges that feminist liberation has freed most women from these domestic expectations. She herself struggles with doing housework: “I hate housework. [...] If I marry or, as is more likely, become a high-flying executive lesbian, I am never going to do housework. [...] I have no talent for tidying.” (*Angus*, 31–32). She is expected to participate in cleaning around the house but is very vocal about not wanting to do

it and this causes arguments between Georgia and her parents. In *Mates*, housework is not really mentioned. There is a brief mention of a magazine called *Good Housekeeping* that belongs to her mum which Lucy picks up to read when trying to avoid a conversation with her mum (*Mates*, 76). It can be assumed, then, that Lucy's mum is in charge of the housekeeping in the family. Even though the parents themselves are less conventional, their family life still falls to the traditional patterns.

6 Conclusion

In my thesis, I have looked into two representatives of the teen chick lit genre that give two similar representations of turn-of-the-millennium girlhood. The novels stand against the backdrop of the emerging Third Wave as well as the competing postfeminism. The genre, which toys with irony and humour, aims to show what it means to be a girl in the current society in which patriarchy still rules. In my thesis, I illustrated how the chick lit novels *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging* and *Mates, Dates and Inflatable Bras* represent girlhood through main characters' relationships with themselves and other people.

I demonstrated the main characters' relationship to themselves through the discord around women's bodies. As summarised by Harter (2012, 167):

On their path to womanhood, adolescent girls are treated as commodities to be looked at and evaluated, particularly by boys and men. In internalizing the gaze of others, females also treat themselves as a commodity or object to be viewed and evaluated, a phenomenon that has been labelled as 'self-objectification'.

The female characters feel insecure about the way that they look and participate in different self-enhancement activities to enhance their appearance and consequently feel about themselves. Through media messages, the girls have internalised that they have to be ultra-thin, while also having curves in the right places. The idolising of thinness encourages the female characters to scrutinise their bodies and aim to change them through dieting. With special bras and dreams of plastic surgery, they aim to enhance their breasts.

The female characters have been made to feel that in order to attain a boyfriend – the one thing that defines their value the most – they must be able to fit into these unattainable body standards. The standards for The Body are upheld by the girls themselves and, additionally, their peers. As Harter (2012, 172) argues, peer impact can have a substantial impact on teenage girls' self-esteem. Lucy and Georgia become more aware and ashamed of their supposed flaws when their friends point them out and become fixated on changing those aspects about themselves. One of the ways to change one's appearance is through the use of makeup, which should not be so detectable as to reveal this facade to the onlooker.

Additionally, I have shown how mothers can often be the toughest critics of their daughter and upheld the generational traumas that come with girlhood. In turn, by telling them to hide their bodies, the fathers perpetuate the young girls' feeling of shame. Although, for the most

part, the patriarchy of the time had become more public in nature, some of the traditional roles were still apparent in the novels. Although perhaps emotionally more available than some, Georgia's father spends most of the novel in another country looking for a job. The novels maintain the girls-as-homemakers stereotype in which they have to take up many of the household duties such as taking care of smaller siblings.

Ultimately, what drives the actions of Lucy and Georgia is the need to be desired by the opposite sex. They struggle to separate their sense of self from boys which keeps their self-esteem tied to the way they are perceived by males. What often creates friction in their close female relationships is the competition for boys. Lucy and Georgia resent their friends who get more attention from boys, and they feel shame over their lack of experience. They partake in slutshaming girls who freely express their desire for male attention. The Mean Girl archetype – a thin blonde girl adored by boys – is used in the novels to create an object for their hate through which their insecurities are mirrored. Throughout the novels, they engage in various schemes where the ultimate goal is to attain a boyfriend.

Of the two main characters, Georgia is the one who is more outspoken of her sexual urges. Lucy does have her own desires to partake in activities, such as kissing, but her way of discussing her wants and needs is more subtle. Georgia does not shy away from discussing her sexuality, whether it be sexual dreams or questions of lesbianity. Unlike Lucy who is focused on one boy only, Georgia has time to date three different boys in the course of the first novel. A common factor between all the boys is that they are much older than Georgia, thus they are also more experienced than her. This often puts her in uncomfortable situations which she herself, nor the adults around her, deem as problematic. Female sexuality, in accordance with Girl Power, is deemed as powerful, which can lead to situations where the girls are taken advantage of without their overt realisation.

The novels show how society of the time encourages the girls to turn against each other. If the girls are fighting each other, they fail to see their true enemy: the patriarchy. Ultimately, no matter how much effort it takes to uphold close female friendships, there is immeasurable importance in them for navigating and shaping girlhood. As summarised by Brown (2003, 5): "Girls desperately need the support of their friends to remain emotionally, psychologically, and physically whole in a world that takes them less seriously, values their looks and their bodies above all else, and still requires that they please boys and men to succeed". Together with their close friends, the main characters are able to overcome the many obstacles they

face in the novels. The characters go to great lengths to repair their friendships. When Lucy realises that she has judged Nesta too early, she aims to fix things with both Nesta and Izzie by showing through her actions that she values her friendship. Through strong sisterhood the girls rise above the postfeminist ideology which encourages them to stand apart.

As one of my points of interest was the current patriarchal society's impact on the female characters' experience of girlhood, my thesis holds on to the notion that these teen chick lit novels portray a world in which the Third Wave is still needed. The Girl Power movement, which quickly began to take on postfeminist ideologies, is apparent in the way the characters interact with and within the patriarchal society. They often do not recognise the way that society impacts the way they move through their adolescence. Moreover, because they are told that they are past patriarchy, they lack the tools to work through the everyday sexism they face. What I did not handle thoroughly in my thesis, are the capitalistic values held within Girl Power. As mentioned, the movement quickly began to be used by marketers as a way to exploit young women. Valuable further research can be done on capitalistic themes such as consumerism with regard to the aspects of girlhood explored in my thesis.

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Appendix – Finnish Summary

Pro gradu -tutkielmassani tarkastelen kahta vuosituhaten vaihteessa julkaistua teini chick lit -romaania: Kathy Hopkinsin *Mates, Dates and Inflatable Bras*, (2001; suom. *Freundejä, kündeja ja biletoppeja*, jatkossa *Mates*) ja Louise Rennisonin *Angus, Thongs and Full-Frontal Snogging* (1999; suom. *Kissanpäiviä ja jumalaisia jätkiä*, jatkossa *Angus*). Molemmat romaanit ovat kirjasarjojen ensimmäisiä teoksia ja niissä kuvataan nuorien teinityttöjen Lucyn ja Georgian elämää Englannissa. Kirjasarjojensa ensimmäisissä osissa he viettävät aikaa ystäviensä kanssa, tuskailevat ulkonäkönsä parissa ja haaveilevat poikaystäväistä. Analysoin miten kyseisissä chick lit -kirjoissa, joiden yksi pääpiirteistä on realismihakuisuus, kuvataan tyttöyttä. Tutkin myös, miten patriarkaalinen yhteiskunta vaikuttaa päähenkilöiden käsitykseen ja kokemukseen tyttöydestä. Lisäksi tarkastelen miten ajan kilpailevat feminismit, kolmas aalto ja postfeminismi, sekä siihen liittyvä tyttövoima-liike (engl. Girl Power), esiintyvät romaaneissa ja vaikuttavat hahmojen käsitykseen tyttöydestä, sekä patriarkaatin vaikutuksesta heidän elämässään.

Pohjustan tutkielmaani sijoittamalla teokset niiden julkaisuajankohtaan, vuosituhaten vaihteeseen. 1990-luvun alusta alkaen toisen aallon feminismiin tilalle alkoi nousta nuorten naisten toimesta kolmas aalto, joka pyrki vastaamaan ongelmiin, joita toinen aalto ei ollut onnistunut ratkaisemaan Näihin ongelmiin sisältyi muun muassa keho-, mielenterveys-, sekä vähemmistöihin liittyvät ongelmat. 1990-luvulla feminismi koki myös toisenlaisen murroksen, kun toisen aallon eläneet naiset kokivat, että he eivät saaneet toivomaansa hyötyä työelämään siirtymisestä, kun taas nuoret naiset etäännyivät feminismistä, jonka tarjoamista eduista he kuitenkin nauttivat. Kolmannen aallon rinnalle nousi tästä syystä postfeminismi: aate post-patriarkaalisesta ajasta, jossa henkilökohtainen vastuu korostui.

Postfeminismin leviämistä vauhditti tyttövoima-liike, jonka perustana oli feministinen naisten voimaantumista edistävä naisartistien punkbändiliike Riot Grrrl. Laajemmin tyttövoima levisi kuitenkin vasta kun brittiläinen tyttöbändi Spice Girls alkoi käyttämään termiä tuodakseen esiin ajatuksia vahvasta sisaruudesta ja vahvasta naisten toimijuudesta. Tämän seurauksena tyttövoimasta tuli kuitenkin nopeasti myös kaupallinen keino, jonka avulla tytöille myytiin postfeministisiä aatteita. Postfeministinen retoriikka peitti alleen todellisuuden, jossa tytöt ja naiset edelleen joutuvat edelleen elämään patriarkaatin alla. Tyttövoima-aatteen myymien postfeminististen aatteiden takia analysoimieni romaanien päähenkilöiden on vaikea tunnistaa seksismiä, josta he kärsivät päivittäin.

1990-luvulla suosioon noussut chick lit -genre nostaa keskiöön naiset, jotka yrittävät selvitä työstään ja ihmissuhteistaan yhteiskunnallisen paineen alla. Kuten monet aiemmat naisille suunnatut genret, myös chick lit on jäänyt etenkin akatemiassa vähälle huomiolle vaikka sen kuvaukset naiseudesta, tai teini chick lit -genren tapauksessa tyttöydestä, tarjoavat samaistumisen kokemuksia aikansa naisille ja tytöille. Chick lit on genrenä vahvasti kahden feminismien välissä. Sen humoristiset kuvaukset yhteiskunnan odotuksien kanssa kamppailevista naisista voidaan liittää kolmannen aallon feminismiin. Kuitenkin samaan aikaan ironian avulla se välittää joitain postfeministisiä ajatuksia. Teini chick lit -kirjoissa kuvataan haasteellista itsensä löytämistä ja suhdesolmuja.

Romaaneissa *Angus* ja *Mates* kehoon liittyvät keskustelut ovat vahvasti esillä. Keho on asia jonka tarkasteluun, kommentointiin ja muovaamiseen käytetään paljon aikaa ja energiaa. Nuorille tytöille ja naisille suunnatuissa lehdissä hahmot näkevät kuvia ultra hoikista malleista ja julkisuuden henkilöistä. Nämä, myös monilla muilla media-alustoilla kuvatut naiset, edustavat vain pientä osaa väestöstä, joiden kehot ovat usein epärealistisin tavoin, kuten ankaran laihduttamisen tai plastiikkakirurgian avulla muovattu tiettyyn muottiin sopiviksi. Näillä kuvilla on suuri vaikutus romaanien hahmojen omiin kehokuviin, ja he pyrkivät eri tavoin muokkaamaan kehojaan niin, että ne täyttävät yhteiskunnan odotukset.

Romaaneissa ihannoidaan hoikkaa kehoa, jossa on kuitenkin muotoja ”oikeissa” paikoissa. Hoikkuutta tavoitellaan romaaneissa esimerkiksi erilaisten dieettien avulla. Lucyn ystävä Nesta mainitsee olevansa dieetillä, koska hän haaveilee mallin urasta. Georgialla ja hänen ystäväillään taas on tapana säännöllisesti mitata kehon ympärysmittoja, jotta he tietävät tarvittaessa aloittaa laihduttamisen. Rinnat ja niiden koko puhututtavat myös kirjojen hahmoja. Lucy on huolissaan, koska hänen rintansa eivät ole alkaneet kasvaa vielä. Romanin aikana hän tuskailee usein asiasta, koska hän ajattelee, etteivät pojat ole kiinnostuneet hänestä tästä syystä. Hän ajattelee, että pojat näkevät hänet lapsena, koska hänellä ei ole isompia rintoja. Vaihtoehtoina tilanteen korjaamiseksi hänelle tarjotaan vaihtoehtoina plastiikkakirurgia ja täytettäviä rintaliivejä. Myös *Angus*-kirjassa rintaliivien käytön aloittaminen kuvataan eräänlaisena siirtymäriittinä työstä naiseksi.

Muiden katseilla ja mielipiteillä on suuri vaikutus siihen miten hahmo kokevat omat kehonsa. Nuoruudessa ystävien ja muiden samanikäisten ihmisten mielipiteiden merkitys kasvaa, kun puhutaan omakuvasta ja itsevarmuudesta. Ystävien kommentit saavat esimerkiksi Georgian tuntumaan itsensä entistä epävarmemmaksi omasta nenästään, jonka hän kokee olevan liian

suuri. Hahmot siis sisäistävät toisten kommentit ja alkavat siksi olemaan ankarampia omia kehojaan kohtaan. He pyrkivät korjaamaan vikojaan esimerkiksi meikillä, jonka tulee kuitenkin olla sen verran luonnollista, että muut eivät sitä huomaa. Kenties suurin romaaneissa kuvattu ulkoinen vaikuttaja tyttöahmojen kehokuviin ja itsevarmuuteen on poikien katse. Suuri syy sille, miksi hahmot kokevat esimerkiksi tarpeelliseksi meikata aina kun he aikovat poistua kotoa on se, että he haluavat saada arvostusta ja hyväksyntää pojilta. He kokevat, että heidän arvonsa on yhteydessä siihen kuinka hyvin he onnistuvat viehättämään poikia.

Kirjojen keskeisimmät juonikuviot liittyvät poikaystävyyden tavoitteluun. Sekä Georgialla ja Lucylla on kirjoissa mielitetty, jonka huomion kohteeksi he pyrkivät päätyttyä. Heidän toimintaansa ajaa halu tulla nähdyiksi, ja sitä kautta saada tärkeäksi koettuja kokemuksia poikien tapailusta. Lucy ja Georgia joutuvat kiusallisiin tilanteisiin, kun he pyrkivät mitä eriskummallisilla tavoin saamaan haluamiensa poikien huomion. Lucy on häpeissään ja kokee huonommuuden tunnetta siitä, ettei hänellä ole yhtä paljon kokemusta pojista kuin hänen ystävänsä. Georgia taas kuulee parhaalta ystävältään Jasilta, etteivät pojat etsi Georgian kaltaista vitsailevaa tyttöä. Ystävilta ja muualta yhteiskunnasta tulevat viestit opettavat tytöille, että heidän tulee pyrkiä miellyttämään poikia. Vasta kun, joku valitsee heidät tyttöystäväkseen, ovat he saavuttaneet tavoitteensa. Kirjoista käy ilmi, että Lucyn ja Georgian käsitys itsestään ja omasta arvostaan ovat postfeministen aatteiden mukaisesti vahvasti yhteydessä siihen, miten pojat heidät näkevät ja määrittelevät. Tyttövoima-aate, joka pyrkii saamaan voimaanuttamaan tyttöjä esimerkiksi seksuaalisen toimijuuden kautta vaikuttavat tyttöjen kykyyn tunnistaa kokemaansa hyväksikäyttöä, koska he uskovat olevansa tilanteissa eräänlaisessa voima-asemassa.

Molemmissa romaaneissa päähenkilöt tapailevat tai ovat kiinnostuneita itseään vanhemmista pojista. Lucy ja Georgia ovat molemmat 14-vuotiaita, kun taas heistä kiinnostuneet pojat ovat lähellä täysi-ikäisyyttä. Tutkimukset osoittavat, että suhteellisesti isot ikäerot parisuhteessa olevien välillä lisäävät tyttöjen todennäköisyyttä joutua erimuotoisten hyväksikäyttöjen kohteeksi. *Angus*-romaanissa Georgia päätyy kahdesti tapailemaan itseään vanhempaa poikaa. Nämä pojat ovat kokeneempia ja odottavat siksi Georgiaa tekemään asioita joihin hän ei ole vielä täysin valmis. Lucyn ja Georgian mielitetty tiedostavat olevansa liian vanhoja tapailakseen heitä, mutta se toimii lähinnä hidasteena heille. Kirjoissa on myös useita mainintoja aikuisista miehistä, jotka hyväksikäyttävät nuoria tyttöjä. Kirjojen tyttöahmot eivät kuitenkaan täysin tiedosta asian ongelmallisuutta, vaan kokevat sen jännittävänä asiana.

Tyttöjen seksuaalisuutta tarkastellaan hyvin avoimesti molemmissa romaaneissa. Georgia ei pelkää peitellä omaa seksuaalisuuttaan, vaan hän kertoo omista haluistaan hyvin vapaasti – ainakin päiväkirjalleen. *Angus*-romaanin alussa hän on vielä melko kokematon poikien suhteen, mutta hän pyrkii kartuttamaan itselleen uusia kokemuksia esimerkiksi menemällä “pussailukouluun”. Lucy haluaa myös saada uusia kokemuksia, mutta hän on hieman ujompi asian suhteen. Silti he välillä päätyvät tuomitsemaan toisia tyttöjä, jotka myös vielä etsivät omaa seksuaalisuuttaan. Heidän seksuaalisuuden tutkimiseen ja löytämiseen vaikuttavat vahvasti patriarkaalisen yhteiskunnan odotukset.

Ystävät ja ystävyys ovat tärkeässä roolissa Lucyn ja Georgian elämässä. Heillä on molemmilla läheinen ryhmä tyttöystäviä, joiden avulla he onnistuvat saavuttamaan asioita, joihin he eivät pystyisi yksin. Ystävien avulla he suunnistavat yhteiskunnassa, jossa heitä ei nähdä yhtä arvokkaina kuin miehiä. Ystävyysuhteita pidetään yllä kirjoissa esimerkiksi erottamalla oma ryhmä toisista juoruilun avulla ja pitämällä tiiviisti yhteyttä oman ystäväporukan kesken. Romaanit juhlistavat sisaruutta (engl. ‘sisterhood’), jonka avulla tytöt pystyvät nousemaan patriarkaalista yhteiskuntaa ja sen tiukkoja arvoja vastaan. Luja siskous on myös yksi romaanien feministisistä arvoista, joka taistelee postfeminististä yksilöllisyyttä vastaan.

Romaaneissa kuvataan kuitenkin myös paljon tyttöjen välistä kateellisuutta ja riitelyä. Lucy on kateellinen Nestasta, joka on hänen mielessään vienyt Lucylta hänen parhaan kaverinsa Izzyn. Hän kokee, että Nesta on kauniimpi ja mielenkiintoisempi kuin Lucy niin Izzyn, kuin poikienkin silmissä. Georgia taas kokee usein kateellisuutta parasta ystävänsä Jasia kohtaan. Tulkitsen, että hänen kateellisuutensa johtuu siitä, että Jas alkaa seurustelemaan ennen häntä. Georgian on vaikea hyväksyä, että hänen paras ystävänsä saa häntä enemmän huomiota pojilta ja pyrkii kontrolloimaan tätä esimerkiksi olemalla puhumatta hänelle. Kirjoissa ‘ilkeän tytön stereotyyppiä’ (engl. ‘mean girl’) käytetään luomaan kohde, johon muut tytöt voivat peilata omat epävarmuutensa. Romaanit osoittavat kuinka patriarkaalinen yhteiskunta ja postfeministinen ajatusmaailma pyrkivät kääntämään tytöt toisiaan vastaan, koska ilman ystäviään heidän on vaikeampi taistella vallitsevia valta-asemia vastaan.

Myös perheellä on suuri vaikutus tyttöyden muovaamisessa. Romaaneissa äidit kritisoivat Lucyn ja Georgian ulkonäkö tai siihen liittyviä valintoja. Näin he usein jopa huomaamattaan vahvistavat naiseuteen ja ulkonäköön liitettyjä sosiaalisia normeja. Kehoon liitetyt ihanteet ovaat syvään juurtuneita, jonka takia äidit helposti siirtävät omia kehoon liittyviä näkemyksiä ja epävarmuuksia omiin tyttäriinsä. Isät vaikuttavat myös osaltaan patriarkaalisten normien

ylläpitoon kotona. Etenkin *Angus*-kirjassa tämä korostuu, koska töiden takia poissaoleva isä laittaa Georgian tilanteeseen, jossa hänen täytyy asettua perinteiseen naisen rooliin kotona ottamalla iso vastuu kotitöistä ja pikkusiskon huolehtimisesta.

Tutkielmani osoittaa, että chick lit -genre onnistuu kuvaamaan vuosituhannen vaihteen tyttöyttä monimuotoisesti. Tyttöjen kehoihin liitetyt standardit ja niiden epätoivoinen ja usein epäterveellinen tavoittelu osoittavat, että feminismiä tarvitaan näiden yhteiskunnan asettamien odotusten rikkomiseen. Analysoimalla päähenkilöiden suhdetta poikiin, ystäviin ja perheeseen havaitsin, miten vahvasti romaaneissa kohtaavat postfeministisen tyttövoiman ja feministisen voimaantumisen aatteet. Vaikka chick lit -romaneissa patriarkalisella yhteiskunnalla on kyky muovata päähenkilöiden tyttöyskäsitettä, tutkielmani osoittaa, että tyttöys on myös osa vastarintaa, jossa vahvat ystävyysuhteet ja kriittinen sitoutuminen yhteiskunnallisiin odotuksiin edistävät voimaantumista.