7. Femininity, Seriality and Collectivity: Rethinking the Bond Girl

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Abstract
Bond Girls are often used to index fifty years of popular assumptions about feminism and femininity. This chapter considers how the Bond Girl's particular position as part of this collective moderates her individuality and limits her agency even as it imbues her with historical and historiographic value. I argue that the Bond Girl's collective identity is allied more to seriality, with its forward-looking regulation of femininity allied to replacement, atomization and substitution rather than the more utopian relational ideals of the female group linked to difference, possibility and growth. Drawing on selected films, reception and marketing discourse, I will trace how the Bond Girl's femininity is caught up in a serial identity that both flaunts and forecloses agency and possibility.

Keywords: Bond Girl; femininity; fashion; postfeminism; serial; female group

Easily recognized and sometimes iconic, Bond Girls are used to index over fifty years of popular assumptions about feminism and femininity, spanning 1960’s sex symbols, 1970’s quasi-feminists and postfeminist sparring partners. Although individual Girls have come close to full narrative subjectivity—understood in the series and by its critics as parity with 007’s professional expertise, control over space, activity and sexuality—Bond Girls’ serial quality positions them as second-class subjects. While Bond unifies different actors via a single, ever-developing, if discontinuous, identity that gives him an unusual capacity to adjust to social change and public taste, Bond Girls are usually contained within a single film, framed as creatures of their time with limited capacity to progress and develop. Moneypenny and,
latterly, Judi Dench’s M (1995-2012) remain franchise constants despite being played by different actors, but they bear a tenuous relationship to the Bond Girl—typically older, these long-term colleagues are not sexually involved with 007.¹ Often defined in terms of their relationship to 007, Bond Girls also help define Bond: “The difference [...] is that Bond is named, identified, singularized, whereas women remain generic, interchangeable, dependent” (Lindner 2015, xvii).

This chapter explores the Bond Girl’s distinctive seriality, examining its vexed relationship to the collective identities and female connections central to femininity while considering the implications for feminism, female agency and popular feminine historiography. Drawing on selected films, their reception, marketing discourse and social/institutional contexts, I trace the Bond Girl’s problematic intersection with feminine and feminist cultures, framed here within concepts of the collective and the serial. Whereas most feminine collectives link diversity to femininity’s complexity and highlight women’s presumed desires for female connection, the Bond Girl’s seriality both atomizes her and renders her replaceable. Even roles intended to challenge this archetype fail as novel treatments of femininity and/or feminism because they are enmeshed in the formal and cultural repetition, recycling and seriality inherent in a character function played out across 24 films, each with multiple Bond Girls. Marketing and the cultural imagination nevertheless link Bond Girls with their predecessors and those who will follow, helping forge a putative Bond Girl archive that, in turn, points to an inescapable collectivity with marked implications for feminism, itself a topic central to the Bond universe.

Both a reference to individual girls and their collective identity, the term “Bond Girl” operates as a catch-all for every young women in the franchise and as something more nuanced. Some academics and critics consider only love interests or professional partners Bond Girls despite publicity and post-release commentaries including a panoply of minor characters and bit part players (Mills 2015, 110-19. Caplen 2010, 125, 346). For example, Lisa Funnell identifies a mere twenty-two Bond Girls, each a lead in a single film, setting them apart from franchise villains, helpers, lovers, “Bond Women” and “secondary girls,” effectively reserving the designation for those who are sexually, romantically and/or professionally aligned with 007 (Funnell 2008, 63; Funnell 2011a, 199-212). Accordingly, one of the Bond

¹ Naomie Harris’s appearance and youth initially led some to include her as a Bond Girl. Her subsequent outing as Eve Moneypenny instead allied her with other continuing members of the ensemble.
Girl's distinctive qualities is her intimate knowledge of and suitability for 007, a man whose profession she sometimes shares (Funnell 2011b, 464; Burnette 2015, 61). Depending on the film (and the critics’ own perspective), this resemblance potentially individualizes the Bond Girl, enhancing her powers, or renders her a facsimile of the male original, undermining her agency. Another dominant approach analyses Bond Girls in relation to their female counterparts (within and across films), raising the potential of the Bond Girl as archive (Ulfedotter 2015, 7-17; Funnell 2015, 79-87). But while these studies point to the Bond Girl as a collective, they rarely examine its significance, instead tracing individual Girls’ feminist credentials. I opt here for the broadest and most inclusive definition of the “Bond Girl” in order to trace popular understandings of the archetype’s cultural and historical significance.

A spectacular part of the Bond universe and its promotional machinery, these young or youthful-looking women are renowned for embodying period trends. Their looks, dress, personal and professional characteristics therefore index period pop culture in ways that Bond often does not, placing him in that conventionally masculine role of seemingly stable, unchanging subject. While often allied to novelty—each Bond Girl has to be “new” even as she recycles and reworks the core archetype—these women often tame the formerly radical, as seen with Grace Jones (May Day), whose image had become tired by A View to a Kill’s (UK: John Glen) 1985 release. A contemporary rather than cutting edge figure, the Bond Girl’s associations with period popular culture both embed her in history and simultaneously configure her as ephemeral.

**Seriality and Collectivity**

The serial’s two major aspects inform the workings of the Bond Girl as cultural, textual and promotional category: the narrative and the mathematical-political. The former refers to ongoing sagas that are primarily modernist constructs designed to manage and respond to the very mass production of which they are a part. Refusing closure, these serials often deal with issues that are too substantial or troubling for any self-contained text: for Bond, these include threats to the UK in a reconfigured world (post-empire, then post-Cold War and the current global/digital economy) as well as challenges to white masculine power associated with the rise of feminism (Bennett and Woollacott 1987, 93-142, 211-30). Such ongoing dilemmas lead to the serial’s profusion producing a narrative world whereby characters replace each
other as they enact parallel and affiliated situations—just like the different Bond Girls who find themselves in similar positions across the franchise, straddling different times and spaces. Serials encourage anticipation while cycling back to earlier narratives, just like the Bond Girls who move the franchise forwards through replacement and substitution but often fail to benefit from any potential “progress.”

While the narrative serial looks forward, reflects upon prior events but never reaches a successful apotheosis, the mathematical serial is predictive and consistent, always structured by its internal logic. As Benedict Anderson has shown, it is consequently attractive to the modern state and governmentality, promising order by identifying subjects and putting them in their place via names, Social Security and National Insurance numbers. Hierarchical and sequential, this serial logic is rooted in comparison, making it innately competitive, something seen in commentary on Bond Girls across the franchise (Anderson 1998, 19-25). Inherently passive, as Jean-Paul Sartre and Iris Marion Young have pointed out, both forms of the serial present collectives of weakly connected individuals subjected to power who lack the group's capacity for action or resistance. For example, Bond Girls are almost always individualized and rarely work together (exceptions include villains like Pussy Galore's Flying Circus, whose members are essentially interchangeable). Most cannot collaborate as they appear sequentially over many years and do not constitute what Sartre would consider a group.

Following Sartre, Young has called for the reconceptualization of social groups in terms of “serial collectivity [...]. Such a way of thinking [...] allows us to see women as a collective without identifying common attributes [...] or implying that all women have a common identity” (Young 2008, 201). Sartre's series is unselfconscious and fluid, a form of constraint that operates amidst “structures that have been created by the unintended collective result of past actions” (213). It does not define individual identities even as it restricts possibilities for action, with members finding themselves “powerless to alter this material milieu, and they understand that others in the series are equally constrained” (215). Linking figures like Bond Girls without shared characteristics or goals, the serial is both more diverse and more passive than the group.

Central to popular feminine culture, the all-female group typically constitutes one of its more utopian features. It presents femininity as relational, linking female friendship to self-actualization while attesting to the emotional literacy demanded from women. Unlike second wave feminism's group consciousness, however, postfeminist collectivity is inherently individualistic. Configured in terms of self-care, it presents the group
in terms of its potential personal, affective, professional and economic, but
tellingly not political, rewards.

As an atomized collective lacking the close interpersonal relationships
of the female group, Bond Girls have a contentious relationship to these
feminine ideals, attesting to their status as both male fantasy figures and
possible sites for feminine identification and emulation. A serial construct
rather than a group, they link weakly connected characters across several
decades. Even as members proliferate, they do not gain power, partly
because they replace each other, making collaboration uncommon, if not
impossible. Instead, the franchise standardizes female experience as all
these women, regardless of their morality, ethics, and motivation, will be
replaced and thereby expelled from this narrative world. So forgettable
are some that they can even reappear as another character: From Russia
with Love’s (UK: Terence Young, 1963) Zora (Martine Beswick) resurfaces
in 1965’s Thunderball (UK: Terence Young, 1965) as the no more memorable
Paula Caplan. Even those who linger across films, like Bond’s (would-be)
girlfriend Sylvia Trench (Eunice Gayson) in the first two installments, link
seriality to failure or even death. Trench never secures Bond and her role
is quickly dropped. Later films reveal Bond’s continued feelings for Tracy
di Vicenzo and Vesper Lynd after their death, transforming them into
memories that motivate his actions.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, popular media usually do not present Bond Girls
as a mutually beneficial collective, instead isolating and ranking individual
members. Some are singled out as “firsts,” exemplars of the kinds of female
“progress” the franchise allows—the first Bond Girl (Dr. No’s Ursula Andress/
Honey Ryder; UK: Terence Young, 1962), the first black Bond Girl (1971’s
Diamonds Are Forever’s Trina Parks/Thumper; UK: Guy Hamilton, 1971),
the first American (Diamond’s Jill St. John/Tiffany Case), the first Mexican
Bond Girl (Stephanie Sigman/Estrella in Spectre [UK/USA/Austria/Mexico/
Italy/Morocco: Sam Mendes, 2015]), the first villainess/Bond Girl hybrid
(Dr. No’s Zena Marshall/Miss Taro), the first Bond Girl in her 50s (Spectre’s
Monica Bellucci/Lucia Sciarra) and the only one to marry 007 (1969’s On Her
Majesty’s Secret Service’s Diana Rigg/Tracy di Vicenzo; UK: Peter Hunt, 1969).
Rather than female camaraderie, this framing presents the Girls battling
for Bond’s—and the viewer’s—attention. Accordingly, features ranking
Bond Girls—the most attractive or memorable, best or worst, most or least
intelligent—have surrounded each release since at least 2002’s Die Another
Day (UK/USA: Lee Tamahori, 2002). Social media has further showcased
the different ways in which Bond Girls can be ordered and reshuffled—a
practice with implications for both history and feminism. Reinforcing the
logic of progress—the first, the best, the worst, the most beautiful, the most stupid, the most unnecessary—history is presented as events organized in a predominantly linear, chronological fashion. The films and their reception/publicity discourse then use this historiography to secure the evaluation of Bond Girls—and by extension women outside the text—in terms of their putative emancipation and/or the degree to which they embody or divert from patriarchal male fantasies (something seen in discussions of the franchise’s earlier installments). Feminism(s) are consequently embedded within the consumerist logic of progress (Packer and Sharma 2009, 95-98; Radner 1999, 8-9). Through this evolutionary tale of feminism, which is in large part the product of a revisionist history that treats feminism as a linear achievement of women’s progress through the years, the Bond Girl becomes only more and more feministic [sic] to the point where she becomes a postfeminist, bypassing altogether the label of feminist. In fact, feminism is not necessarily acknowledged as a worthy social struggle that has had any effect on the lives of the women discussing their lives as Bond Girls, instead it is something that happened outside of the text that exerted pressure on the filmmakers to re-represent the Bond Girl (Packer and Sharma 2009, 97).

Even as it subsumes female diversity and racial, sexual, ethnic or professional difference into aesthetics, this historical narrative foregrounds Bond’s growth and social awareness, both as character and franchise, tracing his migration from British agent to increasingly global figure. The Bond Girl, then, is simultaneously category, brand, historiography, mode of evaluation and archive of (largely recycled) images of women. While this recycling potentially disturbs the franchise’s progress narrative, it is nevertheless widely associated with populist images of female liberation. As Yvonne Tasker points out, Bond Girls coopt period ideals of female strength and independence, moving, for example, from the 1960’s fascination with sexual liberation to the 1970’s “figure of fun—if you think of the ads at the time that celebrate that independence, like Charlie, they’re very similar to the [era’s] Bond Girl” (Rothman 2012). This progress narrative and the practice of recycling (including the self-cannibalization involved in the franchise’s allusions to its earlier incarnations) further signify the Bond Girl’s inherent seriality. These practices, in turn, evoke temporalities that coexist within this Bondian articulation of history: the franchise reboots itself each time a new actor plays James Bond, while
each new unveiling of the Bond Girl [...] is always also an unveiling of a more “evolved” feminist role model [...]. The unveiling begins a long term (for some of the actresses more than forty years) public relations campaign of exploiting the notion of “the new” to denote female advancement. Ultimately, within this discourse her power lies in the fact that she needs neither Bond nor the feminist movement (Packer and Sharma 2009, 92).

Being new also means that Bond Girls risk rapid obsolescence, their value embedded in a temporality that quickly assigns them to history, just like Bond’s other accessories.

Embedded in progress rhetoric, practices of replacement and substitution are found within each film as well as across the franchise’s broader history. In refusing closure, the serial has an asymptotic logic: it moves close to its goals but cannot achieve them. Final installments usually fail to convince, largely because serials engage fundamentally irresolvable problems that encourage us to return and reflect back on earlier dilemmas. As a serial construct, the Bond Girl simultaneously attests to the ways in which these women are brought together, usually not for their own benefit or for a broader feminist cause, as well as to the problematic status of female emancipation within the franchise. Framing the Bond Girl since her inception, this appropriation of feminism continuously molds reception practices and discourses.

While each film’s Bond Girl must be unaware of her status, it is now almost compulsory for actresses like Jane Seymour, Maryam D’Abo, Halle Berry, Olga Kurylenko, Monica Bellucci and Léa Seydoux to reflect on their place in franchise history when promoting each new installment. Here each Girl measures herself against the others as cultural memory precludes them existing in isolation. Interviews either argue for the exceptional, progressive nature of each new Bond Girl or celebrate what they see as the neglected feminist qualities of their predecessors—even as actors try to distinguish their characters from those who came before. For example, in promotional interviews for 2006’s Casino Royale (UK/Czech Republic/USA/Germany/Bahamas: Martin Campbell, 2006), Eva Green (Vesper Lynd) argued that she was not a Bond Girl and that she was “less iconic, more human [...] rather than just beautiful and sexy [...]. Far from feeling part of a glamorous pantheon, she dismisses most of the Bond Girl archive as chauvinist fantasies—with the notable exception of Honor Blackman’s [...] Pussy Galore” (Sachs 2006). On the other hand, 2012’s Skyfall’s (UK/USA: Sam Mendes, 2012) Berenice Lim Marlohe (Sévérine) and Naomie Harris (Moneypenny) frame Bond Girls as strong and progressive, with Marlohe describing her character as having “all of the classic components of a Bond
girl: voluptuous, sexy, a woman and not a girl, a mystery and a survivor” (“Skyfall Bond Girls”, n.d.). While she later critiqued her role and vowed not to appear in the franchise again, Gemma Arterton initially praised her forbears in promotional interviews for 2008’s Quantum of Solace’s (UK/USA: Mark Forster, 2008): “My character [Strawberry Fields] is an homage to the 1960s original Fleming-type Bond girl and definitely the way she looks. She is just fun and lovely [...]. It’s brilliant [...]. Just to be known as a Bond girl is an incredible thing for me [...] even as I don’t really think my character is Bond-girly” (Laufer-Krebs, n.d.). Despite distinguishing herself from her predecessors, noting that, amongst other things, she survives to the end of the film, Spectre’s Léa Seydoux does not diminish them: “I don’t mind the cliché of the Bond girl, it’s a choice. A statement. I’m not the typical Bond girl” (Coren 2015).

Postfeminism and the Bond Girl

Seydoux’s use of “choice” recalls the postfeminist sensibility that tries to reclaim Bond Girls as desiring women in charge of their own lives, unconstrained by monogamy and reproduction as they seek pleasure and adventure outside the home. Often problematic, such efforts overlook individual girls’ struggles to retain agency even as they validate their collective accomplishments. Often dubbed “choice feminism,” signifying its relationship to consumerism and its neoliberal investment in individuality, postfeminism departs from the women’s movement’s collective social responsibilities and free market critiques. Instead, as Angela McRobbie has shown, it uses feminism’s mainstream acceptance to position it as unnecessary, part of a less enlightened historical moment (McRobbie 2004, 255-64; McRobbie 2009, 1-12, 24-40, 66). Simultaneously a historical development (post-second and third wave feminism), a sensibility found in mass media and popular culture, and a form of backlash, postfeminism positions women as ideal neoliberal subjects by making them responsible for their own fate (Gill 2007, 218-71). Maintaining that battles for equality have been won, postfeminism positions class, race, age, national origin, sexuality and other inequities as easily overcome with the “correct” attitude. Heralding women’s capacity to do anything as long as they want it enough, work hard and make the “right” choices, postfeminism gives rise to Anita Harris’s two archetypes—the “can-do girl” and her “at-risk” counterpart, signifying its privileging of white, middle-class, upwardly mobile youth as well as neoliberalism’s emphasis on individual responsibility (Harris 2004, 13-36).
Young women invested in self-improvement who self-monitor their body, professional skills and emotions constitute postfeminism’s ideal. Entirely self-reliant, they aim to have it all. More a market- and media-driven sensibility than a political or social movement, postfeminism is distinctly populist, emphasizing pleasure and success. It restores the primacy of the body, annexing it to an “essential” femininity that has to be cared for and nurtured lest it becomes undisciplined or decays, producing social marginalization, the loss of status and pleasure. Even as it heralds “the girl” and suggests aging can be overcome, postfeminism is, as Diane Negra points out, acutely time-conscious, measuring female success against myriad deadlines that often signify disappointment and failure (Negra 2008, 45-78). Despite ostensibly celebrating feminine pleasure and power, postfeminism instead circulates fantasies of largely inaccessible privilege, although its utopian emphasis and insistence on pleasurable self-improvement make it deceptively attractive.

Radner’s reading of cinema’s first Bond Girls highlights their postfeminist orientation (although she does not use the term): “Her body and her sexuality are the implicit rather than the explicit measure of her value, most important, it is she herself who reaps the benefits of her well-invested capital” (Radner 1999, 7). As she points out, the Bond Girl’s ostensible sexual and gendered liberation serves the needs of consumer culture in the guise of a feminine “independence” that ultimately binds her to the necessity of physical and sexual self-improvement. Rather than feminists, then, the first Bond Girls might be seen as postfeminist antecedents, participating in both mid-twentieth century swinging bachelor culture and Cosmopolitan magazine’s 1960s light feminism. Associated with Helen Gurley Brown and centered on the figure of the working girl, this archetype focuses on glamour, work, self-improvement and the explicitly self-referential self-construction that Radner (1999, 8) links to “a slow evolution toward an economic and social structure in which the individual rather than the family became the primary locus of identity”. Tracing the historical logic espoused by Lynn Spigel, postfeminism thus finds its antecedents in popular representations of an illusory past lacking feminism but filled with independent, young, beautiful working women who, like the early Bond Girl, seemingly achieved liberation on their own, rendering feminism unnecessary (Spigel 2013, 270-78).

Radner’s analysis is important in tracing postfeminism’s roots—its combination of hyper-individuality, self-reliance, female professionalism and self-construction—and linking them to the consumer culture the Bond Girl embodies. Within the films, however, the desire to consume
often has negative consequences, tempting Girls into crime or putting them in danger even as it also facilitates their meetings with Bond. For example, *Diamonds Are Forever's* Tiffany Case and Plenty O'Toole so covet high-end consumption that they relinquish morality with the latter losing her life. For today’s critics, bloggers and fans, the Bond Girl's retro-glамour, seeming liberation and life outside marriage and motherhood support utopian, postfeminist readings that are often based on images removed from their narrative contexts: beautiful, well dressed young women fight antagonists, almost overwhelm Bond and still find time for romance and sexual pleasure. But this ideal is often undermined in its execution: many Bond Girls show no real evidence of their professional skills (like Denise Richards’ nuclear physicist Christmas Jones in 1999’s *The World Is Not Enough* [UK/USA: Michael Apted]) and their activities often result in death or disappointment.

**How to Be a Bond Girl: Fashion, Beauty and the Postfeminist (Collective) Self**

In keeping with postfeminism's investment in self-surveillance and self-creation, stories about how to be—that is, look like—a Bond girl proliferate, linking appearance to the Bond Girl's purported agency. In 2015, British *Vogue* released a glossy one-minute film to mark *Spectre’s* release. Starring Léa Seydoux, *How to Be a Bond Girl* (Jeremie Rozan, 2015, style.com) used the high fashion magazine’s consumerist female gaze in an effort to reclaim the Bond Girl as an icon of postfeminist style and independence. Positioned at the center of its diegesis, Seydoux is narrator, agent, object and subject (associations underlined by its title). The Bond theme plays as she stands at the bar of a high-end restaurant, enunciating the following rules, ones whose elusive quality evokes high fashion's connections to fantasy and the possibility of crafting multiple feminine selves:

> Always make a bold entrance [...], remember to assess your environment, look out for glitches in the matrix. Danger usually comes from the most unexpected places. Neglect no options, never put all your eggs in one basket. I don’t gamble but I like a little flutter now and then [...] but at all times keep your guard up. As a Bond Girl I’ve got be able to swim with sharks. It is part of the learning curve [as she says this camera traces the curve of her waist, simultaneously showing us the details of her black jacket]. Seydoux, Léa Seydoux.
This monologue links high fashion and the well-honed fantasy of replacing 007 with an eminently feminine agent seemingly in control of her environment. As she surveys space, the camera foregrounds the female gaze's capacity to register and recall detail via a series of cutaways that embed her advice and vision in franchise history, each reference more explicit than the last. First a gadget is surreptitiously passed between two men, then a Faberge egg opened, evoking 1983’s Octopussy (UK: John Glen). A poker chip points to the importance of casino gambling, particularly in Goldfinger (UK: Guy Hamilton, 1964), while the reference to sharks is accompanied by close-ups of a handsome young man whose metal teeth recall Jaws in The Spy Who Loved Me (UK: Lewis Gilbert, 1977) and Moonraker (UK/France: Lewis Gilbert, 1979). Finally, fashion is linked to fantasies of the empowered female subject as the film reveals Seydoux is wearing red dagger shoes inspired by From Russia with Love. Hyper-feminine, they merge the adult and childlike, explicitly referencing The Wizard of Oz’s (USA: Victor Fleming, 1939) ruby slippers as she clicks her heels to bring us back to “reality” while uttering the final words: “Seydoux, Léa Seydoux.”

This short’s structure is telling. It starts by individualizing Seydoux—alone by the bar, she directs the camera and scans space. Her look signifies her secret agent skills via references to franchise history, producing a backwards vision that recycles the past to suggest the difficulty of imagining a feminine future. Even as the film nods to the possibility of other powerful women through a cut to an older, stylish woman whose designer bag might contain a bomb, her counterpart’s grey hair points to the problematic future facing all beautiful women. Their eye contact nevertheless signifies mutual feminine understanding, shifting the discourse to gender. Next, a trio of handsome young men (the sharks) stare back at Seydoux, linking female sexual desire to mortal danger. From here we move to fashion—at last something seemingly within female control as the camera traces its “learning curve” around Seydoux’s waist, allowing (female) viewers to take in the details of her jacket before moving to her shoes and then back to her beautiful face. In keeping with Radner’s observations, the voice-over positions her body, clothing and accessories as locus of her identity and central to her value. The film ends on a reflexive and self-aware note that both infantilizes Seydoux and links fashion’s capacity for roleplaying to childhood fantasy. As she clicks her red heels, bringing together Bond and Dorothy Gale (Judy Garland), Seydoux’s pigeon-toed stance and innocent face render her childlike while references to The Wizard of Oz highlight fashion’s innate irrationality, positioning her Bond-like agency as just another dream—an unoriginal and heavily recycled one at that (Wilson 2003, 47-66).
This film links Seydoux’s self-surveillance, careful consumption and physical perfection not to espionage but to the ultimate (post)feminist fantasy of reversing the gaze, so central to femininity and the structure of fashion magazines. Her presentation of successful individualism is nevertheless undercut by the logic of substitutability—the audience hopes to take her place at the center of attention and as the apogee of beauty. We also know she will be replaced; such is the logic of both the Bond franchise and the magazine cover girl, another serial construct. Mired in fashion’s need for constant change, she thus shares its capacity to index history without full participation. Even the film’s title, *How to Be a Bond Girl* positions Seydoux as a type not an individual, reframing her as part of a well-known brand and inviting viewers to take up similar positions in this potentially unending serial or chain. Standing alone, she is ultimately isolated: connected to others only via threats, whether sexual, mortal or the ultimate menace, aging.

Mass market and high-end cosmetic brands like Avon (007 perfume) and Charlotte Tilbury (Bond Girl lipstick) offer a more utopian take on the Bond Girl’s seriality, promising women who carefully manage their own self-presentation access to an idealized form of this collective identity, one that is only inspired by and therefore somewhat divorced from the films. Many of these fashion and beauty tie-ups and tutorials adopt the Bondian notion of history—linear progress combined with recycling and return—echoing Spigel’s points about postfeminist histories that deny feminism (Spigel 2013, 270-78). A style blog, couturing.com proclaims, “The ‘Bond Girl’ image is rooted in the 1960’s look of the original Bond films. Although throughout the decades Bond Girls have modernized the premise is still the same. Classic, sophisticated and extremely sexy” (Walsh 2012). A vintage website, Go Retro, recommended their readers emulate the Bond Girl’s classic makeup and touchable, long hair, advocating exercise while shunning more contemporary activewear or tattoos (Pam 2015). Meanwhile, myriad online features discuss how to replicate the likes of Vesper Lynd’s gowns, Solitaire’s bohemian dresses, Pussy Galore’s wrap blouses or Lois Chiles’ and Tracy di Vicenzo’s jumpsuits (Doupnik 2012; Nguyen 2015; Walker 2015).

Like Bond Girls, fashion exists in the dialectic between individuality and collectivity, promising a distinctive self while enforcing group social and aesthetic norms and inviting comparison with others. But Bond Girl fashion is ultimately problematic, pointing to shared collective features rather than individuating its members. This can be seen, for example, in a promotional poster featuring the “most memorable” Bond Girl outfits which highlights the difference between passive seriality and the greater variation the group allows.
Designed by the London marketing company Big Group to mark Spectre’s 2015 release, its drawings of headless bodies wearing key outfits from each film are organized in chronological order. Identical save skin color and dress, the overall effect is of one girl’s wardrobe, a strategy that further recasts race as style. The repetition of certain items—bikinis, slinky evening gowns, jumpsuits, men’s shirts/jackets—coalesces into a Bond Girl look that reduces historical variations, binding these women together over time. Similar recycling occurs across films, most famously in images of Ursula Andress (Dr. No) and Halle Berry (Die Another Day) wearing similar bikinis that point to the franchise’s shared history while flattening the gap between the 1960’s Swiss blonde and Berry’s millennial mixed-race American Girl. A franchise characteristic, recycled fashions are used in 2006’s Casino Royale to evoke “the history and glamour of the Bond films to create [sic] a timeless effect […] that connects it to the earlier films,” rather than to foreground feminine individuality (Severson 2015, 180).

Besides binding actresses to this collective, Bond Girl attire distances them from their other roles and off-screen identities. One iconic outfit, Diana Rigg’s low-cut white lace wedding jumpsuit from On Her Majesty’s Secret Service, contrasts with her more streamlined The Avengers (UK: Sydney Newman, 1961-1969) garb, suggesting a retreat away from modernity and independence that is further compounded by her character Tracy di Vicenzo’s mental instability, marriage to Bond, and subsequent death. As one journalist points out, “the role of helpless heiress feels like a step backward after the smart and karate-kicking Mrs. Peel” (Kurchack 2015). Although Emma Peel’s wardrobe was more varied than her iconic catsuits and streamlined jersey mini dresses suggest, Tracy’s fluid and decorative fashions are emblematically feminine, featuring white lace blouses, cleavage and lots of girlish curled hair. This departure from Rigg’s established style suggests efforts to rework her image away from her progressive, strong-willed and independent Avengers alter-ego.

A View to a Kill’s May Day (Grace Jones) presents an interesting counterpoint to Rigg as the film uses Jones’ well-known masculine image to signify villainy, capitalizing on her 1980s fashion credentials with her black, red and yellow snoods, bat-winged leather jackets, padded shoulders, thigh high boots, and bright red jersey dresses. By this point, however, Jones had lost her power to shock. Cartoonish rather than cutting-edge, her costumes were as lacking in high fashion credibility as Moonraker’s naïve futurism or the Caucasian Girls of the 1960s aping exoticism with their cheongsams (Dr. No) and sarongs (From Russia with Love). Jones’ clothes remind us that the Bond Girl style is populist, not high fashion with its glory days always slightly in the
past—the early films’ 1960s outfits arguably retain their fashion credibility because of the transformations wrought by time. Historical distance erases the specificities of period dress, transforms kitsch into style and permits the evocations of agency seen in feminist-oriented vintage aesthetics—conscious reworkings that exhibit some of the strategies postfeminist audiences use to recuperate the Bond Girl. Designed not for high fashion’s female gaze but to capture male attention, the Bond Girls’ attire ultimately undermines fashion’s feminine knowledge, literacy and female address. *Vogue’s* video speaks to this ambivalence, with its difficulty imagining a plausible future for its Bond Girl even as it celebrates her appearance, self-control and ability to master the gaze.

**Independence and the Female Group**

Critical considerations of independence, agency and individuality are central to feminist media criticism, spanning varied methodologies and concerns with text, context and audience. Similar issues shape the Bond Girl’s marketing and popular reception. I do not want to suggest that individuality is more progressive, powerful or feminist than collectivity—indeed the question is often moot, given the diverse ideologies both terms encompass. Feminists may laud individuality and its close relative, agency, but both are also central to postfeminism’s free market imperatives. Like individuality, collectivity is not inherently progressive but rather an ideal that is up for grabs. While feminism has historically embraced collective action, popular media typically misrepresent collectivity as homogeneous and dull, restricting social mobility (here seen as a reward for idealized forms of individuality) and eliminating pleasure. Other forms of collective femininity are seen as more “traditional,” linked to the family, emphasizing relationships over work and even lauding the value of submission. Presentations of the female group often capture this ambivalence: it operates both as a sign of women’s idealized relationality and encapsulates purported feminine limitations that foreclose agency and entry into public life.

Promotional images for the 1960’s and 1970’s films present Bond Girls as part of another regressive group: the harem. Roger Moore is pictured flanked by eleven swimsuit clad beauties for *For Your Eyes Only* (UK: John Glen, 1981), four young Asian women in pink bikinis wash Sean Connery in a hot tub for *You Only Live Twice* (UK: Lewis Gilbert, 1967) while George Lazenby sits amidst nine or ten ethnically and racially diverse starlets, several in different national dress (Blofeld’s Angels of Death) for *On Her Majesty’s*
Secret Service. These images simultaneously point to and erase something powerful and attractive: the possibility of a public life oriented not just around self-betterment and self-display, but one that facilitates feminine camaraderie, something principal Bond Girls usually cannot access. As the female group and feminine connectivity become more central to millennial popular culture, the franchise has moved away from such scenes, which may now appear simultaneously more repressive and more difficult to reclaim for the male gaze. Pointing to the ambivalence of the female group in this cinematic universe (and others), the films favor seriality instead as it brings women together on terms that often preclude relationality while redirecting femininity’s comparative gaze.

In most films, the Girl’s allegiance to Bond limits her capacity to maintain relationships with other women. Groups of women working together are usually presented in a negative light, usually as villains in the 1960s and 1970s’ installments. Pussy Galore’s Flying Circus is perhaps the paradigmatic example of the visually undifferentiated female group: each (conventionally attractive) pilot wears an identical black catsuit, white belt, headband and ankle boots and styles her hair in a loose, curled bob. Their leader, Galore (Honor Blackman, an established actress who will be reclaimed from the group) wears a variation on this theme, pointing to her nascent individuality and subsequent redemption. Besides their lesbian implications, the Flying Circus are linked to death—Goldfinger orders them to spray nerve gas on Fort Knox, an activity Galore foils after Bond seduces her. On Her Majesty’s Secret Service features another deathly female group, Blofeld’s Angels of Death, who spray bacterial agents to spread infertility in plants and animals. Their dress presents them as exoticized representatives of racial and national difference, distinguishing them not as individuals but as types, with the film’s credits bracketing most of them together as “The Girls” (Caplen 2010, 222). Other production decisions flatten female difference with German actress Nikki van der Zyl voicing at least thirteen Bond Girls in ten Bond films between 1962-1978, including Ursula Andress, Eunice Gayson and most of the actresses in Dr. No (Funnell 2008, 63-65; Roberts 2015). Such practices depart from feminine or feminist ideals of the female group as a positive, empowering or nurturing entity, reinforcing widespread interpretations of the Bond Girl as eminently replaceable or “entirely disposable” (Caplen 2010, 82).

The Bond title sequence displays perhaps the franchise’s most reductive image of women with its serial profusion of different, barely identifiable hypersexualized girls, starting with the second film, From Russia with Love, whose credits are projected onto a bikini clad belly dancer’s writhing thighs
and torso. 1965’s *Thunderball* introduces the now-characteristic motif of the disposable and proliferating girl when one of its anonymous female silhouettes shoots another as they swim. This action produces more girls as a second, then a third optically printed figure materializes, with this series of cloned women effectively voiding each other’s identity. More reflexive and tongue-in-cheek, *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* highlights her disposability as a range of Bond Girls (and a couple of male villains) pass through martini and wine glasses like sand through a timer, consciously indexing franchise history. *Tomorrow Never Dies* (UK/USA: Roger Spottiswoode, 1997) uses code to connect the Girl to the logic of the endless digital copy while transparent bullets containing nude women update the earlier films’ girl-gun-bullet motif that signifies female danger. Despite hints at female authorship—*For Your Eyes Only* features Sheena Easton singing the title song while *Licence to Kill* (UK/Mexico/USA: John Glen, 1989) opens with a woman holding a camera, then a still image of another girl holding a gun—the franchise’s established logic of proliferating silhouettes, abstracted nudes, and dancing figures shot from guns consistently foregrounds the Bond Girl’s seriality and replaceability. A rare deviation from this pattern, *Casino Royale*, features no women other than a brief shot of Eva Green as the Queen from a deck of cards, rebooting the franchise and returning to *Dr. No’s* opening salvo of a gun targeting Bond. Female bodies return for *Quantum of Solace*, first via sandscapes that echo female curves and then through the arching back of a female nude, progressing to a zoetrope-like scene of dancing figures. Credits for Craig’s films are generally more abstract: their Bond is more vulnerable, hard to read, and less in control of what are increasingly complicated global spaces. Possibly attesting more to changes in technology and music videos than in Bond and the Bond Girl, the credits nevertheless share their predecessor’s logic of female replacement and proliferation. Although Bond Girls “progress”—they develop careers, become more multiracial, stand up for themselves, experience sexual pleasure and, in the Craig films, have increasingly technologized bodies—the franchise’s title sequences present them as mass-produced figures who risk obsolescence. Rather than a single individual, the Bond Girl is here envisaged as part of a proliferating sequence, framed as a nodal point on the route to change, readily bypassed in the transition to the next new thing.

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2 Sabrina Planka suggests that many of these women “lack coherent identities […] [envisaged] as two dimensional figures […] or as fragments.” Planka, Sabrina, 2015, “Female Bodies in James Bond Title Sequences,” in *For His Eyes Only*, 142-43.
Conclusion

Considering the Bond Girl as collective entity demands examination of the ways these women are brought together by the franchise, its audiences and popular culture. Largely kept separate in the films, posed as antagonists or replacements who perform the same limited range of functions—decoration, distraction, love interests, collaborators or threats—they are bracketed together in publicity and made part of a Bond Girl archive. Postfeminist efforts to reclaim the Bond Girl as a feminine icon likewise bring Bond Girls together to create historically impossible female groups that contest serial logic. Some actors use similar strategies to foster “real” connections and camaraderie, with Jane Seymour lauding “an interesting sorority. We all share about our Bonds [...] We may as well be in high school” (McKay 2012). But this might be wishful thinking: differences in actresses’ age and languages limit opportunities for socializing, making this collective more imaginary than real.

As replaceable, disposable figures in a franchise that shows no sign of ending, who serve and undermine narratives of progress, Bond Girls function as serial constructs: they follow each other but do not necessarily coexist, with each proposing a somewhat different approach to related core dilemmas. Connecting texts and the issues they raise, from sexual mores and gender ideals to geopolitics, the Bond Girl is unable to escape her own time and its limitations and conventions even as she invites comparisons with other Girls and other possible worlds. Her position is therefore essentially symbolic. Existing both in and across texts, she forms part of a network that fractures the linearity that she also serves.

Framing the Bond Girl in serial terms nevertheless foregrounds her vexed position with regards to feminism and feminist historiography: she may or may not seek female emancipation or work for the good of other women, but her actions are framed in terms of an agenda she does not—and cannot—set. She is delimited by the innate passivity of her seriality, even as she points towards greater feminine emancipation and agency. Here, the concept of the serial encapsulates some of the contradictions that make the Bond Girl so marketable, so promising and yet so limited a model for feminist possibility. She derives her force and cultural significance from being part of a group that frames her actions, positions her historically and yet traps her in its temporal logic, always folding back as it moves forward, never reaching its denouement. As such, she shares the serial’s other pivotal characteristic: she does not make sense on her own. Her identity, meaning, and cultural significance all depend on a collective of which she can only be a part and whose future she cannot determine.
Works Cited


Selected Filmography

How to Be a Bond Girl (Jeremie Rozan, 2015, style.com) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLIvQnPWUlU.

About the Author

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