

From God Terms to Gaga: The Bad Romance between
Motherhood and Female Suffragists in American Film

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DEDICATION

For my dearest Paul, who never gave up on me and who never let me give up on myself.

For my parents, whose constant support throughout my life and especially through this degree
has taught me so much about love and sacrifice.

And for Mr. Abernathy, my wonderful third grade teacher. You always told me that I should
dedicate my first book to you. This isn't exactly a book, but this one is for you, sir!

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ABSTRACT

Ninety-five years ago, the Nineteenth Amendment was passed by Congress, and women across America were given the right to vote. Nearly a century later, the long-gone figure of the female suffragist continues to subtly permeate American film, a reoccurrence that is not easily justified. Why would viewers in the English-speaking world continue an interest in a historically-contextualized feminist that seems, at first, to have little to do with what a “modern-day feminist” portrays?

Although the woman that history calls the suffragette hasn’t existed in America since 1920, representations of her in film and visual media have reminded viewers that this particular brand of female activist faced a challenge that women in America have faced throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: a female’s struggle to reconcile her identity as a woman and her identity as a mother. Each of the five films studied in this project, ranging from 1912 to 2012, raises some form of the question: “Can a woman be both an activist and a ‘good’ mother to her children?” Through the use of Burke’s dramatistic pentad and Prelli and Anderson’s pentadic cartography and Buchanan’s rhetorics of motherhood, this project ultimately finds that American films tend to portray activist women as inadequate mothers, going so far as to invent fictional public and private sphere choices for their historical characters; finally, it places this idea in the context of the twenty-first century, suggesting that the suffragist figure’s plight remains the plight of women today.

“For the Cinema Woman is a Popcorn Venus, a delectable but insubstantial hybrid of cultural distortions”

-Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus* (1973)

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A Preface

This goes out to all the women getting it in – you’re on your grind.

To other men that respect what I do, please accept my shine.

Boy, I know you love it, how we’re smart enough to make these millions.

Strong enough to bear the children – then get back to business. (Beyoncé, “Run”)

These song lyrics embody something remarkable about American culture, for they imply something that, truly, should not be remarkable about American culture at all. The song itself is called “Run the World (Girls),” and the song debuted on Beyoncé’s 4 album in the year 2011, over one hundred years after female suffragists in America were beginning to protest their own patriarchal culture. In contrast to the condescending and discriminatory influences from American citizens who opposed women’s suffrage, these staunch women insisted that women were not only capable of informed citizenship, as men were, but that they were moreover capable of being both informed citizens of the United States and devoted mothers to their families. Of course, they had trouble convincing the men around them that a person could be both intelligent and maternal at the same time. Therefore, one might find it interesting that the problem with convincing American culture of this idea that women could be mothers and intelligent citizens has remained, in some small way, for over a hundred years.

Why does a female pop star still need to sing and attempt to convince her audiences that a woman is able to be both a mother and a savvy citizen in the 2010s? Better yet, why are women who did not grow up prior to the suffrage movement in America still unable to reconcile their

worth as a human with their worth as a female capable of motherhood? This latter issue is one that finds a particular home in both this writer's life and in Southern American culture. An experience in a "Women in American History" course in my senior year of undergraduate work triggered the thought processes framing this study. One of our assignments for the class was to conduct an oral history project and interview a woman above the age of fifty who had lived in the South her entire life about how much a woman's place in Southern society has changed during her lifetime. Out of the desire to learn some new trivia about her life and bond even closer, I chose to interview my one living grandmother, a woman who has lived nearly half of her life alone after the sudden death of my grandfather. When I asked her what she missed most about him after he passed away, she gave me a response that took me a bit off guard. After talking briefly about how "scary" it was to be alone without a husband and with two grown sons away at college, she stated matter-of-factly, and almost as an afterthought, that "you miss... 'man-talk.'" That may sound silly to some people, but that's the only way I can describe it. Just... 'man-talk.'" (Glymph). A tad ruffled, I couldn't stop myself from asking her to qualify what she meant by "man-talk." To elaborate, she went on to explain: "Well you know, they come in and tell you about what went on during the day at their job, or they talk about political things or sports or whatever, and they give you a different perspective... They give you advice around the house...just everything, really!" (Glymph). It was not surprising to me that she missed her husband because she missed the presence of a man; rather, it was the fact that she was missing a certain kind of force in her life that, to me, was not one that necessarily had to be gendered.

Over the course of the interview, my grandmother unearthed the underlying truth that she had never felt permitted to – or even able to – stand up to rigid gender roles that had dominated

her upbringing and the way she had been molded and trained to live her life. Her inner strength and resilience, as demonstrated by her ability to live alone and support herself for over forty years, was lost to her conscious recognition, and she subconsciously resolved to see herself as weak for feeling periodically helpless. A woman's role, purpose, and place were strongly molded in her mind, and this required character was a coloring book page with lines that she never felt the need to cross with her crayons. I have often wondered what her life would have been like if she had been born and raised in the late twentieth century. Perhaps she would have gone to college, become a business professional, worked because she wanted to and not because she had no choice, maybe even developed political opinions that she felt confident enough to act upon in her community. Sometimes I wonder why a woman born in the first decade of the Nineteenth Amendment seemed to be apprehensive about using the power afforded to her by it, but then I remember that culture kept her from believing that she was worthy of the strength it afforded to her.

When I asked my grandmother what her proudest accomplishment in life was, she gave me the most sobering answer I had ever heard: "I can't think of a time like that. I've really never done anything. I really can't think of anything that I've ever done" (Glymph). I prompted her, asking an answer that momentarily presented itself as the most natural one: "Well, you've raised two wonderful children," an answer to which she only modestly accepted credit (Glymph). Still, I couldn't shake the shadow of that initial answer. Aside from her children, my grandmother claimed to have never accomplished anything in her life to make her proud of herself. Then again, she was not raised in a culture where a woman's pride in herself could come from anything but producing children.

Considering the example of these two very different American women (Beyoncé and my grandmother), this study proposes the question: Why does American culture in the twenty-first century still consider it remarkable for a woman to be both a mother and a woman with her own personal interests and achievements? A lack of cohesion between these two identities has existed for generations, and even today in an era of “mommy-shaming,” mothers are unable to make choices about their careers uninfluenced by what they believe their culture expects of them.

This continued lack of understanding in American culture can, in many ways, be related back to how the media has portrayed female activists over the past hundred years. Of course, the term “female activist” is a far-reaching umbrella term. A researcher could likely find fascinating results by investigating media representations of any flavor of female activist from women in labor unions to women in politics, and any of those directions would make an interesting target for this project as well. Yet, for this thesis, I choose to discuss a singular figure in American cinema that, historically, only existed for a few decades and who currently does not exist in America anymore: the American female suffragist. Women in the United States won the vote in 1920, but that final Constitutional Amendment has not stopped American filmmakers from revisiting the figure in past and more recent decades. If the vote was achieved for women ninety-five years ago, why are audiences still willing to listen to what these long-gone voices say? Perhaps American women still feel drawn to relate to these liberators, and perhaps their fight does not cease to feel real in the 2010s. Even from childhood, American women have been exposed to their culture’s past beliefs about a woman’s ability to be both activist and mother. These next song lyrics might sound rather familiar:

Cast off the shackles of yesterday!
Shoulder to shoulder into the fray!
Our daughters' daughters will adore us
And they'll sing in grateful chorus
'Well done, Sister Suffragette!' (*Mary Poppins*)

Like many American children, I grew up happily chirping along to the songs in one of Disney's most beloved family films, *Mary Poppins*. Moreover, my first exposure to the suffragette figure was through this film, just as I'm sure it was for many other children. Once I became old enough to understand the cause dear to Jane and Michael's mother's heart, I began – without recognizing this mental process myself – to draw borders between a woman's role as a mother with her role as an activist and feminist. As a child, I identified with the children in the film; consequently, the children's neglecting mother became, for me, a figure against which I formed my own identity as a future “good woman.” I saw that Jane and Michael felt alienated by their mother, and so I decided that in order to be a good mother, I could not be a woman interested in pursuing women's rights issues. Thus, my first conception of a suffragette was as a child-fearing, self-serving woman, an impression that likely contributed to my own delayed acceptance of my feminist side. Although Mrs. Banks' militant suffragette was not the primary focus of the film in which she was contextualized (and although she represented the British suffrage movement), her role is one that several generations of Americans would likely remember well, probably well enough to have internalized it as I did.

Although Mrs. Banks may be the first representation of a female suffragist that American children were and are introduced to, representations of American female suffragists have

appeared sporadically throughout film history in the United States. Since narrative film gained popularity in the early twentieth century, the female suffragist has appeared, either as a primary character or a supporting character, in American films of nearly every decade since. I still find it remarkable that a figure with such a relatively brief existence in history has cameoed unexpectedly across American cinema for decades; but, perhaps it is the reoccurrence of one particular theme in these films with suffragists that makes their reappearances make more sense, both in past decades and in our current one.

These films with female suffragists seem to be subtly proposing one common question: does American film believe that a woman can be both an advocate of the rights of her sex and a domestic caretaker? Films featuring suffragist or suffragette figures attempt to reconcile this question, both with fictional suffrage-fighting characters and with figures based on real-life, but each representation consistently fabricates a clear dividing line between family advocate and female activist. Regardless of her late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century existence in American culture, the female suffragist has always found a unique domestic battleground in film and media.

Purpose

Although much scholarship has been published on the female suffragist's place in film in her contemporary time in history, on the early suffrage films as a genre, and on more contemporary film representations of those early twentieth-century fighters for women's suffrage, there has yet to be surveying project. The American woman suffragist is a figure that, despite her relatively short-lived existence in history, has remained a small, yet distinct source of interest in film sporadically over the last ten decades. Since this source of interest has usually

been placed in a precarious position where she must choose either to be a “good” domestic figure or an advocate for her cause, an investigation of the commonalities among the films in question is worth attempting.

This study examines several representative films from across the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, all of which depict this category of woman activist in a variety of ways. By doing so, it seeks to answer these questions:

- 1) How are women suffragists represented as potential domestic figures in these films, and how do they react to the role assigned or expected of them?
- 2) What choices about their present or future role as a domestic figure do these female suffrage fighters make in these films, and how do the films themselves rhetorically represent these figures as situated in the domestic sphere?
- 3) Ultimately, how can the relationships between how women are represented in these films provide a larger portrait of how female activists as a whole are represented in the context of rhetorical motherhood in other films?

Female suffragists in the United States, arguably the “first” feminists, faced the criticism that their activism would only tear apart their families and rob them of their femininity, a criticism that has only been echoed again and again in the one hundred years since the suffrage cause was thriving in America. These films suggest that American cinema is rarely able to naturally pair female activism in this suffrage form with motherhood. This pairing, or lack thereof, is occasionally the result of the individual film’s time period, but the overall inability to unite the two paralleling purposes in film implies that American cinema has been and still remains unable to pronounce female activism and motherhood as cohabitating roles.

Research Context

As mentioned, suffrage-related films are not a new area of research; in fact, much scholarship has been done to examine suffrage films as a genre, in addition to scholarship that examines individual films or individual time periods. Kay Sloan, author of *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* and other scholarly articles about sexual warfare in cinema among others, addressed the silent suffrage films as a genre while discussing their place in the canon of social problem films in that period. Martin Norden also addressed the early twentieth-century suffrage films as a genre, acknowledging its short-lived life and admitting that “mainstream filmmakers have never been known for resisting the temptation to exploit current social phenomena in their works” (172). This fad-like genre only lasted until 1920 when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, but the figure of the female suffragist persisted in American film and, consequently, in scholarship written about it. However, scholarship about post-suffrage films has tended to discuss individual films rather than a collection of suffrage films over the years.

Since the “suffrage film” genre ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, a discussion of suffrage-related films as a whole has not been completed with any films released in most of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Aside from film reviews, little has been published on more modern films featuring suffragists at all, with the exception of Kristy Maddux’s “Winning the Right to Vote in 2004: *Iron Jawed Angels* and the Retrospective Framing of Feminism,” a discussion of third wave feminism and its use and representation in the film. Much scholarship has also been written on *Mary Poppins* and its American cultural context; however, a small percentage of that discussion relates specifically to Mrs. Bank’s proud

suffragette fight itself. This scattered and less than cohesive genre of twentieth and twenty-first American women's suffrage films may seem unworthy of collective analysis, but, as Beyoncé has already reminded us, modern American culture could use some answers to questions posed by these fictional and historical cinematic women. This blank space in scholarship is a space that merits discussion.

Theoretical Overview

In order to answer the questions I have proposed, I intend to employ these three different categories of discourse. This project is rather interdisciplinary, and as such it requires analysis and language used in different discourse communities. Rather than explain the overlap I see in the work that this thesis is doing, I present a Venn diagram to demonstrate how I see these different voices working to assist my own arguments in this discussion:

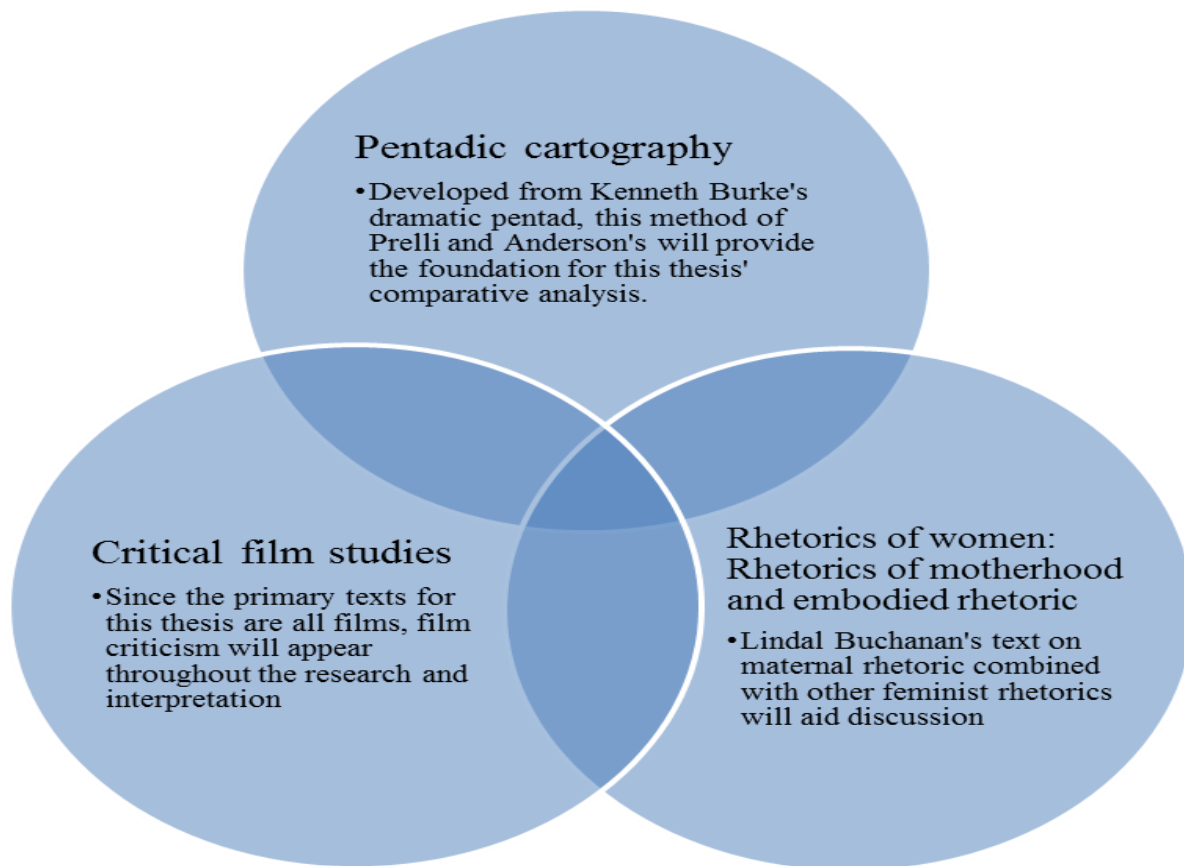


Figure 1. Theoretical Overview

Starting from the bottom left, critical film studies set the basic foundation for this project. Although this study would not be necessarily classified as a film studies work, it still uses the

same foundational texts for its analysis. This study takes a primarily cultural approach to the analysis of these films because before the films are put under other points of analysis, they must first be understood within the context they were created, both in the narrative itself and around the film's productions. A brief overview of each film with its historical and cultural context will set the foundation for further analysis in this study.

Next, pentadic cartography will serve as the secondary point of analysis. Each individual film will be visually mapped separately using Prelli and Anderson's theory. This theory, which seeks to read motivations at work in a situation in terms of each other, seeks to expose ambiguities among factors, hoping to shed light on why certain critical points of discussion in a certain context remain undefined. The theory stemmed from Burke's original work with the dramatistic pentad in *A Grammar of Motives*, and it will be used here in this project to break apart each film into five elements used for discussion.

Finally, after each film has been mapped, a discussion of maternal rhetorics and embodied rhetorics will analyze the ambiguities found through pentadic cartography and will ultimately offer an answer to the questions posed earlier in this chapter. This final step in analysis seeks to reconcile and explain the issues raised in these films and explore not only what they projected about gender in American culture surrounding their specific release dates, but also about what the evolution of the suffrage figure has to say about American gender culture in the 2010s.

However, one category that is not represented in this diagram (but that still remains irreplaceable and undeniable to this project) is history. Although film studies tend to encourage an open discussion of historical context, historical studies itself is just an implied category of

analysis here. Discussion of the films in question requires an investment in the history surrounding the events (both historic and fictional) so that the significance of some moves by the filmmakers and characters in question can be explained adequately. As such, one distinction in language that I use in this thesis is the result of historical research. All films used for this project are American ones, but not all of them take place in the United States; two of them are set in Britain. As such, I will use the term “suffragist” or “female suffragist” when discussing figures in film representations of the American suffrage fight, but I will use the more common “suffragette” when discussing British activists. The reason for this distinction, as will be discussed more in depth later, is that the American activists stayed as far away from that British name as they could since the British suffragettes were making an unpopular image as militant protestors. American women wanted to make their campaign much more peaceful, and thus it would be inappropriate to use “suffragist” and “suffragette” interchangeably for the purpose of this project.

Organization

This paper is divided into the following sections:

- 1) Chapter 1: *Introduction* – This chapter provides an initial discussion of the paper and overview of its main points.
- 2) Chapter 2: *Historiography and Cultural Setting* – This chapter provides a brief overview of the suffrage movement in the United States of America, placing special focus on Alice Paul and her influence on the movement. The second chapter also provides some historical context to the history of early film and its representations of women prior to the earliest suffrage films. Additionally, it discusses a cultural history

of the woman's expected place in American society, including the divide between the public and private spheres and the "cult of true womanhood," demonstrating how these nineteenth-century influences left their traces throughout early film. After establishing the historical and cultural context surrounding the time period in question, the chapter situates each of the films chosen for this thesis in their own cultural and historical context.

- 3) Chapter 3: *Setting the Stage: Mapping the Cinematic Suffragists through Pentadic Cartography* – This chapter begins by discussing Kenneth Burke's dramatisic pentad and Anderson and Prelli's use of pentadic cartography, later introducing a new way to use it through visual representation and written explanation. This section seeks to break down each film analyzed and demonstrate, through the use of visual "mapping," how similar or dissimilar these suffrage-inspired films are to each other.
- 4) Chapter 4: *Pitting One Against "the Other": Activism versus Motherhood* – In this chapter, I explore motherhood's rhetorical power as it conflicts with female activism in film, providing some further insights into unvoiced rhetoric of maternal activism existing there.
- 5) Chapter 5: *Conclusion and Implications* – This chapter offers some final thoughts about the research, its purpose, and its usefulness, contextualizing the study both personally and publically.

CHAPTER II

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND CULTURAL SETTING

As implied in the theoretical overview section, historical study is a foundation of this project; without historical awareness, many of the historical events that are depicted in various films used for this thesis would lack accurate interpretation. Similarly, many of the films used for this thesis are rather rare and are probably very unfamiliar for most readers, so a brief overview and summary of important plot points will be useful for further discussion later in the project. In this section, I intend to provide context for historical events surrounding the suffrage movement in the United States, briefly introduce cultural movements leading up to the women's suffrage point in American history, give a small overview to film history in this time period and how suffragists used film, and, finally, to give an introduction to each of the five films used for this project. This context should "set the stage," so to speak, for the later rhetorical interpretation used in later chapters.

Relative Historical Setting

In order to provide enough historical context to frame the suffrage movement, I have chosen to focus specifically on Alice Paul, as her particular role in the American women's suffrage movement is characterized in two of the film examples chosen for this thesis. Alice Paul truly transformed the end of the women's suffrage movement and with her defiant, peaceful protests, she was an integral part to the final passing of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Alice Paul

Although most of the films used in this study depict fictional characters created for or interpreted by these cinematic representations, some of these creations utilize real-life figures, namely Alice Paul, the founder of the National Women's Party.

Alice Paul, born in Pennsylvania in 1885 to William and Tacy Paul, was raised in somewhat unusual circumstances for her time period. Her parents, devout Quakers, “believed deeply in gender equality” and expected their strong eldest child, Alice Stokes Paul, to lead her three younger siblings with a respectable example (Lunardini 3). In fact, since all of her close family friends and associates were devout Quakers like her family, Alice Paul grew up accepting that men and women were equal as a given, not a privilege. Her family's faith and practices endorsed the Quaker tenet that all people are searching for an “inner light” to illuminate the path to a “better society” (2), an upbringing that automatically distinguished Paul from her contemporary female activists. Of course, the women's suffrage movement in the United States was in full swing during Paul's early years as well; as a child, Paul attended suffrage meetings with her mother, and she determinately lived to exceed her father's already confident expectations of her. When it came time for her to attend college, Paul attended Swarthmore – noting with pride that the male to female ratio of the school was roughly even – and declared a major in, of all subjects, science (4). Although Paul excelled in English literature, Latin, and other subjects deemed “feminine” in that time period, she chose science and mathematics not because she intended to enter a career in these fields, but instead because she knew little of those fields. Paul's philosophy was that “there was little to be gained from redoing something someone else has done” (4), a perspective that only proves more and more truthful upon an examination of

her life. Towards the end of her undergraduate career, Paul discovered political science and economics courses, and there she discovered her vocation. After graduating from college, Paul pursued a degree in social work through a program in New York begun by Jane Addams herself, but she knew that social work was not her ultimate path.

In Zahniser and Fry's recent *Alice Paul* biography, the authors paint Alice Paul as a woman who came of age in "dynamic" times (3). Her growth into a woman and citizen of the world occurred at a moment in Western history when women were harnessing political power in a way that they had not before. While being educated at Oxford in England, Paul involved herself with the British women's suffrage movement, learning from Emmeline Pankhurst, Britain's most memorable suffragette, herself. It seems that Paul took some of Pankhurst's bolder, more militant strategies with her back across the Atlantic. Her journey back to the States and quick involvement in the American women's suffrage movement took NAWSA (National American Women's Suffrage Association) leaders by surprise, as she began to insist upon more attention-getting tactics for the movement such as parades and picketing. Division with Carrie Chapman Catt and other older suffragists led Alice Paul to start her own suffrage party, the National Women's Party. Her charm won over her fellow suffragists, and her determination to succeed led her to adopt drastic measures in drastic situations. Paul is most remembered for her hunger striking when she and other NWP members were imprisoned under a bogus "obstructing traffic" charge (17). Her determination and ceaseless efforts, despite World War I taking most of Americans' attention in the mid 1910s, ultimately resulted in the United States adopting women's suffrage officially in 1920.

Cultural Setting behind the Suffrage Movement

Although the Nineteenth Amendment was passed in 1920, the quest for American women's suffrage began decades earlier, and this fight was situated in a societal context hell-bent on dissuading it. The "cult of domesticity," or, as it was also known, the "cult of true womanhood" was flourishing among middle-to-upper-class American women in the late nineteenth century; consequently, the culture prescribed women the unbreakable role of angelic housekeeper. The rise of this societal movement (approximately 1787-1840), which overlapped almost perfectly with the rise of the fight for universal white male suffrage, set a new foundation for the logic behind American citizenship (McHugh 39). What it meant to be a man began being defined as strictly what a woman was not. A set of extremes began to form, and men and women lived with a solid brick wall separating their gender identities. The cult of domesticity was formed as universal white male suffrage was achieved – for, the gendered private and public spheres were formed in opposition to each other¹.

While the right to vote initially rested solely with property owners – meaning that widowed women had the opportunity to vote if they inherited property – the rise of universal white male suffrage indicated that, undeniably, the man's world would be a place of political discussion while the woman's place would remain the domestic sphere. In fact, this created binary only intensified the fact that this "true womanhood" had, as Kathleen Anne McHugh describes in *American Domesticity*, "also formulated and promoted gender as *the* representationally dominant social difference at a time in U.S. history when the construction of

¹ See McHugh for further information about this shift. It's likely that the development of this binary also stemmed from the shift from an agrarian, rural lifestyle in which men and women worked alongside each other to an urban lifestyle in which men worked and women stayed home.

racial difference had greatly intensified owing to increasing social conflict over slavery” (36). By this point, the cult of domesticity had become quite popular in nineteenth-century America with women as well as men, and it remained firmly in place as the early women suffragists like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton struck the suffrage movement into being.

Despite the fact that motherhood and wifehood occupied the only available positions for middle-to-upperclass women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some women like Susan B. Anthony never conformed to those standards. Historian Jeanne Boydston observes that the cult of true womanhood “did not operate identically in all women’s lives,” offering the evidence of Susan B. Anthony’s own experience as an unmarried, childless, and self-sufficient woman whose only experience caring for children was when she was required to watch Stanton’s brood while Stanton wrote letters for the suffrage cause (Boydston). Although the collective white and wealthy female domestic identity did not speak for all American women, the rhetorical construct of “true” womanhood permeated American culture, forming perceptions of the private and public spheres.

But this concept of motherhood dominated American culture in the nineteenth century, and it was seen as the culmination of all a woman could amount to be – motherhood earned a PhD in woman, so to speak. Lindal Buchanan, author of *Rhetorics of Motherhood*, discusses the depth to which the role of mother permeated each part of an American woman’s life by reminding readers that

By the nineteenth century, motherhood had become the pinnacle of feminine accomplishment: The mother stood at the apex and was followed (in terms of significance) by the maiden, eagerly awaiting marriage and family; the mother and

maiden were, in turn, trailed by the spinster, a pitiful figure lacking the home, husband, and children required for social consequence... The code dictated that all women should crave motherhood and become mothers; those who failed to desire maternity, to become mothers, or to “manifest the qualities required by mothering” were regarded as “deviant or deficient.” (18-19)

This sort of woman, the “angel in the house,” as Coventry Patmore called her, was devoted to her children and submissive to her husband; she was domesticity, gentleness, spirituality, and soft support. She was not necessarily intelligent, and she was definitely not interested in any politics or other male-dominated fields. She depended upon her husband and children for her livelihood, her purpose, her social presence, and her happiness. Yet, those tricky women desperately campaigning for the right to vote managed to overturn – or at least complicate – this ideal and create what was then and now called the “New Woman.”

Many scholars cite the birth of the New Woman in America with suffrage success in 1920, claiming that her identity becoming solidified by 1930. This woman legally maintained full voting rights as a citizen, but her identity as a social entity was becoming much more than that. She was beginning to enter a voice in the political mainstream, but she was also becoming more comfortable with men and she was assimilating into a previously all-male part of society. Aside from breaking into the public sphere, the New Woman was now sexually liberated and wanted an egalitarian marriage, desiring an “erotic” companionship with the men in their lives (Trigg 3); gone were the days that women craved a loveless marriage with loveless children just for the promise of financial security and a life purpose. These New Women “worked for wages...and desired autonomy and self-understanding” (3), and their ““passionless”” marriages

were now a topic of discussion, allowing an open and candid discussion of a woman's sex drive to occur – for the first time since before the conservative Victorian era – on a social level. In short, the average young woman in the United States may have seemed a complete foreigner to young women living in America just twenty years earlier. If it is not possible to completely assign credit for this transformation to the suffrage movement, an amendment to the Constitution giving women more political power than they had ever been given before must bear much of the responsibility. Women in the United States between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries experienced the most tumultuous transformation in their social, cultural, and political roles of any other generation in American history, and readers of this project must especially consider it as contextualized in the center of this transformation.

A Brief Historical and Cultural Introduction to Early Film

With the advent of film production, the private sphere lost much of its seclusion. Even the earliest films, such as the Lumiere brothers' *Le repas du bebe*, depicted scenes of domestic life; therefore, because these domestic scenes were advertised in so public a forum as the theatre, film slowly began to turn the private sphere into a spectacle. These early films lacked a narrative that twenty-first century viewers would consider captivating, but they inadvertently transformed the commonplace and routine task of housekeeping into entertainment to be consumed for pleasure (McHugh 83). However, once the very earliest films (late 1890s to early 1900s) had invested enough fascination with domestic practices on screen, filmmakers and the culture to which they appealed began to grapple with how women, as a category, should be depicted on the screen.

Victorian notions of private and public spheres found conflict in cinema. The old notion of women's visibility wrestled with the voyeurism that the movies presented, resulting in a collision between entertainment and, as McHugh discusses, "morally appropriate femininity" (95). Early film directors such as D. W. Griffith depicted women against designated "morally appropriate" backgrounds such as homes, with children, or performing household tasks. Regardless of "feminine" background, the women in early romantic dramas were constantly busy with work suiting their sphere, while "idle" women (or, women not occupied with domestic work within the home) came to represent feminine "evil" characters (95). This conflict between the public and private sphere came to both aid and abet the suffrage cause when both suffragists and their anti-suffrage opponents battled in the silent cinema.

Once film became a popular medium for entertainment and news, some groups became using this new cinematic genre to create their own propaganda. In the 1910s, filmmakers rapidly churned out movies due to the growth of the film industry, allowing films advocating against or in favor of social and political causes to be churned out by the dozens. Suffrage-related films, due to the mocking physical comedy that anti-suffragists could easily use to their benefit in the silent cinema, were especially popular. Although the films lacked sound, their visual representations of women suffragists needed no spoken explanation. The filmmakers often depicted these women in the day's common stereotype² as "mannish, flat-fronted, bottom-heavy spinsters" (Hynes, "Has Margaret Become"), implying that a woman loses all that makes her female once she becomes "victim" of the suffrage movement. Such anti-suffrage films were

² Examples of such films will be addressed later in this chapter.

made by many well-known filmmakers of the time, and some arguments have been made that Charlie Chaplin contributed as an actor.³

However, as Maher argues in *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood*, suffragists were among the first “politically motivated women from outside the entertainment industry [who] also came to the studios hoping to make films to further their causes” (66). These American female suffragists did not allow the cinematic satire depicting them to remain unaddressed, creating their own pro-suffrage film features such as 1912’s *Suffrage and the Man*, created by the Women’s Political Union in conjunction with the Éclair Company (Maher 66) and the ground-shaking social problem film, *Votes for Women*. These films sometimes featured a sweeping introduction by a well-known suffragist⁴ before entering into a narrative story painting an image of a world where women could actively participate in both the private and the public spheres and contribute to both. A war, then, was waged between pro- and antisuffragists on the silver screen during the teens and twenties. Suffragists took to the medium themselves to make of it what they could and seek to promote their cause. Even today, films produced and created entirely by women are a shocking rarity; therefore, an entirely female-created piece of cinema during these times was even more of an impressive achievement. However, even though these activist women were able to “[oversee] all aspects of the production” (Rosen 33), they also recognized the delicacy with which they must make cinematic choices within their cultural context. The female suffragists “made sure that attractive women played leading roles, and subversively enhanced their feminist

³ For more information, see 1914’s *A Busy Day* and related scholarship.

⁴ For further examples of this type of narrative propaganda film introduction, see Emmeline Pankhurst’s appearance in *What 80 Million Women Want* (1913) and the following review: Lindsey, Shelley Stamp. “Eighty Million Women Want—?: Women’s Suffrage, Female Viewers and the Body Politic.” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 16.1 (1998): 1-22. Print.

messages by setting them within lively ‘acceptable’ stories of love and marriage” (33).

Regardless of the message about female independence that their suffrage proclamation was sending, the filmmakers remembered that they must set their plea rhetorically within the ready domestic framework already normalized in their society. A woman may vote, but she must use that power within the confines of heterosexual, monogamous affection and the institutions of marriage and family. Although these messages might seem counterproductive to modern readers and viewers, Marjorie Rosen offers this insight in *Popcorn Venus* to better explain the significance of this genre:

The frivolous tone of the majority of suffrage films made in America is, however, the strongest comment on how the nation in the years 1910-1914 viewed the birth of autonomous woman. Indeed, it took a world war to bring about a climate in which women might assert themselves as useful, productive citizens. (34)

Many of the films discussed in this thesis comment on the seeming insensitivity of the suffrage movement to have continued throughout World War I, yet without its continuance, the representation of women in film might not have changed so much in the years following the war.

Rosen poses the question: “How would this new medium...manipulate the image of emerging womankind? Could it preserve, against the tide of feminine opinion, man’s cherished eternal girl-child?” (Rosen 36). That eternal girl-child could only be preserved for so long, for the flapper figure soon overtook the screen, and with it, representations of “serious” women. The Roaring Twenties brought with it ultimate transformations of women on the screen. Gone – for now, at least – were the days in which women’s private spheres were hidden from the silver

screen. The figure of the flapper became the primary female representation in cinema, and many Americans blamed suffrage success for the root of these new scandalous representations.

Women were no longer mere cinematic arm candy for the masculine men they accompanied. Rosen comments on this perspective in *Popcorn Venus* when she discusses the evolving preferences men generally had for women:

Since ornamental women enhanced their men's masculinity, naturally independent ones detracted from it. Regarded as subtly emasculating, they were cautioned about the dangers of becoming masculine themselves...Other qualities [males] preferred, in descending order, were: love, good disposition, sympathy, Christianity, common sense, intelligence, and taste in dress. If this listing reads like an ad for a private-duty nurse or a housekeeper, it is no coincidence. (Rosen 18)

Women in cinema, figures of a very different woman than the "ornamental" one described above, were slowly changing the way that women in the private sphere were regarded. In the decade following the constitutional suffrage success, women were claiming their independence both on screen and in the domestic sphere.

Women saw their identities evolving, and the "flapper appeared on the scene when career women were becoming disenchanted with their prospects," provoking "feminists, having won the suffrage, [to become] diffused" (Higashi 130). However, as Higashi writes in *Virgins, Vamps, and Flappers*, "the flapper did not have much in common with either the suffragist or the professional woman who belonged to a previous age when effort on behalf of a cause counted for something" (131). This figure was not interested in reform, political change, or breaking open career paths for women in America; instead, she was fascinated with lighter social affairs.

Consequently, the cult of domesticity enveloped her again, making this brief account of women in early cinema a rather cyclical one. Examining this very familiar rise and fall of liberalism and conservatism reminds us that women in cinema have always been facing, as Rosen reminds us, a Popcorn Venus – a distortion of cultural ideals, ultimately resulting in a hybrid figure that may not always represent the truth. Later in this project, I demonstrate that Rosen's observations are especially true, as liberal and conservative values have continued to clash over the same historical figure and her rhetorical motherhood in American cinema.

Filmography

In order to demonstrate the commonalities among films depicting female suffragists as main characters in America, I have chosen the following films as representatives. The scope has been narrowed to introduce primarily characters whose motherhood role or prospective motherhood roles have been challenged within the film; however, a short silent film comedy depicting a contemporary stereotype of female activism in the day has been included for context.

A Suffragette in Spite of Himself (1912), directed by Bannister Merwin.



Figure 2. Unintentional Male Suffragette

This eight minute short film from the Thomas A. Edison Inc. production company takes place on the other side of the Atlantic and it depicts British suffragettes, even though it was a film made for American viewers by an American company and American director. Many satirical films were made in this time period, but this film was and is unique, both in film history and in this thesis research, because it focuses on the male suffrage opponent and not on the female suffrage fighters themselves (Simmon 64). The brief narrative begins by depicting an English gentleman, staunchly opposed to women's suffrage, sitting at his breakfast table and complaining about newspaper headlines he sees describing victorious suffragette events. This complaining amuses his maid, a steadfast suffragette, but it concerns his wife. As the English gentleman prepares to go about his daily business, he passes two boys on the street corner who, as a joke, fasten a "VOTES FOR WOMEN" sign from a nearby light post to the back of his coat. The suffrage-opposing gentleman fails to recognize the joke played on him, but plenty of other

onlookers spot the conspicuous sign on his back. He quickly becomes the center of some “real” suffragettes’ attention, and after he accidentally crashes a protest and appears to be its most ardent contributor, he is arrested for his contributions and fought by anti-suffrage men, much to the excitement of his new unintentional fan base.

This satire is certainly not meant to praise the suffrage movement – far from it. The “new suffragette” is appalled and embarrassed to have been mistaken for a women’s suffrage supporter, and the film’s title even gives away some of the fuel behind his anger. The term “suffragette,” a term never used in the American suffrage fight, was first coined in a British newspaper in 1906 (Simmon 65), and it goes without saying that such a feminine suffix would have been considered emasculating if used to describe men. This English gentleman, this undeliberate ““suffragette in trousers”” (65), finds no happy ending in being mistaken for a suffragette; however, other men in the time did exist.

““Suffragettes in trousers”” were not completely uncommon in this time period, but it is worth noting that a significant decision within the British suffrage movement occurred during this year. In May 1912 (several months prior to the shooting and release of this film), the Women’s Social and Political Union decided to exclude men from membership, a choice that would have been very fresh in the memory of *A Suffragette in Spite of Himself*’s audience (Simmon 64-65). Yet, the film implies that suffragettes were still overjoyed to receive support from helpful men, despite their recent vote to exclude men from their unionized ranks. In fact, suffragettes in this film are portrayed as a vicious, faceless rabble, not as individual activists or even as women in general. The film separates women from their individual selves and implies their dependence on men, making this suffrage film one that removes female suffragists from not

just the title of “mother” or “maternal caretaker” but also of “woman.” In other words, this short film reduces suffragettes to merely the faceless “other.”

The Shocking Miss Pilgrim (1947), directed by George Seaton.



Figure 3. Miss Cynthia Pilgrim

Betty Grable starred in this film, situated in Boston in the late nineteenth century, which placed a young woman’s prospective role in the domestic sphere against her ability to have active participation in the quest for national women’s suffrage. This Miss Pilgrim gains a position as a secretary for a Boston firm, falls in love with both her manager and the suffrage movement, and eventually finds herself able to choose *both* activism and a role in the domestic sphere. The film pits woman against man; yet, it ultimately leads to an equally-happy conclusion.

What makes this film such an interesting example for this research is that it emerges from a period in cinematic history known as the “Golden Age” of Hollywood, and it, overall, follows a narrative pattern similar to the “Classical Hollywood Cinema” standards. Several common plot elements reside in the typical “Classical Hollywood Cinema” film: a clearly defined male

protagonist, a (usually romantic) female double, a clearly defined antagonist, a conflict that is clearly resolved by the end of the film, and a linear plot. Furthermore, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* follows all of these standards without question, save for one element. In this film, the clearly defined protagonist, Miss Cynthia Pilgrim, is female; her romantic double is male. This reversal triggers a true matriarchy throughout the film. In each of the film's four primary locations (the office in Boston, the boarding house, the suffrage rally, and the Pritchard's grand house), a woman becomes the figure of dominant power over her environment. Even in the office, a place only populated by men, Miss Pilgrim's charm and kindness sways her stone-hearted and prejudiced colleagues and unofficially takes the place of authority in her workplace.

If this film reverses the conventions of Classical Hollywood Cinema, what could have caused that reversal? Considering this film in its American historical context could answer this question. *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* was released in 1947, only two years after the end of World War II, a coincidence that is not at all insignificant. During the war years, as is common knowledge, women poured into the workforce, replacing the men called away to battle in Europe. Once the men returned from their wartime duties, they sought to reclaim their jobs from women; women, then, were expected to return to their domestic sphere. Yet, many women had found a new kind of fulfillment in the workplace and refused to recognize what mainstream society expected them to do. Consequently, the figure of the American female suffragist returns in *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, a representation of a woman's ability to balance work, domestic responsibilities, and activism (all with the eventual support of her romantic male partner).

Mary Poppins (1964), directed by Robert Stevenson.



Figure 4. Mrs. Winifred Banks

Although this film depicts a British mother involved in the British women's suffrage movement, it was created by an American company, Walt Disney Studios, for a primarily American audience, becoming a childhood staple for generations of American children. Several generations of Americans remember this film as the story of two well-to-do British children who infuriate their nannies because they feel neglected and unloved by their parents, only to find salvation in the form of magical salvation-nanny, Mary Poppins. Mary Poppins brings the children's father back to the family, serving for the sake of the film as the children's mother figure in place. Consequently, it is easy to forget that the children were rebelling against their nannies in response to more than one parent's neglect. The children *do* have a mother, even though her character in the film is less highlighted than their father's and shows much less transformation and progression. It seems, from the way that Mrs. Banks' character is used in the

film, that her role is partially to be a foil for Mary Poppins' character. If Mary Poppins is the nurturing mother figure who brings the family together, what does that make Mrs. Banks? And, what exactly is keeping Mrs. Banks from being the attentive mother she is expected to be?

In this film, fictional suffragette mother Mrs. Banks attends suffrage rallies and participates fully in suffragette functions in Edwardian England, remaining inattentive to her children in the process. Although the primary narrative focus of the story involves reconciling Mr. Banks to his role as father, little is done within the narrative to reconcile the mother to her children, reiterating a dichotomy between motherhood and feminist activism. Again, if Mary Poppins is the ultimate mother role in the film does that make Mrs. Banks the anti-mother? The film seems to suggest that her activism is what keeps her from setting her priorities in the "correct" order. Unlike *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, this film seems to make the case that women cannot, actually, have both motherhood and activism.

Both *Mary Poppins* and *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* bookend the 1950s, the conservative middle decade of twentieth-century American culture; thus, each one represents how quickly culture in America can change. By the time the *Mary Poppins* entered the film scene, "good" female domestic figures were talking back against the progressive counterculture movement with the emergence of characters like Mary Poppins, Maria von Trapp, and Eliza Doolittle (notice, all musicals).⁵ In contrast, American culture was being more radical in a way that was irreparably altering what had previously been in place (especially with regard to gender roles), and the film

⁵ For more insight into Mary Poppins and 1960s gender negotiations in popular culture, see Anne McLeer's "Practical Perfection? The Nanny Negotiates Gender, Class, and Family Contradictions in 1960s Popular Culture" (2002).

scene was conflicted with how to handle that change. Marjorie Rosen addresses that changing landscape with the observation that

The most astonishing aspect of Hollywood in the mid-sixties was its total inability to reflect the tapestry of the youth culture – and perhaps, also, its *unwillingness* to do so...the industry opted out of making meaningful contributions in interpreting the role of the new young woman, choosing instead the safe, sweet, familiar way of *Mary Poppins* (1964), *The Sound of Music* (1965), and *My Fair Lady* (1964). (Rosen 319)

Where *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* was using its progressive female character to reflect women's post-War career and family aspirations, *Mary Poppins* used Mrs. Banks as a foil to the “safe, sweet, familiar” title character to demonstrate the inappropriateness of prioritizing public concerns over family.

This film in particular presents an interesting counter to others discussed in this thesis in that Mrs. Banks is (and has been) likely the earliest representation of suffragists absorbed by American children, and she is thus the character that many comparisons will reference. The film choice to make this character thrive on seemingly thoughtless devotion to the cause (over her children) makes this character a special case for discussion.

Iron-Jawed Angels (2004), directed by Katja von Garnier.



Figure 5. Alice Paul (Hilary Swank)

Directed by German film director Katja von Garnier, this HBO feature film reframed third wave feminism within the context of the American national women's suffrage movement's final years. Filled with non-diegetic contemporary pop music, modern dialogue, and other contemporary quirks, this film attempts to revitalize Alice Paul and Lucy Burns' quest for suffrage by preserving the fervor of the suffrage movement while using music and dialogue to make the story seem bolder and more accessible for millennial viewers. The film chronicles, primarily, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns' quest to achieve an amendment to the Constitution preserving women's suffrage. The film begins in 1912 with Paul and Burns' first trip to meet NAWSA leaders and ends in 1920 with the passage of the amendment. In this passage of time, Paul leads national campaigns, organizes White House peaceful protests and attention-getting

parades, gets arrested for obstructing traffic, goes on a hunger strike and is force-fed in prison, and...falls in love? One of these actions seems unlike the other.

In the film, real-life Alice Paul faces a difficult (but fictional) romantic decision. She finds herself falling in love with a fictional widower and cartoonist for *The Washington Post*; however, if she falls in love with him, she must become a mother to his young son. The creation of this fictional character with a son presents a complex twist to the representation of suffragist characters in the film. Very little at all is known about Alice Paul's intimate relationships, so it seems confusing – well, it's Hollywood, so perhaps not that confusing – that the filmmakers would insert a fictional romantic relationship into the plot. However, what is worthy of noting is that the fictional relationship is not a mere heterosexual love plot device; this plot device has a motherless child. In the film, Paul is pushed to make a choice. In her first encounter with her potential love interest's child at a restaurant meeting, Paul feels out of place and is unsure what to do when faced with this sort of company. The company of children is clearly depicted as being an undesired one for Paul, and the prospect of being motherly to this child seems to be far away from Paul's options, desires, and perhaps even abilities. Although the choice is never sharply defined in the film, it is implied that Paul's relationship with Patrick Dempsey's character is one that will remain mere friendship,⁶ perhaps partially because of the additional human in the equation. By inserting this fictional predicament and decision into the true-to-history plot, the filmmakers comment on a suffragist's (in)ability to be happily both a domestic figure and an activist for women's rights. Why insert a fictional predicament into a historical film? It seems a

⁶ Although, the film does comment more on Paul's sexuality than many other sources ever deign to do by including a montaged scene flitting back and forth between Paul and her love interest spending happy days together and Paul in an unexpected bathtub masturbation scene.

strange choice to make, but then again, the choice offers some ambiguous and critical points of discussion.

“Bad Romance: Women’s Suffrage” (2012), directed by Tim Alden Grant.



Figure 6. Alice Paul (SOOMO Publishing)

This final film sample is a parody of a Lady Gaga music video, both in lyric and in theme. A brief overview of “Bad Romance: Women’s Suffrage” will make more sense with an introduction to the original Gaga video. The song and its video, which debuted on YouTube in 2009, portrays a powerful woman who both leads others and exploits her own sexuality on her own terms. Lady Gaga, known for harnessing her sexuality as a source of power over men in her music and her music videos, acts as a creator (by overseeing the birth of her little “monsters” at the beginning of the music video), a victim of oppression (by being physically stripped and force fed), and a sexual destroyer (by literally lighting the room and her sexual partner on fire when she unveils her body) (Gaga). The movements in the film are sharp, abstract, and rhythmic, attempting to simulate “monster”-like motions, with Gaga leading the way. Like many fandoms,

Lady Gaga's fans have a name for themselves: "Little Monsters." Gaga herself serves as their "Mother Monster," making the "Bad Romance" music video appropriate fodder for the Alice Paul parody used for this project. Moreover, the decision to use this particular song and video for the suffrage parody could not have been a more suitable one; the women who paved the way for political equality also paved the way for all women in the future who would step gracefully out of their prescribed culturally-gendered boundaries, Lady Gaga being a very fitting example. In fact, the music video makes the visual argument that Alice Paul's message transcends time and unites generations, as will be explained later in this section.

Although not a feature length film, this most recent parody of pop singer Lady Gaga's hit single "Bad Romance" utilized the fierce and exotic overtones of the original music video and underscored Alice Paul's National Women's Party and its movement to suffrage with a similar empowered ferocity. This video short, produced by the educational company called Soomo, was intended to describe and express the final stages of the national women's suffrage movement in America. However, it was also an exploration of different women's reactions to the movement and participation in it, depicting scenes both public and private. Although the sole singer in the music video is the Alice Paul character, each individual (mostly women, but still including the occasional man) lip syncs to her voice, making the entire song seem unified. The various "singers" range from Alice Paul and other suffragists to older women in the kitchen, younger, angry women holding children, female movie stars, and to even the occasional male suffrage supporter. The emotions featured in the tone of this music video range, but the degree to which they are expressed does not; each figure in the video over-exaggerates her expressed emotion (be it determination, anger, fear, loyalty, or any other emotion) in order to accommodate the bold

and dramatic motions in the original Lady Gaga video, a directing choice that oddly seems to be perfect for the historical moment being interpreted by the cast and the song.

Again, the primary voice in this music video parody is intended to be Alice Paul's. The singer is pictured in a variety of different costumes and scenarios, from reenacting Paul's famous White House protest to her even more famous prison force-feeding. But, to further explain the significance of one voice "singing" for all characters, the one voice, one movement choice, implies that Paul's voice spoke for all women in her time. This choice is exceptionally notable at the end of the video when women wearing modern clothes strut front and center from behind the suffragists, indicating that the story told in the video is one that eternally supports American women from all decades since 1920. Several aspects and ages of a woman's life are featured in the video, including many examples that correlate directly to the woman's expected place in the domestic sphere. In one particular moment of the video, one that will receive further attention later in this thesis, an unnamed woman holding a small child faces the camera and sings "[We] just want our rights" before turning her head from both the child and the camera and singing "And nothing less" (Soomo). This minute physical motion (in addition to larger ones later in the video) begins to imply a view on activism and motherhood that, despite the one hundred years of film examined in this thesis, still remains prominent in modern American culture.

Conclusion

These films and media representations all depict women in and out of the domestic sphere. Some examine the choices that these women activists faced, and some created conflicts for real-life situations in order to argue a maternal perspective on the people already well-known in other roles. In this project, I will assess these films both in their cultural context and in the

context of historical accuracy so that I can offer observations about how depictions of female activists as mothers have and have not changed throughout film history. In doing so, I hope to propose some insight about what these representations mean for twenty-first century women who would identify as both feminists and mothers – how far has society *really* progressed since 1920, and what can cinema offer for these twenty-first century women?

CHAPTER III

SETTING THE STAGE: MAPPING THE SUFFRAGE FIGHTERS THROUGH PENTADIC CARTOGRAPHY

From contemporary films about women's suffrage in the 1910s to 2015's upcoming *Suffragette* starring Meryl Streep, Carrie Mulligan, and Helena Bonham Carter, this particular kind of female activist has been appealing to American audiences and American actors for decades. But, what about this person – isolated, as a singular figure, in history – has been interesting enough over the years to continue piquing the movie-going pleasure of American audiences? The female suffragist may be an isolated figure held in the confines of history books, but something about her struggles with politics and between the public and private spheres has continued to resonate in the hearts of millions, again and again. In order to answer this question, I will apply a well-known rhetorical framework, but with a slightly different twist.

Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad has been discussed and employed by scholars for decades, and it is an irreplaceable method of analysis. In *A Grammar of Motives*, published originally in 1943, Burke outlines a method of interpreting actions in order to find the ambiguities existing in a situation and expose them. He answers the seemingly simple question of "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (xv) with a discussion of five different key terms used for investigating the answer to this question: Act, Scene, Agency, Agent, and Purpose. Putting these terms to use in a given rhetorical situation and examining the relationships that they have with each other allows scholars to infer "how these various resources figure in actual statements about human motives" (xvi). The ratios between the five pentadic elements can yield answers to questions about human motivation, and thus, it is the

hope that these five elements can yield answers to questions about the relationships between the characters in each of the examined films in ways that no other methodology could.

However, the primary theoretical framework for this research is not Burke's dramatic pentad alone; its foundation is primarily found in a further application of the framework, pentadic cartography. Pentadic cartography, a method of analysis created by Floyd D. Anderson and Lawrence J. Prelli, allows even greater emphasis to be placed on the five pentadic terms and their relationships with each other. This useful approach allows a scholar to map the ambiguities in a text, catching a glimpse into the transformation possible once what is unclear in a text is understood. This cartographer, a "cartographer of motives" as Anderson and Prelli call her, must be able to "locate the featured term that coordinates transformation of one vocabulary into the terms of another at pivotal sites of ambiguity" (80). Reading one instance in terms of another allows the cartographer to diagram a text and interpret it with new eyes, making sense of what had previously been nonsensical. By analyzing the relationships between these films featuring female suffragists, I hope to understand how motherhood and activism has never been a resolved discussion in films where female suffrage is a theme. By employing Prelli and Anderson's use of pentadic cartography, we can better understand how the tensions created in these films have remained points of contention for viewers throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries.

Although pentadic cartography is a useful tool through which scholars can explore and come to new understandings of texts and the relationships between forces within them, this form of cartography seems to counter its name. This category of map-making requires no external visual element beside words on a page; yet, when using it for a surveying project like this one,

the use of a visual element seems nearly required in order to provide a solid analysis of how several different films interact together. In order to answer this conundrum, I sketched – using PhotoShop – visual representations of each film and used images to better represent the forces at work in each piece of visual rhetoric. Operating under the idea that the “Agent” in each film is the primary suffragist character, each suffragist is depicted as standing on a stage. In each picture, the Agent stands on a stage, representing the Purpose. The Scene, behind the Agent, is the backdrop of the stage. The Act is written on the curtains framing the stage, and the Agent holds the Agency in her hands (or on her body). The images are included before each film is discussed. In this chapter, I will break down each analyzed film into its pentadic elements and expose especially turbulent ratios occurring among the elements both within each film itself and among the films collectively. Through the use of this strategy, I hope to offer an explanation as to why conflicts emerge for women in American cinema between their roles as activist and mother.

A Suffragette in Spite of Himself

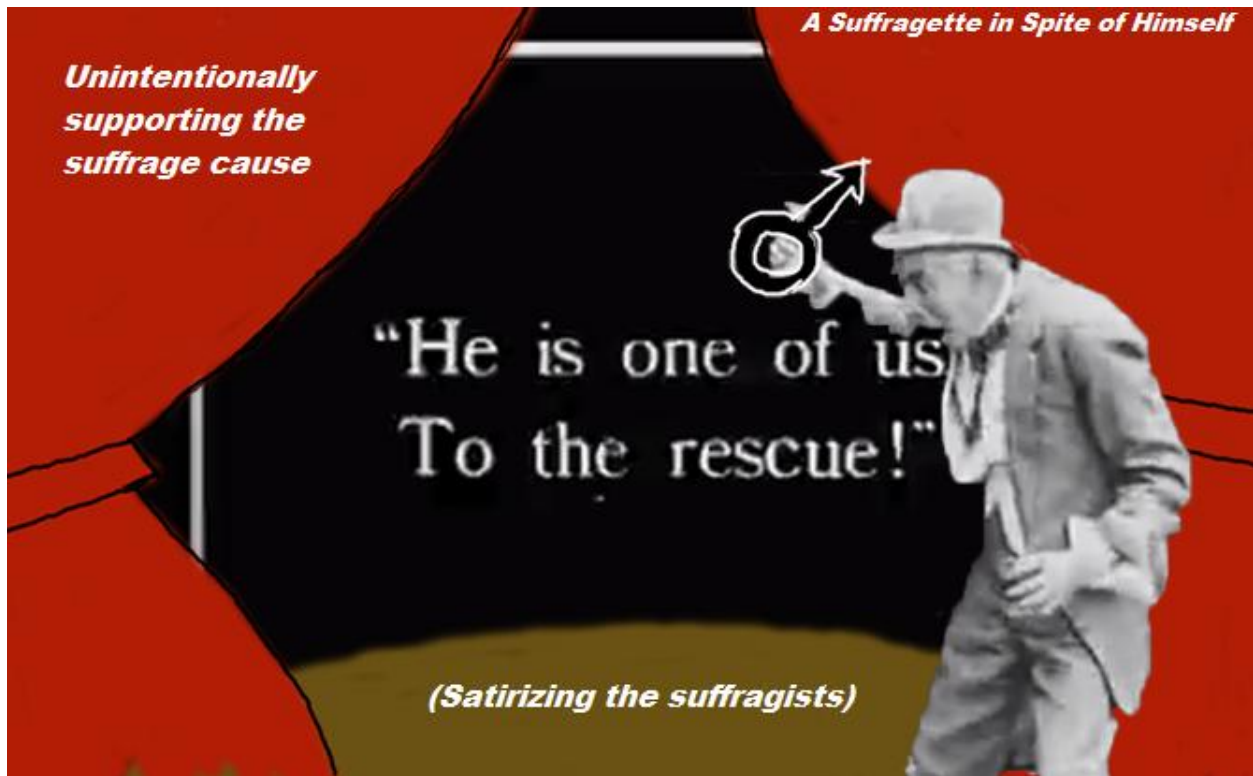


Figure 7. A Suffragette in Spite of Himself

As mentioned before in the historiography section of this project, this particular film was partially a response to the exclusion of men from the suffrage movement. However, the film itself seems to respond directly with “Who cares? We didn’t want to be part of your movement, anyway.” The two earliest films used for this project present a confusing lack of cohesion between the pentadic elements, probably due to the fact that the Scene behind each Agent is more reflective of the filmmakers’ choices than the Agent’s abilities. This earliest film differs from the rest of them in that the Agent’s Purpose is completely unintentional, making all of the motivations behind each element even more ambiguous.

Agent: This agent, unlike any agent in any other film analyzed, is a male suffragette. In fact, one could argue that this stuffy anti-suffragist is not even worthy of the agent title for this work; regardless, his unintentional suffrage-fighting actions are what propel the main actions of the simple, eight-minute plot. This man is, viewers assume, in his late fifties or early sixties. He has a wife and a suffragette maid, and he thoroughly disapproves of women's suffrage. He would not be fuel for the cause at all, had two mischievous boys not pranked him with a hidden "VOTES FOR WOMEN" sign.

Agency: Agency is where this unintentional suffragette complicates the analysis. Contextually, the film short seems to imply that the act committed by this spiteful suffragette makes a larger impact on the suffrage cause than does any other action by female suffragists. The female suffragists are depicted as a nameless, faceless rabble of women, and their primary purpose in the film seems to be to swarm gratefully around their new male "supporter." Between his accidental chaining at the Houses of Parliament and his arrests, it seems that this one male women's suffrage supporter does more for the cause in one morning than any of the women have done themselves, or so the film would make it seem. Therefore, his gender and element of surprise is this agent's agency. His status as a man in a woman's cause allows him to accomplish his (unintentional) purpose.

Act: The act committed by this unintentional agent is, simply, to unintentionally promote the cause of women's suffrage and to call attention to what this agent believes is an unremarkable cause. The act, though clearly committed by many other unnamed (female) characters in the film short, is ignored in favor of the one male (and seemingly more valuable) contribution.

Purpose: The ironic bit is that this agent does not actually have a purpose. Since his actions are entirely unintentional, the purpose behind them has no foundation. However, we can read the filmmaker's purpose (represented by parentheses) behind this character's Act: by making fools of the women who run to rescue a man who is indifferent to their cause, the filmmakers satirize the cause and all of the "silly" women who participate in it.

Scene: The most important Scene of this Act is represented by the title page shown: The Scene for this film is nearly identical to that of one other film discussed for this thesis, *Mary Poppins*. Edwardian England frames this narrative as well, but one particular historical event defines the scene for this film, as mentioned earlier in this discussion. The May 1912 decision to exclude men from the British suffragette movement would have been a very current political reality for this film's audience, perhaps provoking the filmmakers' decision to make a movie mocking, in a sense, that decision. Modern viewers should (as did contemporary viewers) read both filmmaker's choices and this male suffragette's actions in light of this historical context.

The Shocking Miss Pilgrim

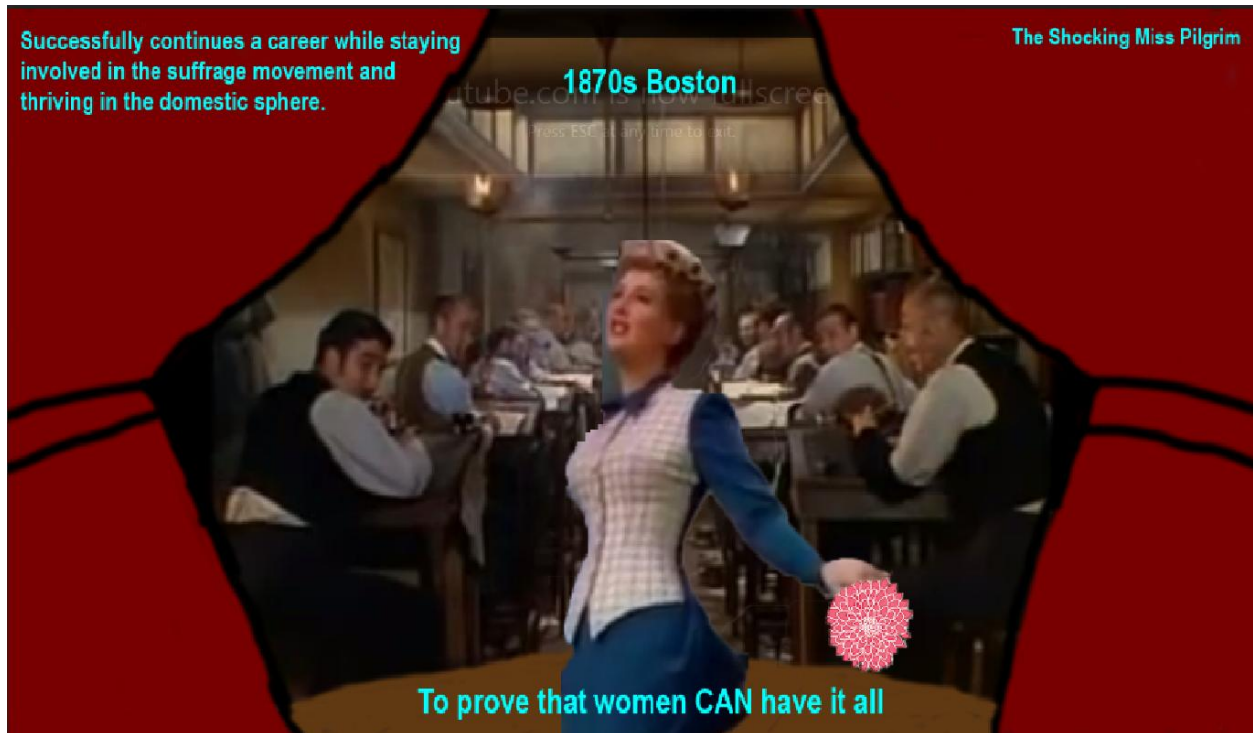


Figure 8. The Shocking Miss Pilgrim

Miss Pilgrim, the character in a film set in the earliest time period, somehow finds herself widely accepted for her feminism by her culture. Consequently, she seems to be able to combine domestic, vocational, and activist accomplishments in a way unlike any other Agent represented, differentiating her Scene and Agency from the others (again, perhaps relating back to the film's post World War II release). This film, set in the golden age of Hollywood and adapted from a story by a husband-wife writing team, allows for some classical Hollywood cinematic elements to dominate its plot structure, but it otherwise differs widely from the gender binaries of other films produced in the time.

Agent: The agent in this film is Miss Cynthia Pilgrim, a young woman freshly graduated from typewriter's college. Despite the heavily male-dominated culture she lives in, Miss Pilgrim is beautifully blonde, charming, clever, and independent. At the beginning of the film, viewers learn that their heroine is the New York typewriter college's star graduate, and she seems destined for success. To her disappointment, she's assigned a firm in Boston where, unbeknownst to her, the boss man in charge is expecting a male typewriting secretary. She spends her Boston days either at her "misfit" Boston rented room or at the firm where she works amidst men who, initially, want no part of her stereotypically feminine cleanliness, charm, and eye for taste. Yet there is more power to this figure than may initially meet the eye of the viewers.

Act: The primary act that Miss Pilgrim commits in this film is to do something that women living in 1870s New England (and, really, 1940s America when this film was released) were rarely able to do: truly have it all. By the end of the film Cynthia Pilgrim has both a successful and satisfying career and a happy and stable marriage with the promise of a family. She does something even highly optimistic from some modern perspectives: she is an independent and self-sufficient woman, despite the domestic pressures of the men surrounding her, and she is able to be both a career woman and a family woman without any surrounding stigma. Unlike several other films discussed in this thesis, women occupy the most important positions of power in the male-female relationships at work in the storyline. Therefore, Miss Pilgrim's Act is, overall, to suggest through her associations and capabilities that women have the capacity for wise authority and multiple domains.

Agency: In order to accomplish this act, Miss Pilgrim uses her natural charm and wit (as depicted by the flower in her hand), in addition to the cultivated skills of her education and determination, in order to keep both the job and man (happily) together. Again, her success could not be credited if it were not for her fiancé's suffragist aunt, his supportive (but firm) mother, or the landlady through whom Miss Pilgrim finds nurture and support. The powerful women who surround her give her the strength to commit the act that she commits in the film; thus, these powerful women are what make both the main character and her story so remarkable.

Purpose: The purpose accomplished by Miss Pilgrim's act in this film is an exception to the rule. She, at least in this story, proves that women can indeed have it all, from career to activism to a devoted husband and future family. No other film used for this research is able to reconcile all roles together, indicating that this film may be the most unrealistic (at least, from the perspective of American cinema in general) representation of women in this collection, although it is the happiest one. No other film allows women to "have it all," even the more modern ones. This film represents an optimistic and determined outlook, but perhaps it is merely reflecting the historical context surrounding it.

Scene: The context of this film and its message is a complex one. The film itself takes place in New England in the 1870s, a time when both the Victorian period and the suffrage movement were beginning to take up speed. The movement was, of course, decades from fruition, but this film implies that popularity for the movement was slowly gaining ground in this time period. Women, too, were only just starting to enter the workforce, much to the disgruntlement of the men around them (as evidenced by the opposition Miss Pilgrim receives from the all-male firm where she works, depicted in the backdrop of the image). In contrast, the film is released in

1947, two years after the official end of World War II. In the years prior to this film's release, women had been entering the work force a new way as well, by occupying jobs left behind by men who flew off into battle during the war. By this time, many of the jobs that women occupied were being reclaimed again by men, and the country was slinking back into what would be the more conservative, strict gender roles environment of the 1950s. One could read this 1947 film as a protest to the cultural shift that was coming, regardless of the fact that the film was partially written and directed by a man, George Seaton. The film represents an interesting commonality between its past and its present, and it represents a conflict among the other films used for this research, as it is the one film in which a woman really can have it all and *win*.

Mary Poppins



Figure 9. *Mary Poppins*

This film is a different sort than the rest. As mentioned before, its inclusion is based not in its country of context (England) or its most featured characters (surely not Mrs. Banks), but instead in its firm foundation in countless American childhoods. Based on a storybook written by female author P. L. Travers, *Mary Poppins* first exposed many American children to the figure of the female suffragist, even if the particular situation surrounding the British suffragettes was not identical to their own American one – a difference likely unbeknownst to the children, too.

Therefore, some elements of this image will be unlike the others.

Agent: Mrs. Winifred Banks, wife of George Banks and mother of Jane and Michael Banks, represents the agent in this film. Visually, she seems to be whatever a typical Edwardian housewife would be: blond, blue-eyed, attractive, intelligent, kind, a hostess. However usual her outward appearance may be, this patriarchy-fighting wife is feisty, perhaps a bit absent-minded, and certainly goal-oriented.

Agency: Her power, her agency, rests primarily in her social class. The Bankses, like many British upper middle class families, employs servants: one for cooking, one for cleaning, and one to look after the children. The presence of these servants is what allows Mrs. Banks to so wholeheartedly invest herself and her time in the fight for suffrage; if not for her health and social class, this wife and mother would likely have to spend most of her time performing household tasks, not investing in personal interests. This aspect of her Agency is represented in the drawing by the money she holds in her left hand. Her right hand holds a book, representing the other method through which she achieves her Purpose: her education, an Agency directly associated with her first one. This education, one that comes with the territory of her upper middle class background, allows her to most readily accomplish her purpose.

Purpose: This Purpose, the foundation of the stage on which Mrs. Banks is standing, is a lyric from her “Sister Suffragette.” “We fight for our rights militantly,” she sings at the crux of the song, expressing the purpose, the motivation for her actions. This purpose differs slightly from those in other films, though it could be very confusing for American viewers who are not aware of the differences between suffragists in America and suffragettes in Britain. As mentioned before in the filmography, British suffragists frequently described their quest for the vote as “militant,” a much more aggressive term than the American suffragists used. This militancy used by the British suffragettes defines Mrs. Banks’ purpose as not just to gain suffrage, but to gain suffrage by any possible means, making her in some ways the most aggressive film female suffragist on display in this thesis.

Act: The actual Act in this film committed by Mrs. Banks is, due to their central role in the film’s narrative, closely tied to her children. Although, as discussed previously in this research, the primary focus in the film is on Mr. Banks’ evolution as a father, Mrs. Banks’ lack of evolution as a mother remains ever present in the film. Again, like the typical upper-middle-class mother in Edwardian England, Mrs. Banks is not a hands-on parent to her children. Instead, each opportunity she receives in the film to speak becomes another proclamation for women’s suffrage. For example, when she encounters a choir of chimney sweeps in her living room, “Steppin’ Time” quickly becomes “Votes for Women Steppin’ Time,” and at the end of the film, just before “Let’s Go Fly a Kite” ends the film with a joyful bang, Mrs. Banks runs to the closet to fasten a “Votes for Women” sash to the kite, saying “Every kite needs a good tail” (*Mary Poppins*). Every moment in the film that her character is recognized becomes a women’s suffrage campaign, making Mrs. Banks’ character much more of a one-dimensional activist

figure than a mother, wife, or any other roles she occupies in the film. Her Act in the story, judging by these examples, is to campaign for women's suffrage, prioritizing it over being a parent to her children.

Scene: Of course, the background to *Mary Poppins* literally, in this drawing, sets the stage for Mrs. Banks' act. The film takes place during what Mr. Banks refers to in his song "The Life I Lead" as "the age of men," 1910 in London, a time when the world was changing faster and faster. England was emerging from the Victorian age and entering a new period of technological enhancement, with old ways of life beginning to edge away. This pivotal moment in time allowed the suffrage movement in England to advance, even though the nation would still not see the vote for another eight years in 1918. Much in England was changing, but the Banks household remained a "fortress," as Mr. Banks calls it (*Mary Poppins*) of solid family values and traditional gender roles. Mrs. Banks is a woman with a husband, two children, three servants, and a passion for women's rights, the one out-of-place factor in this otherwise typical scenario.

Iron Jawed Angels

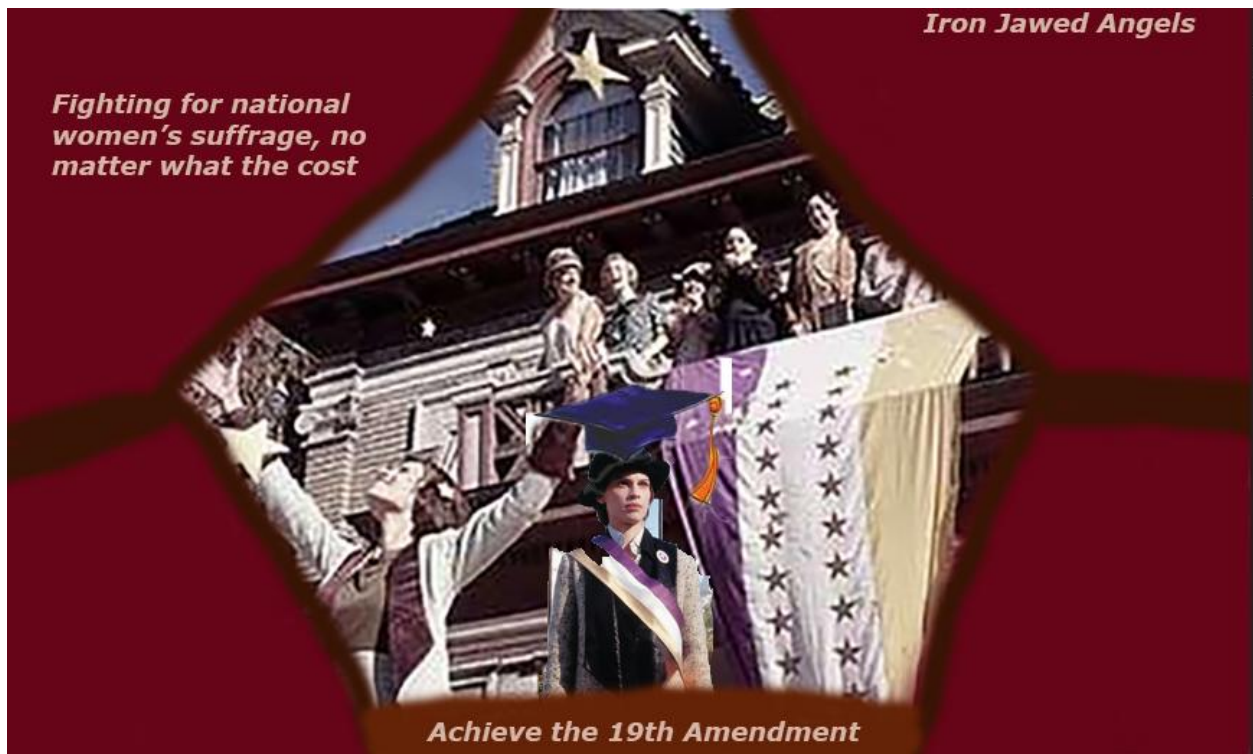


Figure 10. *Iron Jawed Angels*

Iron Jawed Angels, the second most recent film used in this study, is (excluding “Bad Romance”) the most intentionally modernized representation of suffragists used, making some of the pentadic elements vary from others in this body of works. This Agent rides on the first wave of feminism, emphasizing Alice Paul’s more “radical or militant” branch of the American women’s suffrage movement (Maddux 76). Although the film is set in the 1910s, the use of modern music and twenty-first century humor gives Hilary Swank’s Alice Paul and Frances O’Connor’s Lucy Burns a new look; the women are sexually empowered in a way rarely discussed in any other suffrage scholarship, and the emphasis on their friendship in the film affects the way that the Scene surrounding the Agent shapes her motivations and actions.

Notably, this film is the only one of the five with a female director and three female writers, a fact that could undoubtedly be affecting the feminist third wave influences.

Agent: The primary suffragist agent in this film is Hilary Swank's Alice Paul, a woman portrayed as a dedicated fighter for suffrage, expecting the total loyalty from her friends and total commitment to the cause from herself. She bold, constant, and subtly emotional throughout the film, and her only areas of discomfort appear to when she is confronted by what would be "typical" interests of young women: young men and the possibility of raising a family.

Agency: In order to accomplish her goals, Alice Paul utilizes all resources available to her in the film, including her network of fellow suffragists like Lucy Burns and Inez Milholland. But her individual agency is due to two primary factors: her education and her charm. As previously discussed, we know from history that Alice Paul's education was extensive, and although the film does not fully recite the breadth and extent of Paul's learning, several references are made in the film by certain, even adversarial characters. Carrie Chapman Catt (portrayed by Anjelica Huston) quips that regardless of Paul's rebellious reputation, her prestigious education must be acknowledged as one of her greatest assets. She garners the respect of her peers and adversaries based on her education, but the film ultimately cites her charm and oratory powers as one of the other ways she enforces her message. Her fellow suffragists acknowledge throughout the film that Alice Paul is a woman that no one "could ever say no to" (*Iron Jawed Angels*), and the film makes clear the fact that she earns the respect and help of many people, suffragists and otherwise, through her persuasive rhetoric.

Purpose: In *Iron Jawed Angels*, Paul's Purpose is defined a little more specifically than in other film accounts used in this research. Rather than merely achieving the vote (an accomplishment

that was already occurring state-by-state in America), Paul's Purpose behind her actions is to ultimately achieve a constitutional amendment granting nationwide women's suffrage. In the film, this particular Purpose is literally laughable to older female suffragists, making it a revolutionary, unattainable one. This Purpose represents the foundation of the film's narrative destination in addition to Paul's personal Purpose for her actions.

Act: Alice Paul's Act in this film is to determinately fight for women's suffrage in America, whatever that fight entails. In the film, the emotional arc of the story reaches its peak during the scenes in which Paul and her fellow suffragists are falsely imprisoned after picketing the White House. After mistreatment in the jail, Paul decides to result to hunger striking, a tactic she cites from "old Ireland" as a way to protest in a way unlike any other, joking with a deadpan expression that "no one likes a stinking corpse on their doorstep" (*Iron Jawed Angels*). Alice Paul's ceaseless and boundary-less intensity to achieve the ultimate goal is what the film highlights as the greatest Act she commits in the narrative.

Scene: This film spans a time period in which much was changing in the women's suffrage movement in America. At the beginning of the film, Alice Paul attempts to be a part of NAWSA (National American Women's Suffrage Association), only to be snubbed by Carrie Chapman Catt. By the end of the film, she has crossed the boundaries from passive speeches and protests to picketing during World War I and more direct political aggressiveness, making a name for the new National Women's Party that corresponds with new tactics. This transitory stage welcomes not just Alice Paul, but her fellow suffragists supporting her along the way (as seen on the image) and even the fictional male interest and his son that were created simply for personal

conflict in the film. Set upon a background of transitory suffrage politics, World War I, and supporters of all truth or fiction, Hilary Swank's Alice Paul is able to accomplish her Purpose.

“Bad Romance: Women’s Suffrage”



Figure 11. Bad Romance: Women's Suffrage

The most recent of the film representations, “Bad Romance: Women’s Suffrage” distinguishes itself from the others again in that it is not a feature film. It descends directly from the original Lady Gaga video, and for that reason, its genre prohibits conventions such as plot and character development that are comparable with the other films. However, the Scene in this video adds dimension to the Agent in very significant ways because this educational film short is a parody of another music video, thus providing a framework for judging this film example in terms of the original one. Unlike any other film examined in this study, “Bad Romance:

Women's Suffrage” seeks to apply the suffrage movement to a modern-day context. This particular distinction causes the video to become the one film that looks far ahead into the future, making this last example an invaluable one.

Agent: As this film is just a music video parody, discernible figures become more challenging to determine. Yet, the principal “singer” in this story is again Alice Paul, but she clearly takes Gaga’s place as “Mother Monster” to the “Little Monsters” on display in the music video – her unnamed fellow female suffragists. That determination seen in *Iron Jawed Angels* emerges with an angry bite in this parody, allowing the Paul figure to synthesize the sharp artistic dance choreography used the original music video with Alice Paul’s own determination and ceaseless suffrage efforts. This Alice Paul is aggressive, powerful, and seemingly not sentimental, in contrast to her Hilary Swank counterpart.

Agency: This figure’s primary Agency, as represented in the music video, is depicted through her hunger strike when she is confined to a straitjacket. Her power comes with her inability to be weakened – she just keeps on singing! – despite the physical restraint she is forced to endure, just as Gaga does in the original video. This defiance is represented in the image through the size of Paul character’s image and her stern, Gaga-like fierce demeanor. As the music video progresses, the faceless suffragist “Little Monster” imitations lose their face coverings and begin dancing behind “Alice Paul,” simulating more women joining the cause and imitating their leader’s spirit. Furthermore, due to the parallel depiction of force-feeding and restraint in both videos, the fact that more women join “Alice” in the mad dance suggests that her physical sacrifice was what inspired more women to fight for the same cause. These other women surround and join

“Alice’s” protest, also giving power behind the movement and facing their own challenges and obstacles in it.

Purpose: The Purpose for this “film” is a little more loosely structured and implied than the others. Because the video represents women in varying stages of suffrage activism facing varying obstacles, the Purpose appears to be to demonstrate the amount and variety of challenges that women fighting for the right to vote faced. By the end of the video, the audience can literally visualize the eternal impact of these actions and appreciate the past fight that these women faced. This visual impact makes that historical struggle contemporary by adding the modern-day women at the end of the video, suggesting that the struggle continues.

Act: The narrative arc in the video progressively depicts a series of obstacles in the fight for women’s suffrage and the way that they are overcome by Paul and her fellow activists. The primary Act here is to fight for the right to vote, despite any existing challenges. The video portrays several human blockades to the suffrage movement, most in the form of men. Scorn-faced male politicians are represented during a tense (and historically truthful) moment of decision, and this challenge is an easy one to accept. However, another obstacle between woman and the vote is depicted in the form of a child. In several medium-range shots, a young mother holding a baby sings “We want our rights” directly into the camera with a determined, stone-like face, but she immediately after moves her body so that she looks away from both the camera and her child to sing “And nothing less” (“Bad Romance”). Later, the same woman quickly thrusts the child into a stupefied husband’s arms before picking up a “VOTES FOR WOMEN” sash and rushing off to join the movement. Though it was not the primary Act of this film, the most

notable act seems to be stating that a woman must forsake one role for another, that she cannot be both a mother and a suffragist.

Scene: The backdrop for this stage contains a literal tableau of different figures for and against the women's suffrage movement, including those in Congress (as previously mentioned) and bewildered men holding children. Some suffragists, like in the original Gaga music video, are faceless stylized creatures wearing suffrage sashes, and some are figures from different classes and economic backgrounds. Notably, in a scene referencing a real-life historical moment at the end of the video, a young male legislator is shown pulling a note out of his pocket. The note is from his mother, pleading with him to support women's suffrage; at last, the legislator reveals his support for the cause, finally bringing a male face to the suffrage fight in the video's depictions. At the end of the video, "Alice Paul" takes the stage again, but this time she is flanked by women in more contemporary dress, suggesting that the background for this Act is composed of not just women from the early 1900s, but that it is also comprised of all American women who benefit from the suffrage fight.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this project, I posed the following questions: how do the women react to the role assigned or expected of them in these films, and how do the films themselves rhetorically represent these figures as situated in the domestic sphere? The function of this chapter has been to expose the actions revealed by the first question, but the next chapter will serve as commentary on the second. The process used by Chapter III has used visual pentadic mapping to break down each of the five films in order to observe the unity or disorientation

existing among the elements of each plot, but the next chapter will seek to put some more conflicting pieces back together again in order to comment on their ambiguous positions.

CHAPTER IV

PITTING ONE AGAINST “THE OTHER”: ACTIVISM VERSUS MOTHERHOOD

Breaking these five films down into their pentadic elements has illuminated several commonalities among the characters and situations, but it has also brought to light some conflicting, murky areas in motive. Now that this project has broken down the five motivating factors at work in each film, it seeks to connect the most conflicting ambiguities exposed in each film overall. In this next section, I will explore what I interpret as the most important or most conflicting ratio of motives in each film, using the first element in the ratio as the dominant force that the second elements supports or heavily influences. This chapter first explores the dominant ratio of the most problematic motives in each film; later, it explores those murky points of contention through the use of maternal and embodied rhetorics in order to offer insights about how the rhetorical constructs of motherhood are used or ignored in each film. Finally, I offer a conclusion about how these constructs have influenced modern American culture.

A Discussion of Ratios

A Suffragette in Spite of Himself – Agent: Scene

Although this earliest of the film representations does not depict an intentional (or female) Agent, it is precisely this Agent, as set against the background of historical context, that provides the most interesting point of contention for analysis. Without the swarming faceless suffragettes around him clamoring to support the “VOTES FOR WOMEN” sign on his back, this Agent would not have even been an Agent. Again, the historical context surrounding this particular film influences the Scene surrounding the Agent: without the recent exclusion of men

from the suffrage movement in Britain, making a mockery of a male suffragette would not have resonated so well with audiences. The Agent and the Scene depend on each other to exist as they are, but they are two factors that are “unintentionally” (at least, from the point of view of the Agent) connected. This unintentional connection is what makes this film amusing for viewers, memorable for cinemaphiles, and remarkable in opposition to the other four films.

***The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* – Act: Agency**

Arguably the most surprisingly feminist of the fictional stories represented in these films, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* contains an Act through an Agency that seems, if viewed in context, quite confusing. Cynthia Pilgrim seems to prove that a woman can exist happily and interchangeably in both the public and private spheres, despite the fact that she accomplishes this goal just as much through her beauty and charm as through her education. By using both her more stereotypically “feminine” qualities in tandem with her education in order to assume power, the Act she commits generates a new rhetorical construct. In a sense, *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* represents the ultimate Popcorn Venus, as Rosen writes. She is a cultural hybrid of differing ideals of what a woman should be, and instead of facing those inconsistencies head-on, the film chooses to portray this cultural inconsistency as normal, just as it places women in positions of most powerful influence in the story. Using charm and femininity as Agency to accomplish goals in the public sphere is an Act opposing those in the other four films, making this ratio the outlier amongst the five, as the other four use Scene as the secondary element.

***Mary Poppins* – Act: Scene**

In *Mary Poppins*, Mrs. Bank’s choice to skip in the streets singing “Sister Suffragette” rather than be part of her children’s lives is greatly influenced by the atmosphere of both the film

and the historical context. Historically, English mothers in well-to-do families were not typically the kind of mothers that 1960s American women were expected to be. Most of the child-rearing was left to the nannies in 1910s England, but in the context of the focus-on-the-family 1960s in the United States, an absentee mother did not have much redemption. Similarly, one could argue that part of Winifred Banks' role in *Mary Poppins* is to be a foil for Mary Poppins herself, becoming the absence of maternal nature in contrast to the abundance – the woman versus the mother. For this film, the Act only produces the desired effect for audiences (inspiring pity for Jane and Michael because of their mother's absence) because of the cultural and narrative context of her character.

***Iron Jawed Angels* – Agency: Scene**

This film representation uses Agency and Scene as its primary and contributing elements. Without the network of other suffragists alongside her, the Agent (Alice Paul) would have been unable to use her strength and willfulness in order to gain national suffrage. In *Iron Jawed Angels*, Lucy Burns and Inez Milholland are as integral to Paul's ability to use her own Agency as she herself is, allowing this particular ratio to become the dominant one in this film. Unlike the other four films, networks of women dominate this film. No suffragist is by herself; they all depend on one another to succeed. However, unlike *A Suffragette in Spite of Himself*, this sea of women activists does not become a faceless rabble of unidentifiable people. Instead, this network forms a forceful Agency, with each face bringing a different source of power to the table. Alice Paul may be the primary suffrage-questioning figure in this film, but the most significant ratio in this film reveals that her Act is naught for the Scene supplying the Agency behind her.

“Bad Romance: Women’s Suffrage” – Agent: Scene

As discussed earlier, much of the Scene of this piece descends directly from the video that is being parodied, causing the Agent in the film to be a reflection on the Scene itself, as this Alice Paul becomes a parody of Lady Gaga herself. In this sense, the Agent and Scene are intrinsically related and form one ultra pentadic element, making this latest example of suffrage figures in film the most unified of the five films. The Scene contains both female and (after some persuasion) male suffragists, imitating the “Little Monsters” descending from the “Mother Monster” (Alice Paul) figure. This original template is what allows these two elements to blend together in the suffrage parody, creating a ratio that is so unique that it is nearly not a ratio at all. Instead, it is a nuanced force that in turn forms the other elements around itself, making Agent-Scene the center focus of the short film.

Commentary:

This analysis has revealed the most significant ratios of each film, but there are some commonalities to note after examining all five in turn. This table, representing the ratios of each film serves to remind us of some similarities.

Table 1. Ratios

Film Name	Primary Element	Contributing Element
<i>A Suffragette in Spite of Himself</i>	Agent	Scene
<i>The Shocking Miss Pilgrim</i>	Act	Agency
<i>Mary Poppins</i>	Act	Scene
<i>Iron Jawed Angels</i>	Agency	Scene
“Bad Romance: Women’s Suffrage”	Agent	Scene

Notice the most striking similarity: Scene is the contributing ratio element for each film, save for *Miss Pilgrim*. Why this overwhelming majority? With many of the films sharing a similar Agent and Purpose, the other elements have the most room for variety. However, since each film is situated in a different historical moment, it makes sense that context is the most defining factor and the one that each of the other elements depends upon. Even in the mock stages, the visual mapping, Scene was the first element to be constructed before each of the other elements was drawn and grafted upon it. Regardless, a commonly diverse element like Scene only reminds us that these films share more in common with each other than at first expected; with similar Agents striving for a common Purpose, we can infer that some things never change.

Yet some of the elements contain more diversity than others. Although the Scene is slightly different in each film, this element has a direct impact on the Agent in question in a similar way: each Scene shapes the way that viewers are expected to interpret the Agent’s personality and characteristics. For example, Mrs. Banks of *Mary Poppins* lives in “the age of

men,” as Mr. Banks so confidently sings to viewers, and consequently her fiery, feminine streak becomes the focal point of her character in contrast. Another similarity to note among these films is that, due to the unavoidable association of the Agents as activists fighting (well, most of them) for a certain cause, the Purpose of each Agent appears somewhat unified in the way that they are being examined. The similarities in these situations are understood and make sense because the characters being represented are very similar to each other and, in some cases, even are the same historical figure. However, two of the pentadic elements in question vary somewhat widely, for here in these two categories are the places where filmmakers can weave their own messages.

The ultimate action committed by the Agent (Act) and the method through which the Act is accomplished (Agency) are the two forces in this analysis that vary in intensity and motivation, and at times the two forces seem to contradict each other. Although some of the figures in the films are based on actual historic persons, the information that is known about their interests, their personalities, and their lives in history books is counter to that which is given in films.

These discrepancies could be said to relate back to two factors: cultural context and film advertising. Each of the films is connected to the historical and cultural context in which it is produced and created (as discussed earlier in this section), especially the cinematic productions representing Alice Paul where the third wave of feminism is a central influence. A modern audience seeking to relate to the long-gone women portrayed in these films wants to see a heroine that laughs, acts, and rebels in the same way that they do; consequently, historical and cultural context that is contemporary to these historical figures becomes distorted.

Now that I have broken down the ratios and individual elements for further examination, this next section will present a closer look at one way the films themselves have been represented to reflect and invite how accessible or “comfortable” each heroine is with the audience to which she is marketed.

Representations of Women Agents: A Closer Look at Film Advertising

One of the pentadic elements with the most diversity, Agency, might be in part explained through discussion of the way that filmmakers chose to represent these women in promotional materials. What gives these women the power to accomplish their Purpose? Partially, this Agency comes from the character herself or from the historical figure on which the character was based. However, this Agency is oftentimes (especially in the case of these particular films) filtered through the goals of others involved in the making of the movie.

Of the five films used for this project, only three of them have easily accessible film posters: *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, *Mary Poppins*, and *Iron Jawed Angels*. The earliest film was too brief to have a promotional film poster, and the last film representation is not feature length and does not have an offering for the genre. Of the three films with movie posters, both of the films that feature a suffragist as the central character of the plot depict their figures in a way that is uncharacteristic of that character in the film or of that character’s values.

For example, the movie poster for *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* is *entirely* misleading. If a person did not already know the plot of this film, he or she might think that the adjective “shocking” was describing a totally different kind of shock:



Figure 12. Pilgrim Poster

Just from examining this movie poster, should *The Scandalous Miss Pilgrim* be a better title for the film in question? However, this film could barely provide audiences with a sexually tamer woman. Although she does wear the clothes she is seen wearing here in the film, the clothes do not hang so low on her bust, and she never, ever, makes the sensual facial expression seen in this poster. She is bright and intelligent and ultimately uses her education and charm to become the master of her own fate in the film, but this poster gives an audience the impression that she uses an opposing source of agency (read: promiscuous or physical) in order to accomplish her goals. Due to the solid red background of the poster, the only focal point of an audience's gaze (and thus the only focal point of the word "shocking") becomes Cynthia Pilgrim's coy expression and bare shoulders. Those tasked with promoting this film clearly thought that the film's story was second to the beautiful actress at the center to it. Sexualization of a female character seems par

for the course for promoting a film with a strong woman at the center of it, especially in a time period in which American values were leaning more to the conservative side. In 1947, Miss Pilgrim represented a woman's winning desire for a place in both the private and public spheres. However, probably due to Betty Grable's status as a popular pin-up woman, the film poster only seems to represent one particular dimension of her character, leading a modern interpreter to assume that filmmakers were not entirely convinced that a headstrong and beautiful female lead could attract audiences on her striking character alone.

Similarly, *Iron Jawed Angels* made some questionable moves when promoting itself on a film poster. When the made-for-HBO film was released in 2004, it was hailed as a film riding on the third wave of feminism, and for that reason, many parts of the film were "modernized," at least with dialogue, non-diegetic music, and other formative elements. However, one way that the film presented itself seemed to backfire on the message promoted by it, this movie poster:

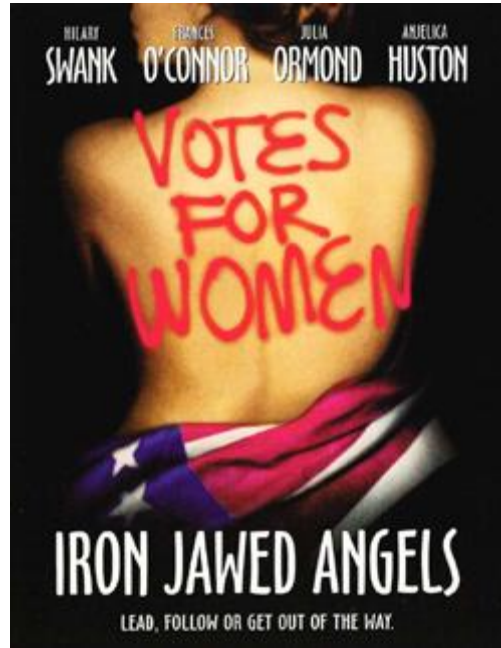


Figure 13. Angels Poster

Though the identity of the bare-backed woman on the film poster is not revealed, audiences are led to assume that the dark-haired woman is Alice Paul, as Paul is the central figure of the story. The overall look of the poster projects a defiant, fierce sort of woman, comfortable in her sexuality and – with the “Lead, follow or get out of the way” slogan at the bottom – intent on accomplishing her goals despite any obstacles in her path. Although the women in the story may be portrayed as defiant and fiercely devoted to their cause (especially Alice Paul), and although female sexuality is something that is decidedly wielded and owned by the characters, nowhere in the film is sexuality so put on display to others. Again, this poster edges on the side of falsely advertising the film it represents. The woman in the poster – seemingly nude – leans slightly to one side, sensualizing her position. She is wrapped loosely in an American flag, and the poster is made to appear as if someone has spray-painted “VOTES FOR WOMEN” in red across the woman’s back. This graffiti-type appearance makes the film appear even more reckless and

edgy, but since the woman is bare-backed, that recklessness and edginess could appear to be sexual. The film's sexualized poster attempts to correlate female strength with female sexuality, possibly much to the compromise, despite attempts by the publicists to attract a wide audience, of the film's feminist message.

Of the two films with movie posters where the central character is a suffragist, both of the films depict *highly* sexualized versions of their female characters in ways that are never used to the same extent in the film. Part of the reason that the Agencies in each of the five films are so diverse could be explained in part by the filmmakers' choices, and nowhere are the priorities exhibited in those choices seen more blatantly than in the way that the films are marketed. The movie posters only confirm a commonly discussed idea that audiences will not enjoy a film featuring a strong female character unless she is sexualized in some way. This difficulty is made all the worse if that strong female character is also a women's rights activist. Cinema seems to be begging the question: Who would want to see a movie about a woman fighting for woman's rights if there isn't sex involved? These two examples suggest that American cinema seeks to make a woman's role in a film one that is a "comfortable" or familiar one for American culture: she must either be, to allude to a later discussion of maternal rhetoric, a God term or a Devil term. She must either belong in the mother camp, or, if she does not fit the supposed "mother" mold, she must be a sexualized anti-mother figure in order to make cultural "sense" to a wide American audience of both men and women.

Rhetorical Constructions of Motherhood, Activism, Womanhood

At this point in the analysis, the conversation in this chapter shifts from a calculated examination of the pentadic elements and their uses and manipulations to achieve goals to a

broad discussion of maternal rhetoric. Here, I demonstrate that the problems and forces unearthed by the pentadic discussion can be interpreted agreeably through the use of rhetorics of motherhood and the way that this line of thinking exposes not only cultural quandaries in the past, but also quandaries in the future.

Lindal Buchanan's influential text, *Rhetorics of Motherhood*, allows for the final stage in interpretation for this project. In rhetorics of motherhood terms, the code of motherhood "erases intersectional difference and creates impediments for women whose social locations and identities depart from the norm" (Buchanan 22). If a woman does not fit the strict mother role, she is sometimes either "flattened" into the "nonthreatening maternal stereotype" (22) or else she is pushed into a caricature of the oversexed opposite. The women in these films (especially Cynthia Pilgrim and *Iron Jawed Angels*' portrayal of Alice Paul) were placed into a dichotomy that had already been set for them, as the example of the movie posters indicates, and although their Agencies overlapped in the pentadic analysis in some ways, it is clear that their differences could perhaps have been explained by choices made by filmmakers in order to attract a wider audience.

The variation in Agency and Scene within the film representations of suffragists could be partially explained in reference to another factor: the way that the domestic sphere is depicted in each one. Each Scene surrounding each Agent varies widely from the other ones comprising the canon, but the choice between domestic and public sphere still presents itself, regardless of the Scene and context. Feminine motherhood wields an influence on each suffragist's situation or actions, either explicit or subtle, simply based on the unavoidable cultural expectations given by her Scene. Cultural influences have not been necessarily kind to female rhetors, and they

typically try to shuffle them into one of two extremes, one very good and one very evil. The five films in question here are no exception. By exploring how maternal ethos is or could be at work within both the historical reality and in the cinematic representation of these women's lives, the murky ambiguities about Scene and Agency may be better explained.

Women figures are generally shuffled into one of two categories: the saint or the devil. In Western literature, this sort of extreme female association is generally portrayed as belonging in one of two camps: like Mary, mother of Jesus, or like Eve, the downfall of "man"kind. The same association can be said of women outside the literary world, especially when the women are placed in a position of rhetorical power. Rhetorical strategies appealing to different types of feminine ethos can help or hinder a figure's ability to reach her audience, so choosing which female extreme on which to lean when appealing to audiences can be a real challenge for a female rhetorician. A selection like this seems nearly inevitable, whether a conscious decision is made or not. Female rhetors must choose: Do I play more to my womanly ethos or my maternal ethos? Which choice will make me more favorable to my audience? A choice like this one is compulsory and subconscious, but it was a choice that each of the suffragists examined in this study were forced to make, either intentionally by the writers or subconsciously, stemming from preconceived cultural expectations. Filmmakers in each of the movies examined made distinct choices about how to align the women they portrayed with preexisting ideals of female ethos, and these choices offer a clear cultural commentary on a woman's place in activism versus the domestic sphere.

Whether cultural vehicles realize it or not, they are operating under a code of motherhood when they are portraying and developing female characters, especially ones with their own

personal motives and independent agendas. In *Rhetorics of Motherhood*, Lindal Buchanan introduces the “motherhood code,” a concept describing mutual cultural guidelines that define the way that women are portrayed in the public eye; yet, these guidelines are typically in rough tension with one another. These guidelines, though they may allow for women’s advancement in a way, do not permit her advancement without maternal association covering her identity. Buchanan argues that “the code of motherhood also restricts the candidate through its embedded and inequitable gender presumptions (holding, for example, that mothers belong in the private rather than the public sphere) and thereby undermines her run for political office” (5), implying that a woman cannot escape being identified as “mother” or “not mother” wherever she emerges as a prominent figure. Some women can and do decide to harness this maternal ethos in order to accomplish their rhetorical goals, but that effort does come with a certain price.

As mentioned before, the stigmatizing extreme between saintly and evil scars what it means to be female in American culture, posing an additional challenge for women in the political sphere. This problem posed an obstacle, perhaps especially, to female suffragists who desperately tried to show their society that their place could be both in the home and in the political sphere, collectively. Buchanan christens these extremes “God terms” and “Devil terms,” ideas that so closely correlate with words that society uses that there can be no mistaking culture’s attempt, namely in the period of the suffrage fight, to categorize female identity. As an example of a film from the suffrage aftermath, in Murnau’s 1924 silent classic, *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*, three unnamed characters form the core characters of the cast: “The Man,” “His Wife,” and “The Woman from the City” (*Sunrise*). In the film, “The Wife” is an angelic figure, always wronged and incapable of wrongdoing, but “The Woman from the City” represents the

villain figure of the story, attempting to sway “The Man” into horrible acts of infidelity and murder for her sake. Here, the domestic title is used for purity and good, while the simple gendered titled is used to represent deceitfulness and evil. Even in this more contemporary example of the distinction between Devil and God terms, modern viewers cannot help but notice a pattern leading up to our own time. The God and Devil terms have subconsciously created a binary in many periods of human history, a binary that Buchanan represents visually in a chart that separates woman and mother and the cultural symbols or institutions they represent:

Woman (Devil Term)		Mother (God Term)
<i>childlessness</i>		<i>children</i>
<i>work</i>		<i>home</i>
<i>sex</i>		<i>love</i>
<i>self-centeredness</i>	rhetorics that	<i>empathy</i>
<i>materialism</i>	combine	<i>protection</i>
<i>immorality</i>	elements	<i>religion</i>
<i>hysteria</i>	of the	<i>nourishment</i>
<i>irrationality</i>	Woman and	<i>altruism</i>
<i>extreme emotion</i>	Mother	<i>morality</i>
<i>self-indulgence</i>		<i>self-sacrifice</i>
<i>weakness</i>		<i>strength</i>
<i>the sensual body</i>		<i>the reproductive body</i>
<i>the public sphere</i>		<i>the private sphere</i>
		<i>the nation</i>

Table. The Woman/Mother continuum.

Figure 14. God terms and Devil terms

Note that childlessness and involvement in the public sphere disadvantages a woman's ethos and, perhaps, her own identity. As Buchanan forwards, "Woman is the antithesis of Mother—the dark to its light, the failure to its success—and a necessary internal scapegoat" (8); these two extremes create a nearly impossible dichotomy with which for women to wrestle. In order to combat this problem, Buchanan concludes and suggests that

[B]earing and raising children frequently has an adverse impact on women's public involvement, routinely ending, interrupting, or deferring their persuasive endeavors. Maternal rhetors must find ways of negotiating conflicting domestic and civic obligations; to do so, they have often turned to collaboration, a cooperative arrangement involving two or more people that results in a rhetorical product, performance, or event. (21)

When faced with challenges from the community, women band together collectively to accomplish their rhetorical goals, working together to enact rhetorical strength. Is this sounding like the suffrage movement yet? Without each other, women would not have been able to demonstrate to their society that they could, collectively, break free from their tight domestic identities. However, it should be noted, women's teamed success could possibly have sprung from the unifying factors of their common foundation. Without the shared, common female identity as a mother, a team effort for suffrage would perhaps have not been so unified.

A "team effort" seemed pertinent to the suffrage movement's rhetorical appeals as well. By making women's suffrage a "family" issue, female rhetors became more effective for "inching" closer to the Mother end rather than the Woman end of the continuum since that end is "a sure way to demean her" (Buchanan 10). Kay Sloan's article "A Cinema in Search of Itself"

uses a pro-suffrage piece of propaganda from 1915 in which a saint-like mother is depicted as surrounded by two children and lovingly cradling a third. This powerful image is paired with the caption: “Double the power of the home – two good votes are better than one” (Sloan, “A Cinema” 5), indicating that suffragists were split at the time between utilizing their motherhood as support for the cause and distancing themselves from traditional female roles. However, remember that no women (save Miss Pilgrim) in the studied five films seem to be able to reconcile both appeals effectively for their male audiences. Although women in the time of the suffrage movement *were* fighting in both camps (taking themselves collectively out of a gender binary), film versions were reluctant to embrace the flexible movement.

Notably, the women rhetors of the suffrage movement were taking a more dangerous risk than many modern women realize by taking themselves out of the dominant system of gender and out of the mainstream, making themselves an unclassifiable entity. They battled the dichotomy forced upon them in hopes that their daughters and granddaughters would not have it forced upon them as well, but if these suffrage-themed films made since 1920 are any indication, American society has not yet caught up with the vision that the suffragists held. Though many would argue that its grip has slackened considerably, the Woman/Mother continuum still grasps American culture, implying that the Great Divide enacted by this binary is unlikely to be bridge effectively. A woman in the public sphere is still stigmatized, making Buchanan’s push for a study of the rhetorics of motherhood even more essential; if American cinema still presents a staunch dichotomy between woman/activist and mother, readers and viewers must understand where maternal rhetoric is emboldening a cause and where it is only limiting it even further.

Although the five Scenes in the pentadic maps varied widely, one constant remained in the backdrop of each film, in some way: feminine expectations. “Feminine” qualities of a nurturing nature, gentleness, and softness were completely lost on our male suffragettes in *A Suffragette in Spite of Himself*. However, Miss Cynthia from *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* found herself in some critical plot points related to this idea that a maiden should fervently await marriage and family: John Pritchard, her boss and love interest, nearly demands that desire from her, as do many other older female figures in the film.⁷ On the other hand, Mrs. Winifred Banks in *Mary Poppins* supposedly finds herself at that “pinnacle of feminine accomplishment”; she has succeeded in becoming a wife and mother in a good and respectable living situation. Yet, this scene behind her does not seem to fulfill her need for personal fulfillment – the pinnacle of feminine achievement, as her culture expects of her, is not where she sees her own achievement. In *Iron Jawed Angels*, viewers see what appears to be a textbook example of unmotherly qualities. Alice Paul is placed in a fictional situation of potential motherhood and slinks away from it, hesitant to combine her woman identity with a maternal one. Finally, “Bad Romance: Women’s Suffrage” seems to present the most complicated arrangement of female identity conflict. In the original music video, Lady Gaga projects a fierce, sexy ultra-woman who portrays “Mother Monster” to her little ones, combining the two identities into one unstoppable and matriarchal goddess figure. In the parody video, Alice Paul also becomes an ultra-woman, serving as leader and “mother” figure to other suffragists, but the video itself depicts several occasions in which mothers disregard or leave their children. Interestingly, the original music

⁷ Though, it should be remembered that this film is set earlier than any other discussed in this thesis, the 1870s in Boston.

video seems to more effectively synthesize God and Devil terms, while the parody video mostly continues within the binary, making some exceptions to expose class issues within the patriarchy.⁸ Because of the Gaga influence, Alice Paul in this parody video depicts femininity as cunning power, strength, sexuality, and ferocity, causing the Scene to incorporate an entirely new definition of what is feminine.

Furthermore, bodies in these films and the gender ascribed to them certainly influence the variety of Agencies and Scenes on display in these five examples. Women in the public sphere are held, consciously or subconsciously, under constant critique and evaluation based on their bodies, and women and men alike draw inspiration on what a woman should be like from the cinematic representations that they see, even if the cinema is also reflecting what it sees in outside culture. However, these bodies are the ones that carry the most powerful forms of rhetoric. In “Metis, Mêtis, Mestiza, Medusa: Rhetorical Bodies across Rhetorical Traditions,” Jay Dolmage reminds readers of Plato and Aristotle’s take on women’s bodies versus men’s bodies, that women’s bodies are, essentially, just mutilated male ones (Dolmage 2). One is clearly inferior to the other, but when that hierarchy is placed on a higher ladder, women’s bodies appear even less important. In his dialogues, Plato argued that the difference between rhetoric and philosophy was rather like the difference between the body and the mind; the body is mortal, flawed, and broken – like the inconstant rhetoric – while the soul could be stronger, more sound, and everlasting, like the ideals of philosophy (4). If the body is already inferior to philosophy and female bodies are inferior to male bodies, then a woman’s body is the least powerful and important of them all. Yet, Dolmage’s article insists that “we” have the power to

⁸ In the video, men resisting suffrage are older, stern, and seemingly wealthier based on their clothing. In contrast, the men supporting suffrage are more delicate, younger, and seemingly less powerful.

give bodies back the power they can wield, arguing that “we might respond to this oppressive legacy by using our bodies significantly and making rhetoric significantly bodied...[maintaining that] rhetoric can reclaim the body” (4-5). By acknowledging the strength that these “mutilated,” “disabled,” or “broken” female bodies can possess, rhetoric can be embodied and best used, most especially in this “extraordinary body,” as Dolmage christens it (5).

The bodies on display on each of these films are all “disabled” in some way, some more than others. In *A Suffragette in Spite of Himself*, the main character is a man; however, his mistaken suffragette identity causes his body to become slightly deficient in the eyes of the angry antisuffragists around him, de-humanizing him. Cynthia Pilgrim in *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* uses her sweet charm and beauty as Agency to accomplish her goals, but these factors only serve to strengthen her ethos instead of making her an objectified figure before the male characters; therefore, her extraordinary body functions as a greater sense of power. *Mary Poppins’* Mrs. Banks breaks all “little woman” stereotypes by being an activist and an absentee mother, making her character more interesting and rhetorically powerful as a consequence. In *Iron Jawed Angels*, Alice Paul is a perfect example of feminine brokenness as she chooses to sexually empower her femininity rather than become “masculine,” submissive, or at all maternal. Finally, “Bad Romance: Women’s Suffrage” presents a fusion of gender constructs based on the female-power framework of the original Gaga video, breaking all historical expectations of the female body and looking to a future where all later generations benefit from this “brokenness.” Dolmage writes that rhetoric can reclaim the body, and if these films are any indication, “disabled” or “broken” female bodies are both the most rhetorically powerful and the most dangerous ones of them all.

Conclusion

Pentadic cartography allows for the breakdown of film elements, but the use of maternal and embodied rhetorics allow for the more uncertain pieces of each film's motivations to be pieced together in a different way. This analysis has shown that these films are more complex in motive and in rhetorical effect than perhaps interpreted at first glance. It has demonstrated that some elemental constants remain in these films, despite the years separating them, and it has shown that this interpretation can and has changed based on the wishes of not only the writers, but also those who publicized the films. Ultimately, it has shown that the female suffragist is a character who defies binaries and, although she is ostracized as "Other" and "broken" due to her inability to be categorized, she becomes an unusual force of female activism that has acquired a unique, unpredictable, and (so far) unending place in American film.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: WHAT DOES A LONG-GONE ACTIVIST FIGURE HAVE TO DO WITH THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?

At the close of this project, I now present one final breakdown of pentadic elements. This series of five stories, each one aligned with a different section of the dramatistic pentad, presents a panoramic picture of the significance of this project.

Scene: Where do we go from here?

Some women have been educating themselves in the past fourteen years; the mass of their sisters is now awake. Are there women ready to lead in these new paths? Will other women follow them? We do not know, but one thing is sure, the attitude of women towards changes in society is going to determine to a great extent our future in this country. (Roosevelt 196)

In 1933, the year that her husband Franklin Delano Roosevelt became president, Eleanor Roosevelt published a book called *It's Up to the Women*. This text, published in the height of the Great Depression, called for women to speak their minds about politics, the public sphere, and their own private hopes and dreams. Based on the call to action that Roosevelt makes, the likely exigence for this book was the aftermath of women's suffrage entering the Constitution. Over a decade had passed since the women in the United States got the vote, and both men and women were beginning to discuss the worth of women in the voting polls. In her book, Eleanor Roosevelt looks forward to what the vote has done and could do for both women and men when she writes: "Fourteen years have now gone by and everywhere people are asking, 'What have the women done with the vote?' I often wonder why they don't ask men the same question, but I realize that it is a high compliment to women that evidently they were expected to bring about

some marked change in political conditions” (190). Roosevelt points to a very important concern: the question should not be “What have the women done with the vote?” Instead, it should be “What can citizens do with the power that the vote gives them?”

Roosevelt demonstrates that her age was still floundering on the subject of women’s suffrage, but she is also demonstrating that the women living in it were also asking the right questions. This “New Woman” controversy was calling the question on women’s interest and worth for power in the public sphere, and it seemed that at the time, many citizens were waiting in the wings for women’s suffrage to be proven a folly. Yet today, that uncertainty would seem ridiculous, even though many young women today could not even define the word “suffragist” if asked. This begs the question: Why do moviegoers in the twenty-first century still pay attention to this hundred-year-old activist figure in the twenty-first century?

Act: How are films still making the choice to portray mother-suffragists negatively?

Some movie-goers may be surprised to learn that suffrage characters still appear in movies in the twenty-first century. Their reaction implies that the suffragist figure has disappeared somewhat in the public eye, but the reality is that English-speaking films have not seen their last representations of this kind of female activist. In fact, the small screen in Britain has recently adapted the suffragette character in an entirely new way in a short-running sitcom, *Up the Women*, on BBC 4. This comedy series starring Jessica Hynes is set in rural 1910 England (the same year as *Mary Poppins*), and it features some rather unsuccessful prospective suffragettes in the town of Banbury who reluctantly band together to form “The Banbury Intricate Craft Circle Politely Requests Women’s Suffrage.” Their less-than-victorious attempts at suffrage awareness feature the antics of a staunch supporter, a lecherous old woman, a radical

young woman, a dim-witted mother of fourteen, a doubter, and a woman that completely represents the physical stereotypes that men gave suffragettes (as mentioned earlier in this thesis). Despite this show's British origin, briefly discussing it can offer some insight about how motherhood and female activism are still at odds in mainstream English-speaking media.

Even in this current television series, motherhood is still represented as a detriment to activism being lived to its potential. In a YouTube clip published by BBC 4, the resident mother character, Eva, struggles to write a protest message on a placard, but her efforts only yield "TACSASHUN WITHOUT REPRISANTASHUN IZ TYR—THR—TER" (Hynes, "Eva's Placard"). She whines to her fellow "suffragettes" that she "didn't want people to know that [she] couldn't spell tyranny!"; but, her predicament is met with a snarky response from another woman, who responds with "Nor 'taxation'...nor 'representation'. Nor 'is'" (Hynes, "Eva's Placard"). This Eva is the comic relief of the series. Aside from her (lack of) intelligence and her status as mother, Eva has no other personality quirks or even a solid, progressive force in the plot development of the episodes. She exists, seemingly, to demonstrate that a woman who has had more children than the other women put together must be the most unintelligent and least worthy of the activism in which she participates. In fact, Eva barely seems to understand the purpose of suffragism or of fighting for it. In an exchange from the first episode of the series, Eva and Margaret, the activist instigator in the group, discuss women's suffrage:

Eva: "What was the rally for, Margaret?"

Margaret: "Women's suffrage."

Eva: "I don't know what that means."

Margaret: “Votes for women.”

Eva: *she gasps* “And your husband approves of this??” (Hynes, “Has Margaret”)

In *Up the Women*, Eva – the woman character whose principal identity on the show is as a domestic figure – represents the Victorian ideals of the woman as the caretaker of the private sphere, never to be involved in politics, only to exist as a submissive caregiver for her husband and as a nurturing mother for as many children as her body can stand. Motherhood and activism are still separated by a clearly distinct line even in this modern representation (and, again, this display indicates a distance between motherhood and intelligence as well). This display again confirms the distance that filmmakers place between motherhood and successful activism, consciously or subconsciously, in their productions, and it begs the question, why is this distinction still used so widely in films representing female suffragist characters?

At this point, the problem is clear, and it cannot be ignored. If an activist chooses to be a mother, our culture is not currently equipped to reconcile the two identities. Likewise, if a mother chooses to be an activist, her intelligence, seriousness, or dedication to the cause she chooses is called into question. Filmmakers for over one hundred years have continually made choices in the representations of female activists that place a dichotomy between motherhood and activism roles, and this portrayal shows no signs of ceasing soon. This continuous choice provokes the question: can women, actually, become both a “good” activist and a “good” mother, simultaneously, at all? This question is approached many times throughout the five films used in this study, and it seems that after what this project has discussed, the answer leans to “no.” But do twenty-first century women *also* believe that they cannot have it all, and is seeing this difficulty represented in films about activist women only purporting the idea for

modern mothers (or activists) that motherhood and activism can never coexist? Have women just accepted that their world will never resolve itself and are now just agreeing to perpetuate an image they cannot change?

Agency: How do women in the public sphere today make use of these culturally-imposed identity choices to accomplish further goals?

The binaries between mother and woman are still very evident in modern American politics, and as the media would see it, women are still required to make choices between which end of the binary they will use as their Agency. In 2008, Tina Fey and Amy Poehler made *Saturday Night Live* history with their portrayals of Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton. In a mock address about the status of sexism in the media, Fey and Pohler parody the depictions of women that each of them represents: Palin as the “pretty, beautiful” mother and Clinton as the “harpy, shrew” woman. Though this skit exaggerates many of the ways that each woman identifies as a politician, one particular distinction is worthy of discussion. At one point near the end of the sketch, Palin (Fey) states that the two female politicians can agree that it is time for a woman to be president; however, Clinton (Poehler) then asserts a different position. “I didn’t want a woman to be president,” she cries, “I wanted to be president! And I just happen to be a woman!” (“Sarah Palin”). Though a fictional parody, this sketch highlights a clear distinction – that the media saw, at least – between Clinton and Palin’s self-portrayal in the public sphere. The sketch implies that Clinton appeals more to her credentials and experience for office, while Palin uses her “softer” feminine qualities and motherhood in order to win over audiences.

In reality, both women made (and in the example of Clinton’s current presidential campaign, make) use of their motherhood in order to convince crowds of their humanity and

accessibility; yet, in Palin's case in particular, motherhood was her defining strategy from the very beginning of her vice-presidential campaign. Sarah Palin is someone who has chosen to use this maternal image to her advantage, attempting to add motherhood to her ethos rather than separate herself publically from it in order to achieve a rhetorical representation as an authoritative politician. Lindal Buchanan begins the first chapter of her book with this quote describing Palin, the words with which John McCain first introduced his running mate to America:

'The person I'm about to introduce to you was . . . a concerned citizen who became a member of the PTA, then a city council member, and then a mayor, and now a governor who beat the long odds to win a tough election on a message of reform and public integrity. And, I am especially proud to say in the week we celebrate the anniversary of women's suffrage, a devoted wife and a mother of five.' (qtd. in Buchanan 1)

The utilization of maternal ethos is clearly effective for both men and women. In this introduction, McCain not only bolstered the credibility of his, at the time unknown, Alaskan running mate, but he also added dimension to his appeal to wider American audiences. From the way he begins his introduction, audiences learn that his running mate began her interest in politics by first becoming a mother interested in the welfare of her children, as evidenced by her first position on the Parent-Teacher Association board. A strong maternal compass directed her political voice, implying that her particular agenda would be heavily influenced by ideas that would benefit families in America, perhaps even more than any other aspect of federal politics.

Yet, note the way that McCain closes his introduction. He does something completely foreign to any of the films that this thesis examines – directly and unmistakably link the winning

of women's suffrage with the domestic sphere. His final words of introduction come immediately after a reference to suffrage; judging by the placement and the rhetorical lead-in to this comment about Palin's marriage and motherhood, this identifier should be the most important one of his small speech. Why does he imply that Palin's domestic identities are her most important ones, at least, why does he tie those identities as most important given the historical context of the week in question? One could argue that this rhetorical moment only continues to prolong American culture's love-hate relationship between women as activists and women as mothers. Perhaps McCain is implying that the best female political figures are mothers, an idea that brings this discussion again to Buchanan's "motherhood code."

Buchanan chronicles Sarah Palin's use of her maternal ethos in order to win Republicans, with references to her son's deployment in Iraq and her choice not to terminate her pregnancy after learning of her child's Down syndrome diagnosis (2), but she ultimately draws attention to the catch Palin and other female politicians must endure if they are to use their maternal ethos to their advantage in such a way. Fundamentally, she argues that "[these mothers], likewise, [allude] to, [mask], and [sustain] the network of power relations that undergird gender (Buchanan 5). By using her reputation and credible status as a conservative mother of five, Palin both won over Republicans and intrinsically fused her identity as a woman and a politician with her identity as a mother. No one would ever think of the former identity without considering it in terms of the latter identity ever again, and that truth remains to today for this particular female politician. Palin's use of the motherhood code trapped her in a rhetorical bind, which Buchanan argues is "expanding women's political voice and igniting social change but also reifying gendered norms that contract and attenuate women's agency and possibility" (1). Motherhood is

especially ““slippery rhetorical terrain”” that can, at once, open up and close rhetorical possibilities for women and define their social responsibility (1). Oddly, Palin’s efforts to win her crowd through the use of maternal ethos is in striking contrast to the efforts of many female suffragists, women who attempted, at any cost, to distance themselves from their maternal identities in order to convince their crowds that they were credible based simply on their status as equal citizens to men before the law.

This discussion of Sarah Palin’s rhetorical strategies brings the discussion back to the present, but it also reminds us that the issue of the place of women in the public sphere is far from resolved. There are no comparable God and Devil terms for man and fatherhood, especially not in the public or political sphere, no deliberate or subconscious choice to make about the side of the binary to favor when making an argument. Women still feel the need to take deliberate stances on how they individually seek to connect (or disconnect) their maternal identity with their womanly identity. But, that sense of unity is, in many ways, still ever present in how women today continue to fight for the rights they feel are underrepresented.

Agent: How do women who identify as feminists reconcile their cultural entrapment in these binaries?

Although the word “feminist” is scarcely found in any of the five films used for this project, the identity of a person striving for equal gender rights colors the Agents examined, and as discussed above, those Agents must face a common choice: to prioritize motherhood or activism. Even women who today are used as role models for feminism by some find this same position just as conflicting. To return to Beyoncé, many fans of this singer look to their idol as an example of feminism and, regardless of what many critics have to say about that particular

belief, Beyoncé's influence on the millennial generation's view on feminism is undeniable. She sings in "Run the World (Girls)" that "My persuasion can build a nation / Endless power, the love we can devour" (Beyoncé, "Run"), intentionally giving support for the growing community of women and men who feel empowerment from her music. We're still looking to our own suffragists in America today, even if they take the form of Beyoncé or Lady Gaga, both of whom are only able to exist in popular culture due to the efforts of their suffragist sisters.

However, even Beyoncé feels a pang between her motherly and womanly identities. Soon after her daughter Blue Ivy was born in 2012, the singer released a new album in 2013 with the song "Blue," a piece speaking to her new daughter. The bridge in the song demonstrates a quaking of identities: "We gotta hold on, I gotta hold on / You've got to hold on / You've got a hold on me" (Beyoncé, "Blue"). The grammatical shifts in each new phrase demonstrate a mixing of identities and changing of power structures in swift succession. This small, lyrical example suggests that a woman's struggle between the roles of woman, activist, and mother still exists within the twenty-first century; no matter how vastly different a woman's place in society is today from an early twenty-first century woman's place, this particular cultural struggle continues to reoccur, much like the female suffragist in American film, which begs this final question:

Purpose: So where does this leave us?

My grandmother grew up in a place where the effects of women's suffrage did not reach, at least not in the same way as they did in more urban and progressive areas of the country. She grew up in a small town in North Carolina, dominated by industry, in a socio-economic setting unable to surpass the separations between class and political power. Her environment did not

raise her to form her own opinions about political matters, and it certainly did not encourage her to exercise any political power. Although she has lived most of her adult life in Greenville, South Carolina, one of the state's largest metropolitan areas, influences that take hold during the malleable years rarely fade forever. I myself was born in that city. I wrote in the introduction to this project that I wonder sometimes what her life would have been like if she had been born in a later year, but I have realized that the year of birth is not entirely to blame for a person's outlook on the world.

Just because I was born in the later years of the twentieth century does not mean that I automatically see my place in the public sphere clearly, and it certainly does not mean that once I decide to become a mother that I will inherently understand how to balance my God term and Devil term identities in my work and in my public affairs. The “modern woman” in 2015 still finds herself forced to choose between the binary elements, meaning that we as participants in modern American culture will never stop needing films about women's accomplishments.

So again, why is the suffrage-fighting woman figure a reoccurring one in American cinema? Films featuring a suffragist or suffragette have spanned over one hundred years, and they are already, with Meryl Streep's *Suffragette* expected in theatres this year, proving that they are not willing to relinquish an audience's attention just yet. Perhaps the answer to the sporadic re-occurrence of such a bold, brave, resourceful, and defiant historical woman in modern media rests in what she represents to audiences: She occupies the first wave of feminism, one of the first recognized categories of feminist, and the “mother” of all boundary-bending female activists in all future decades. Perhaps when women in America grow discouraged by obstacles facing gender equality, they look to the original source, to one of their first inspirations for female

political demonstrations, the first model for widespread feminism. Women realize that in order to know where they are going, they must know where they have already been; they envision suffragists as their eternal reminders for who they are, who they are capable of becoming, and what they can accomplish. Whether film culture recognizes it or not, the suffragist Agent seems to consistently recur in film in order to remind women of their own Agency, regardless of the Scene contextualizing them. These “founding mothers” of feminism reappear to remind their daughters, generations later, of one eternal proverb:

Mother knows best.

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Vita

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