

**Pre-Brides and Independent Heroines: Evolving
Representations of Female Teen Protagonists in
American Film, 1982-2015**

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kierstyn Gaye Lamour
December 2018

Copyright © 2018 by Kierstyn Gaye Lamour
All rights reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I've won the "most improved" award multiple times in my life. It's both a lovely recognition of effort and a humbling acknowledgement that I did not begin the task with much mastery (or in the case of synchronized swimming—any talent whatsoever). I have come to believe that any student who gets through a dissertation deserves a "most improved" award, because it is an endeavor that no one, no matter how talented, gifted, or masterful, can complete without determination and resilience. Much of my success has to do with the stellar, patient guidance of Chuck Maland, who never wavered in his duty to keep me on track. I'm not sure I know anyone who works harder than Chuck. I'm very fortunate to have had him as a mentor and feel the university will probably need three professors to replace him when he retires at the end of this year.

Each member of my committee had an essential role in guiding my scholarship leading up to the dissertation. Mary Papke's early encouragement set me on this course. Amy Billone brought me into teaching children's literature with her at the height of the *Harry Potter/Twilight/Hunger Games* craze with hundreds of eager students who couldn't wait to dig deeper into literature they felt was theirs. Chris Holmlund's outstanding courses in cinema helped me expand my repertoire of feminist scholars and international directors that continue to inspire me. They have all influenced the work I have done and have pushed me to do more. I am grateful and fortunate.

I would have been lost in this process without these generous, outstanding brains: Kat Powell, Dawn Coleman, Julia McCleod, Stephanie Metz, Kirsten Benson, Michael Knight, Thomasena Shaw, Jami Blaauw-Hara, Carrie Preston, Sarah Sword, Diane Wakoski, Charlotte Pence, Tim Lane, Courtney Chapin, and Angela Vasquez-Giroux. They are all writers, readers, listeners, and friends. I cherish all of them.

My husband, Kurt, who has stuck by me while I followed this dream, deserves the most gratitude. Our children, Iris, Justin, and Oliver, were just seven, five, and two when I started my M.A., and they are now the ages of most of the protagonists I study. Their roles in my life are crucial and delightful. My sister, Anyssa Marvin, and my brother, Johnnie Ipson, deserve a special shout-out for being life-long supporters of their most improved sister.

ABSTRACT

Over the first seventy years of American cinema, big budget Hollywood films rarely told heroic stories about teen female protagonists as they did for young male protagonists. Until the civil rights era, young female protagonists most often found identity and sought economic security by winning the affection of a young man by the end of the film. I call this character type the “pre-bride” because she is a teenager, and while there is no “marriage” by the end of the film, she has successfully trained for the marriage plot ending in her future. Since then, some films have challenged this long-standing paradigm, leading to the emergence of a new conceptual model for teen girls—the independent heroine—who is defined by agency instead of the marriage plot.

Drawing on the work of cultural historians and employing both ideological and formalist film analysis, this dissertation explores the emergence of the independent heroine and the persistence and updating of the pre-bride by analyzing the teen female protagonists in six representative, popular American films: two from the 1980s, two from the 1990s, and two from the past decade. By examining the teen protagonists of *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *Clueless* (1995), and *Twilight* (2008), I show that the pre-brides here were not seamless replicants of traditional femininity but rather altered old paradigms. At the same time, I analyze how the independent heroines develop considerable agency in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Titanic* (1997), and *The Hunger Games* (2012) by diverging from marriage plot conventions, although they are not always radically disruptive characters. The arc over the past thirty-plus years suggests that although the pre-bride remains as one persistent character prototype for female teen protagonists, independent heroines are beginning to appear in traditionally heroic roles as the culture adjusts to the idea that women may be as capable as men in pursuing authentic identity separate, but not necessarily apart, from seeking a mate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: DIVERGING PATHS: FUTURE PRE-BRIDES AND NEW INDEPENDENT HEROINES	1
Critical Conversations, Film History, and Social History.....	7
Chapter Descriptions	14
CHAPTER ONE: 1980's REPRESENTATIONS: HUGHES' PRE-BRIDE AND HECKERLING'S HEROINE.....	19
Section I: Production and Plot: <i>Fast Times at Ridgemont High</i>	20
Historical Context of the Late 1970s-Early 1980s: New Teen Representation..	25
<i>Fast Times</i> Narrative: Agency, Roles, and the Future.....	34
Cinematic Style: <i>Fast Times at Ridgemont High</i>	46
Editing Emotion: Abortion, Humiliation, and Compassion.....	53
Music and American Girls: Go-Go's or Somebody's Baby?	56
Section II: <i>Sixteen Candles</i>	60
Plot and Production History: <i>Sixteen Candles</i>	60
Historical Context of the Mid-1980s: Backlash and Pre-Brides.....	68
<i>Sixteen Candles</i> ' Narrative: The Pre-Bride Makeover	75
<i>Sixteen Candles</i> ' Cinematic Style: Nostalgia and Comedy.....	85
<i>Sixteen Candles</i> ' Music: Remake, Reuse, Recycle	92
Chapter One Conclusion.....	96
CHAPTER TWO: 1990's REPRESENTATIONS: A <i>CLUELESS</i> PRE-BRIDE & A <i>TITANIC</i> HEROINE	98
Broad Social/Historical Context: The American 1990s.....	99
Section I: Everybody Loves <i>Clueless</i>	107
Production and Plot: <i>Clueless</i>	108
<i>Clueless</i> Narrative: The Flattering Parody	112
Cinematic Style of <i>Clueless</i> : The Blonde Light.....	128
Editing the Concrete and the Abstract	137
Music: Just a Girl?	140
Section II: <i>Titanic</i> is not a <i>Teen</i> Film (but...).....	143
Production History and Plot: <i>Titanic</i>	145
<i>Titanic</i> Narrative: She's a Beauty.....	156
The Cinematic Style of <i>Titanic</i> : Deliberate Destruction.....	170
Editing & Cinematography: The Eye and Agency	177
Music: The Song Will Go On (and On).....	179
Chapter Two Conclusion.....	182
CHAPTER THREE: 21ST CENTURY PRE-BRIDES & HEROINES	183
Historical Context—Vampires and The Dystopian Future.....	184
<i>Twilight</i> Plot & Production	188
<i>Twilight</i> Narrative.....	196
Cinematic Style: Blue Filters, Yellow Eyes, and Swirling Pan Shots	210
Cinematography & Editing: Still Characters and Moving Cameras.....	217

Music	219
Section II: Katniss Everdeen: Heroic Sixteen in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	224
<i>The Hunger Games</i> Plot and Production: “Panem et Circenses”	225
<i>Hunger Games</i> ’ Narrative: Teen Rebellion, Reality, and Performance.....	233
Cinematic Style: Long Lenses and Hand-held Cameras	246
The Photographic Eye/I in Framing, Editing, and Movement	254
Sound Perspective: Hunters Listen.....	256
CONCLUSION: PROGRESS, REVISION, THE FUTURE	262
WORKS CITED.....	268
APPENDIX	286
VITA	317

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Original <i>Fast Times at Ridgemont High</i> Movie Poster	287
Figure 2. Stacy's Work Uniform in <i>Fast Times at Ridgemont High</i>	288
Figure 3. The unhappy, modern look of Sam (left) in <i>Sixteen Candles</i>	289
Figure 4. Final shot in <i>Sixteen Candles</i>	289
Figure 5. Sam's full-length bridesmaid's dress.	290
Figure 6. Publicity photo for 1990s band, The Lunachicks.....	291
Figure 7. Kathleen Hanna of riot grrrl band Bikini Kill, 1992 (Rosier).....	292
Figure 8. Frame capture of Britney Spears' "Hit Me Baby..." Music Video (1998). ..	292
Figure 9. Frame capture of Cher's "Shirts" <i>Clueless</i>	293
Figure 10. Frame capture of Cher's short bridesmaid's dress in <i>Clueless</i>	293
Figure 11. Publicity photo of Dionne, Cher, and Tai in <i>Clueless</i>	294
Figure 12. Frame capture of <i>Clueless</i> : final kiss.....	295
Figure 13. Frame capture of Rose and Jonathon in matching ties in <i>Titanic</i>	296
Figure 14. Frame capture of traditional feminine Rose in <i>Titanic</i>	296
Figure 15. Frame capture of Rose's Edwardian style in <i>Titanic</i>	297
Figure 16. Frame capture of Rose under a plaid blanket in <i>Titanic</i>	297
Figure 17. Frame capture of Rose on a horse in <i>Titanic</i>	298
Figure 18. Frame capture of Rose's first look at <i>Titanic</i>	298
Figure 19. Frame capture of Rose's first look at the Statue of Liberty in <i>Titanic</i>	299
Figure 20. Frame capture of Rose and Jack looking at nude sketch in <i>Titanic</i>	299
Figure 21. Frame capture of Bella and Edward inside with blue filter in <i>Twilight</i> . ..	300
Figure 22. Frame capture of blue filter exterior in <i>Twilight</i>	300
Figure 23. Frame capture of conspicuous Rosalie and Emmett in <i>Twilight</i>	301
Figure 24. Frame capture of Bella holding her cacti in Arizona in <i>Twilight</i>	301
Figure 25. Frame capture of Bella in Plaid in of <i>Twilight</i>	302
Figure 26. Frame capture of Bella (left), Angela (center), and Jessica (right) shopping for dresses in <i>Twilight</i>	302
Figure 27. Frame capture of Bella's prom dress in <i>Twilight</i>	303
Figure 28. Frame capture of Bella in her sweater in <i>Twilight</i>	303
Figure 29. Frame capture of "final kiss" in <i>Twilight</i>	304
Figure 30. Frame capture of close-up shot of Edward in <i>Twilight</i>	304
Figure 31. Frame capture of Bella's close-up/reaction shot to Figure 30.	305
Figure 32. Frame capture of medium close-up shot/forest montage in <i>Twilight</i>	305
Figure 33. Frame capture of medium shot/forest montage in <i>Twilight</i>	306
Figure 34. Frame capture of extreme long shot, bird's eye view angle/forest montage in <i>Twilight</i>	306
Figure 35. Frame capture of Edward talking treetop with Bella in <i>Twilight</i>	307
Figure 36. Frame capture of Caesar Flickman's interview in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	307
Figure 37. Frame capture of the Capitol crowd/parade in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	308
Figure 38. Frame capture of a close-up Capitol resident in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	308
Figure 39. Frame capture of Katniss' interview shoes in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	309

Figure 40. Liam Hemsworth, Jennifer Lawrence, and Josh Hutcherson at the <i>Catching Fire</i> Premiere in 2013 (AP Photo).....	310
Figure 41. Frame capture of District 12 at the reaping in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	311
Figure 42. Frame capture of Effie Trinket at the reaping in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	311
Figure 43. Frame capture of Katniss hunting D-12 woods in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	312
Figure 44. Frame capture of Katniss in her blue dress at the reaping next to Trinket in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	312
Figure 45. Frame capture of Katniss/fractured mirror in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	313
Figure 46. Frame capture of Katniss during interview in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	313
Figure 47. Frame capture of Katniss' hands in woods in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	314
Figure 48. Frame capture of Katniss' hands in a tree in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	314
Figure 49. Frame capture of Katniss' hand with Tracker Jacker venom in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	315
Figure 50. Frame capture of Rue's corpse (left) and Katniss' hands (right) in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	315
Figure 51. Frame capture of Katniss making a political sign with her hands to D-11 in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	316
Figure 52. Frame capture of Peeta (left) and Katniss (right) clasping hands at their homecoming after the games in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	316

INTRODUCTION:

DIVERGING PATHS: FUTURE PRE-BRIDES AND NEW INDEPENDENT HEROINES

This dissertation investigates teen female protagonists in popular North American big studio film productions from 1982-2015. The focus is on two specific character types I have labeled the “pre-bride” and the “independent heroine,” and examines how these female leads are represented on screen formally and ideologically in six popular productions over the past three-plus decades.

Several broad questions have helped focus my inquiry: 1) How has cultural history and social change influenced the way female protagonists are portrayed in big studio productions that find financial success? 2) What significant changes in their portrayal have emerged? 3) To what extent do bigger productions perpetuate residual ideologies in contemporary culture? 4) Even though independent young women, embodying emergent ideals, have become protagonists in blockbuster¹ productions, can it be argued that they are the new status quo?

Underlying these questions is an awareness of the powerful commercialism of film, its dependence on audience to connect with narratives, and the social and political pressures that shape the way young women are represented on screen.

After conducting an analysis of close to 100 films (made from the late 1970s up to the present) with teen female leads, I suggest that two distinct protagonist

¹ I am using the term “blockbuster” as Thomas Schatz defines it in “The New Hollywood.”

roles are frequently used in popular narrative structures: the “pre-bride” character from modified “marriage plots,”² and the “independent heroine” character from non-marriage-oriented stories of heroism and/or self-discovery. The pre-bride is derived from an older ideology that tends to support roles for young women steeped in traditional femininity, what Barbara Welter called “The Cult of True Womanhood.”³ Alternately, the independent heroine embodies newer possibilities concerning young women and their roles, or potential roles, in society. For example, the pre-bride’s dominant motivation is not in finding her personal autonomy by the end of the film but to continue dependence by winning the affection of a young man who is (typically) in a higher economic and/or social class. Her community (peers, family, teachers, etc.) work diligently to help her on this quest and the film often employs common tropes like “the makeover” to illustrate how she can physically change to look like the right person to win the young man. She never gains this acceptance through engaging in sexual activity, and specific rules help her maintain her material value in both public and private capacities. In contrast, the independent

² “The Marriage Plot” refers to a specific historical pattern of stories created through narrative fiction that “positions marriage as the thing that matters most, especially for women. Novels center on the heroine’s path to marriage; the conventional focus on the female’s perspective signals its particular relevance to a woman’s life. The conspicuous lack of interest in events following marriage establishes getting married as the primary fictional and life goal” (Harrison 117). Critics argue about its origin, but most seem to agree about the marriage plot’s beginning in 18th-Century British literature.

³ Victorian in origin, the reigning principle supported rigid gender roles for men and women that associated the family with the stern development of “both individual and collective character” (Coontz *Never Were* 50). Women were confined to the domestic sphere in caretaker roles, and they were subordinate to men who possessed the ultimate authority as protector and provider. As Coontz points out, women were expected to care for others while being denied personal autonomy; men solely possessed personal autonomy but were penalized for caring for others (*Never Were* 51-52).

heroine presents a new and radically different trajectory, which includes common tropes present in conventional young male protagonist's quests of finding personal autonomy and does not have the defined goal of being in a heterosexual commitment by the end of the film.

Organized by decade, this dissertation will examine six films to compare protagonists in updated marriage plot traditions to protagonists who introduce emergent cultural values through representations of independent heroines. Three marriage plot films—*Sixteen Candles* (1984), *Clueless* (1995), and *Twilight* (2008)—will serve as examples of commercially successful narratives with female leads guided by traditional (dominant or residual) ideologies of femininity. These will be compared and contrasted to three films with independent heroine structures: *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Titanic* (1997), and *The Hunger Games* (2012). The protagonists in these non-marriage plot narratives will be analyzed to determine how ideologically emergent values are communicated through representation. My goals are to show how films featuring teen female leads over the past thirty years are “products” of an evolving American ideology and to connect the progression of these narrative trajectories to social, historical, and cultural changes.

It is important to note that this study does not include films whose leads are young children or below the (portrayed) age of thirteen. For example, Dorothy (Judy Garland) from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) would be too young for this study. Even though Garland was sixteen years old at the time the film was made, she was representing a twelve-year-old girl on a journey who is not in a position to become

an adult at the end of the film; she begins and ends the story as a child. The “teen” age—the liminal transition between childhood and adulthood—encounters unique complexities because of its vacillation between dependence and independence, and films using characters from this age usually end with an expectation or discovery that will put them on a deliberate path toward adulthood. The transitional “teen” age is what links the films of my study.

Historically, American audiences enjoy popular films featuring male protagonists who cultivate an image of rugged individualism and self-reliance. Luke Skywalker, Dirty Harry, Indiana Jones, and even Ferris Bueller embody this kind of celebrated independence. In a classic bildungsroman plot, the lead character (not quite adult) sets out to find his authentic self while developing a profession, acquiring an apprenticeship or pursuing an artistic endeavor, and leaves home in an attempt to test himself. Along the way to finding his desired place in the community, he makes mistakes, endures suffering, and gains valuable experience he will eventually share with others. His personal success is not dependent on marriage, though that is sometimes a part of the plot. How often are these rugged, unmarried individualists portrayed as young women in American film, and when did they appear? Of course, they have always existed in the margins in other popular stories; as early as 1936, Charlie Chaplin created the character “A Gamin” (Paulette Goddard) in *Modern Times* (1936) who navigates poverty and undermines authority much like Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) must in *The Hunger Games* (2012). The difference, over the past thirty-plus years, is that in *The Hunger Games* the

urchin is the center of her own story and, increasingly, audiences wish (and will pay) to see this story played out.

Teenagers often represent the changing values in their culture because their subject position is usually rooted in flux and rebellion, no matter the year the film is produced. What does flux and rebellion look like in teen films made after the social upheavals of the 1960s and '70s? Actresses Olivia Newton John, Phoebe Cates, Molly Ringwald, Winona Ryder, Alicia Silverstone, Kate Winslet, Lindsay Lohan, Emma Stone, Kristen Stewart, and Jennifer Lawrence are all iconic for their leading roles as teenagers in popular films like *Grease* (1978), *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *Heathers* (1989), *Clueless* (1995), *Titanic* (1997), *Mean Girls* (2006), *Twilight* (2008), *Easy A* (2010), and *The Hunger Games* (2012). I suggest their cultural stories can be mapped along the marriage plot and independent heroine narrative structures to provide a broader conversation about American film and social history.

This dissertation examines the last three-plus decades because the emergence of the independent heroine character first appears in commercial films in the early 1980s, riding the last vestiges of the radical social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, but disappears from the commercial film by the end of the decade. None of the scholars I've read describes Stacy (Jennifer Jason Leigh) from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* as a "heroine." She does not defy gravity with supernatural strength; however, her active powers as a character next to a tradition of passive pre-brides seem almost heroic. She makes her own money, initiates interest in sex,

makes mistakes, solves big problems with her own resources, and leaves the narrative with an open ending. She is an independent protagonist embedded in a popular ensemble comedy about teenaged life that was completely new.

The abrupt disappearance of the self-actualized teen heroine from popular films, as demonstrated by many of the beloved John Hughes' films during the Ronald Reagan and George H. Bush administrations, communicates the cultural backlash against feminist ideology that authors like Susan Faludi and Ann De Vaney have identified in their scholarship. The female teen character appeared in lead roles much more frequently during the 1990s and not in just one kind of role. She appeared in films at multiple levels of economic production, utilizing both marriage plot devices and independent heroines, with both finding modest to outstanding financial returns.

During President Bill Clinton's second administration, *Titanic* (1997) changed the way the film industry viewed the social and financial possibilities for narratives featuring young women. Since its release and commercial success, representations of independent and, in some cases, even feminist, young women have moved from peripheral positions to the center of popular films. My research did not reveal that demands for teen marriage plot narratives have disappeared; indeed, those stories continue to be vigorously employed and defended. What's exciting is that there isn't just *one* independent Jo March from *Little Women* being

adapted over and over again,⁴ but multiple narratives illustrating personal development that reinforces positive representations of intellectual growth, character, leadership, generosity, and strength in young women—without being dominated by the narrative device of attaining love or attracting male attention to drive the plot. Just like the classic bildungsroman filmic plots for teen men, these new representations of teen women provide a wider range of possibilities for social roles, and their value is not explicitly linked to virginity or marriageability.

Critical Conversations, Film History, and Social History

This dissertation is concerned with a comparative analysis of characters in their cultural and chronological order, and I propose linking David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson’s neo-formalist approach to film study⁵ with the cultural studies method of analysis, particularly the notion of “structure of feeling,” as conceived by Raymond Williams. “Structure of feeling” posits the existence of “dominant, residual, and emergent” ideologies that exist simultaneously within cultures at all times (R. Williams 121-127). These two approaches will facilitate discussion about how contextual ideologies influence the historic and cultural changes represented by the textual images of female leads in teen films. Together, these approaches enable one

⁴ *Little Women* has been adapted for the screen four times since 1933 by American film producers. According to *Variety* (6/29/2018), director Greta Gerwig just announced that she will direct another adaptation of *Little Women* for Columbia Pictures (Kroll).

⁵ An analytical approach to studying film that explores how elements of a film’s two subsystems (narrative and cinematic style) interact to communicate meaning and evoke emotion, as elaborated by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in *Film Art: An Introduction*, and Thompson’s book *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*.

to explore how individual elements of cinematic style (mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound) work within the narrative system of films to communicate social meaning about positions of power, restriction, gender, education, and class, particularly as they relate to teen female protagonists. I will also analyze how representations of young women have absorbed small changes over time to expand their previous repertoire of roles and analyze the evolving representations in teen marriage plot and teen independent heroine plot stories in commercial films.

This character study will draw on some generic narrative and stylistic conventions of American high school films, but it will also identify recurring ideological tensions in unique and distinct ways. For example, the teen character is often employed to interpret generational and familial conflicts within the narrative, and commercial films tend to reflect a dominant culture's ideal sensibility about how family structures operate, letting audiences know quite easily if the film's central concerns challenge or affirm the status quo. The neoformalist approach works well to distinguish how the narrative structure in film communicates ideas. The cultural meanings embedded in these ideas may, according to Williams, reinforce the dominant culture, demonstrate residual practices of older belief systems, or articulate emergent ideals that challenge all of the above.

Because film images attempt to capture the lived experience of "current" youth in the United States, Raymond Williams' concept of hegemony, which refines and enlarges the concept of ideology, is methodologically suited to the

interpretation of female protagonists in teen films. Williams' concept of "structure of feeling" provides a framework to situate thematic and formal elements of the film form in the larger context of historical transition and to capture each film's representation of existing and emergent norms. This dovetails with Thompson's assertion that the neoformalist approach does not regard art as existing in a fixed or permanent realm but as distinctive, though "culturally determined and relative" (K. Thompson 9).

In carrying out this study, I hope to draw on and extend the work of key social historians and film scholars. Because my emphasis is on young women who are physically, emotionally, and legally dependent on families, the work of family historian Stephanie Coontz will be an important resource. Coontz' *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* covers the American family's social history between 1900-1990, providing an overview of structural shifts of the teenager in his/her own family through waves of changes as the country grew in the twentieth century. Her second book, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families*, offers particularly relevant insight into the history of high schools and outlines a unique "modern" teenage problem in the United States that she calls "rolelessness." Coontz concludes that "young people do better on almost every level when they have meaningful involvement in useful and necessary tasks" but notes that contemporary teenage women often lack that meaningful involvement (13). *The Way We Are* was published the same year as the release of

Titanic, and her work contextualizes conditions that contributed to the enormous success of a film with a young teenage woman as its protagonist.

Susan Faludi's work, along with Coontz's, provides a way to assess the cultural response to the backlash against feminist ideology during the 1980s and 1990s. Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* gathered statistical information from Census Bureau demographers, mental-health professionals, and personal interviews to explore changes in American culture. These include reproductive rights, the beauty industry, equal rights' opposition, family structure, domestic violence, film studies, the media, and legislative policies. As with Coontz, Faludi helps establish a historical context for the ideological concerns and textual analysis presented here.

A critical conversation about films and ideology is an important component of this analysis. Analyzing the female teen protagonist in popular films opens the conversation to include youth and gender dynamics as they are mutated and translated right after the civil rights era backlash and through the information era in the new millennium. I will draw on Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner's approach in *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*, in which the authors indicate their research is as much about "cultural history and social change as it is about film" (xii). Kellner and Ryan address the relationship between Hollywood films and American society between 1967-1985, a time dominated by a major swing in social and political movements from liberal to conservative. From their point of view, many American films in the late 1970s began to reflect a sharp

turn to the political right, as evidenced in more conservative attitudes toward American families, race, gender roles, the military, and socioeconomic policies.

The characters analyzed in this dissertation highlight social and political contrasts present during their cultural productions. Ryan and Kellner believe, like Williams, that contrasting political views coexist and compete for audiences in contemporary culture. For example, they make a distinction between critically reflexive, experimental films like *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and *M*A*S*H* (1972), which reflect the “New Left” ideology of the 1960s, and “New Right” films like the “conservative chiaroscuro of *The Godfather* (1972) and the misogynistic horror of *The Exorcist* (1973),” which indicate the return to classic Hollywood “fixed” or closed narratives (9). A similar opposition is paralleled in the contrasting female characters in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *Sixteen Candles* (1980s), *Titanic* and *Clueless* (1990s), and *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* in the new millennium. The two distinct character types addressed in my dissertation make it possible to track American tropes like self-reliance, capitalism, patriarchy, and individualism within representations of young women in lead roles, and provide evidence to support how the emergent, dominant, and residual ideologies exist simultaneously in the culture.

Not all of the films I have chosen to analyze fit neatly into fixed genres, though several borrow tenets of well-established “teen” film conventions outlined by a number of film scholars. For example, certain setting conventions, like high schools, are great platforms for “teen” narratives to show the characters’ relationship to authority, peer groups, and the ritual testing of boundaries. Thomas

Doherty calls the emergence of movies aimed at a teen audience “teenpics” in American cinema beginning in 1955 as “a product of the decline of classical Hollywood cinema and the rise of the privileged American teenager” (12). While some of the narrative and stylistic conventions Doherty describes are used in all of the films I’ve chosen to study, Doherty’s attention to the rise of “privileged” teens is an important consideration when looking at the evolution of how young women are portrayed during the political currents and social upheavals in each decade. Both protagonists from Chapter Two feature privileged teen heroines at the helm of their narratives, but their choices lead them to distinctly different ideological paths with contrasting outcomes between dependence and independence.

“Youth” as a subject is often paradoxical, as Jon Lewis posits in his book on the teen genre, *The Road to Romance+ Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture*, and my research adds young women in atypical protagonist positions to the conversation. He describes youth as “incoherent, ahistorical, riddled with continuities and contradictions” (7), and concludes most teen narratives focus on “a single social concern: the breakdown of traditional forms of authority: patriarchy; law and order; and institutions like school, the church, and the family” (3). Lewis’ close readings of films like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* weave together compelling observations about cinematic style and point of view, linking the film and characters in their cultural context. By adding the pre-bride and the independent heroine character types in their cultural contexts, this study offers a broader discussion of female protagonists responding to the breakdown of cultural institutions outlined by Lewis

and other scholars, like Catherine Driscoll, Roz Kaveny, Kathleen Karlyn, Timothy Shary, and Linda Seger, who study teens in films.

The separation of a young heroine's value from her virginity is one of the distinct milestones I'm tracking through independent heroines over the past thirty years. In addition to looking to Hanne Blank's broad historical study in *Virgins: The Untouched History* (2007) for a social history perspective, Timothy Shary's historical film genre study, *Generation Multiplex* (2014), looks at "youth" in contemporary American cinema during the 1980s and 1990s, exploring intersections of setting, education, sexual relationships, and the emergence of the horror sub-genre within popular youth narratives. He analyzes *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* for its unusual treatment of sexual content, specifically because it privileges a young woman's point of view. Although he mostly discounts Stacy's (Jennifer Jason Leigh) role as "spacey" in the context of her own sexuality, he astutely recognizes the importance of sex being "merely one aspect of the narrative's matrix" that allows for exploration of numerous emergent values concerning young women and sexuality (Shary 2014: 228). This recognition is a milestone. The fact that Stacy's value is not tied to her sexual agency and treated negatively by the narrative itself is a watershed moment for the independent heroine character. Additionally, Shary's succinct filmography demonstrates how contributions from smaller budget films from the 1980s and 1990s led to increasingly independent representations of young women as protagonists in the new millennium.

Popular discourse on American films has always been vast, and in order to discern cultural approval of particular texts, this dissertation follows the trends of each decade, which change dramatically over time. During the 1980s and 1990s, writers like Roger Ebert from the *Chicago-Sun Times*, Pauline Kael from *The New Yorker*, and Janet Maslin from *The New York Times* offered film critiques from professional backgrounds in journalism and film that establish credible, consistent baselines for their time periods and regional contexts. The Information Era, ushered in via Internet communication during the mid-1990s, greatly changed media forms and changed the way people discover, discuss, and critique films after the mid-1990s. The new millennium, perhaps defined by its factionalism, requires a greater variety of media sources for evidence of shifting and enduring ideologies. This dissertation utilizes traditional and non-traditional resources in a variety of media for cultural research.

Chapter Descriptions

The three chapters that constitute the body of the dissertation will each focus on two films, one featuring a pre-pride protagonist and one featuring what I'm calling an independent heroine.

Chapter 1

The first chapter will outline how *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) and *Sixteen Candles* (1984) can be understood within the context of their political and social history. Presidential elections, legislative policies and campaigns, and economic fluctuation all have direct and indirect influences on film content. After

identifying the political climate of this era, I will address each film's ideological concerns and link the formalist analyses of the female protagonists to representation and social context.

To introduce the two key narrative structures, I will begin with Amy Heckerling's independent heroine protagonist, Stacy (Jennifer Jason Leigh), from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and contrast the novelty of her representation with that of Sam (Molly Ringwald), a pre-bride from the John Hughes' teen marriage plot film *Sixteen Candles* (1984). Sexual agency, parental guidance, economic class, religious influence, peer pressure, and trusted relationships are all conditional forces that help form the core story in these films, even if they are presenting different positions of power and authority. These differences can be outlined, for example, by contrasting marriage plot conventions in *Sixteen Candles*, which reinforces patriarchal authority over the pre-bride's sexual autonomy, and Stacy's clumsy (but age-appropriate) agency in exploring her own sexuality in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. As the 1980s come to a close, Sam's dependent representation is culturally affirmed in a number of ways and reproduced in other films well into the 1990s. In contrast, by the end of the decade, Stacy's independent representation shifts back to lower budgeted independent film productions like *Dirty Dancing* (1987)⁶ or is relegated to mad, murderous, or damaged protagonist positions.⁷

⁶ *Dirty Dancing* was a surprise hit (\$6 million budget/\$64 million domestic gross) that featured an independent heroine (ironically?) named "Baby" (Jennifer Grey) in a sex-and-abortion narrative.

⁷ *Heathers* (1988) and *The Accused* (1988) are two examples of young, damaged survivor-heroines, along with a number of "final girls" who live despite trauma in numerous popular slasher film

Chapter 2

As in the previous chapter, Chapter 2 will establish the significant historical factors that shaped the 1990s and address the ideological concerns presented by two lucrative, big studio films that employ marriage plot and independent heroine narrative structures, *Clueless* (1995) and *Titanic* (1997), respectively. The second chapter will concentrate on female representations in teen films during the political transition from right to left in the 1990s. Timothy Shary's argument that the "emphasis in youth films since 1980 has been on positive aspects of young love and negative aspects of young lust" aligns with trends in the 1990s as well (Shary 2014: 222). Teen protagonists started the decade performing in moderately successful marriage plot films,⁸ but there was a transition to films with independent heroines that garnered enormous commercial success by the end of the 1990s.

Because Amy Heckerling directed both *Fast Times* and *Clueless*, one can contrast her second film's shift from left to right, which reflects a larger cultural swing. While my argument centers on attributing much of *Titanic*'s enormous success to its independent heroine, it will be important to illustrate how this is orchestrated within a production some critics regard as melodramatic, scopophilic,

franchises. *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*, and *Nightmare on Elm Street* all produced multiple sequels between 1985-1989. Although *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988) do not feature teen female protagonists, they became famous and/or popular for their portrayals of female characters, played by Glenn Close, who begin their narrative with agency and become disempowered by the end of the narrative. *Fatal Attraction* grossed \$156 million (domestic) in 1987.

⁸ Shary points out the prevalence of "period" films (ones that deliberately conjure more "innocent" eras) dominating youth films at the beginning of the 1990s, and in 1991 alone, "six period youth romance films were released compared to four set in contemporary times" (Shary 2014: 224).

sensational, conventional, or, as Shary assessed it, a “nonconfrontational period romance” with “safe” content pushed by big studios (Shary 2014: 224). Just as I see a correlation of dependent representation between Sam in *Sixteen Candles* and Cher in *Clueless*, I see a direct correlation of independence between the lead characters in *Fast Times* and *Titanic* and will demonstrate how these characters are developed through the narrative and cinematic style of both films.

Chapter 3

The final chapter will begin by establishing the historical context for the first fifteen years of the new century by identifying conditions that led to fundamental socioeconomic changes in American culture. The new millennium has produced several wildly successful film franchises featuring teenagers, including the eight *Harry Potter* films, the four *Twilight* films, and the four *Hunger Games* films. This chapter will examine the first *Twilight* (2008) film and the first *Hunger Games* (2012) film to connect the protagonists to the two key narrative structures and protagonist types outlined in this dissertation. I intend to analyze how the marriage plot comes back disguised as feminist empowerment through protagonist Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart), who begins with agency but gradually transforms into a passive pre-bride in *Twilight*. I will also connect how millennial independent heroine Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) inverts tropes like “the makeover” in *The Hunger Games* to critique the marriage plot paradigm itself on her way to self-discovery. As in the previous chapters, I will examine the political climate and the film’s ideological concerns to conduct formalist analyses.

The conclusion will summarize the arguments made in the dissertation and discuss avenues for future investigation.

CHAPTER ONE:

1980'S REPRESENTATIONS: HUGHES' PRE-BRIDE AND HECKERLING'S HEROINE

This chapter introduces two films featuring well-depicted character prototypes of the independent heroine and the pre-bride, as they appeared during the 1980s. *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) presents Stacy Hamilton (Jennifer Jason Leigh) as its lead protagonist, and her representation reflects a cultural ideology that championed equality among the sexes born from the civil rights era and the emergence of second wave feminism. Samantha "Sam" Baker (Molly Ringwald) emerges from *Sixteen Candles* (1984) as a recycled pre-bride reflecting the wider cultural backlash against young women performing roles previously held by young men in protagonist positions.

To situate the significance of each character, I will provide a history of each film's production and a brief plot summary before considering the films in their historical contexts, including political and social movements related to teenagers. I then examine the films' narrative themes, characters, and stylistic choices. Ultimately, this first chapter will use *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* to show how a self-determining teen heroine emerged for the first time in a mainstream film, while, at relatively the same time, the old pre-bride paradigm evolved to adapt to the 1980s context with equal success.

Section I: Production and Plot: *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) was adapted from a book which was based on real student experiences in a southern California high school and written by twenty-two-year-old ex-*Rolling Stone* reporter Cameron Crowe. Crowe posed as a student at Van Nuys High School and kept a record of his experiences during the 1978-1979 school year. Simon and Schuster published his results as a book, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High: A True Story* in 1981, and *Playboy Magazine* also published excerpts from it during the fall of the book's release. In the introduction of his book, Crowe admits he developed friendships with his subjects and was upfront with them about his intentions when it was over: "[He] did not want to become yet another adult writing about adolescence and *kids* from an adult perspective. This story, [he] felt, belonged to the kids themselves" (Crowe). He changed their names, and they all consented to its publication. Universal Pictures bought the rights to the book, hired Crowe to pen the screenplay, and he worked with producer Art Linson to bring Amy Heckerling on as director. Crowe and Linson were convinced she would be a good fit because of a short, comedic film she had done in graduate school called *Getting it Over With*.⁹ Crowe's "true" account of teenagers living at the tail end of 1970s social activism introduced a commercial audience to a new kind of independent teen heroine in a non-marriage plot.

⁹ This film is unavailable for viewing. According to *IMDB.com*, her film is a comedy about a nineteen-year-old girl who wants to "get rid of" her virginity, which plot is apropos to Crowe's text and the trajectory of Stacy's plight in *Fast Times*.

The narrative of the film *Fast Times* reflects the episodic origins from the book but trims the number of characters to an ensemble cast of six: Stacy Hamilton (Jennifer Jason Leigh), Brad Hamilton (Judge Reinhold), Linda Barrett (Phoebe Cates), Mark “Rat” Ratner (Brian Backer), Mike Damone (Robert Romanus), and Jeff Spicoli (Sean Penn). Stacy, the main character, is fifteen years old and works at the mall with her best friend, the slightly older and wiser Linda. Rat and (Mike) Damone also work at the mall. They form a parallel relationship to Stacy and Linda in that the slightly older Damone often counsels Rat on relationship strategies. Although Rat harbors a crush on Stacy during most of the year, when he finally takes her on a date, he’s not emotionally ready to have sex that same evening. Stacy takes this as a rejection and dates his best friend, Damone, shortly afterward. Their sexual encounter is awkward and rather humiliating for him (he ejaculates prematurely), but he nonetheless impregnates Stacy. She asks him for half the money needed for an abortion and for a ride to the clinic, but he does not come through on either request. Stacy asks her brother, Brad, for a ride to a bowling alley, but Brad sees that she runs across the street to the abortion clinic as he is pulling away. He comes back to pick her up and continues to support her even after her secret is discovered.

The story does not depict Stacy, Linda, Brad, Rat, or Mike Damone as heroes, villains, or buffoons. Instead, they all share intersecting plotlines around Stacy’s conflicts with sex, love, and maturation during her first year of high school. Though Heckerling wanted to leave the ending completely open, the studio pushed for an

American Graffiti (1973)-style finale, offering a few sentences on what happens to each of the main characters in their not-too-distant futures.

As a film production, the ninety-two-minute-long *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* was acquired, developed, and released in a relatively short amount of time. Principal photography lasted roughly eight weeks, starting in November of 1981 and wrapping before the end of the year. Several California locations were utilized, including Sherman Oaks' Galleria Mall and Van Nuys High School. Occasionally the students attending school appear as extras. The only constructed sets were the bedrooms of the principal characters and the changing room beside the pool. The original sex scene between Stacy and Damone featured full-frontal male nudity and caused the film to be awarded an "X" rating by the MPAA. The final cut, rated "R," also featured their awkward sexual encounter but cut the male nudity. The film title was given regional release in Los Angeles on August 13, 1982, but its popularity prompted a second premiere in New York City in September 3, 1982. It stayed in theaters across the country well through the end of October.¹⁰

Inspired by a Led Zeppelin song, Crowe had intended to call his book *Stairway to Heaven: A Year in High School*. An in-house editor ultimately came up with the title of "*Fast Times*," which Crowe disliked because he felt it "boil[ed] down

¹⁰ All of the production information was obtained from the American Film Institute (AFI) website *afi.com*. *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* is part of the Institute's catalog of films, and the statistics I use here are itemized in the "notes" section of its catalog page. It includes a cited bibliography of information obtained from the publications *Variety*, *Hollywood Reporter*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Daily Variety*, and *LAH Exam* for these notes ("*Fast Times at Ridgemont High* – Catalog Detail"). These primary sources were all published between 1981-1982.

the metaphor of the book” (Crowe). He credits its publication to the ingenuity of a female editor who made sure the publisher’s sixteen-year-old daughter read the manuscript. According to Crowe, the teen said, “Dad, you have to put this out,” and it was only after that the book was published (Crowe). To me this is evidence that young women had a hand in bringing a new story to the mainstream, even if they didn’t directly write it.

Since comedy may also function as cultural critique, *Fast Times* was able to introduce less visible social conflicts regarding teens and gender to mainstream audiences. The evocation of laughter and discomfort was intentional. On the DVD commentary, Heckerling and Crowe discuss the implication that part of the story these “kids” communicate is that they are growing up “*too fast*” (Heckerling and Crowe DVD Commentary). In his 2002 interview, Crowe lamented what he identified as a great loss for the teenagers in the late 1970s—“a vanishing adolescence...; kids were becoming adults, burdened with financial and sexual responsibilities, years earlier than their parents ever had” (Crowe). The comedy obscures some of this lament, but it also creates discomfort by using visual elements that don’t quite match the seemingly light tenor of the narrative. Heckerling purposefully tried to emphasize the child-like qualities of characters who were engaging in adult activities through mise-en-scene.

For example, during the first date between Stacy and Rat, Heckerling deliberately tried to make them look young for their age. She changed the size of the props and removed part of the sets to make them look smaller: “[She] took the

cushions out of the chairs...[,]made them hold huge menus” (Heckerling and Crowe DVD Commentary). The visual effect exaggerates the awkwardness of dating and of kids performing adult roles. Heckerling distracts audiences while addressing taboo subjects such as un-romanticized sexual activity among teenagers, like masturbation, unfulfilling encounters, and abortion. The film also incorporates an emerging independent heroine exploring an identity outside of the usual pre-bride paradigm without her being punished by the narrative for investigating some of those taboos.

Major studios like the certainty of film genre conventions because they know how to market them, and Heckerling’s awkward comedy featuring a female protagonist did not fit into the gross-out sex comedies of the *Porky’s* or *Risky Business(es)* that came before it. The original movie poster (see Figure 1) demonstrates Universal Pictures’ uncertainty about *Fast Times* appeal by putting Spicoli and two unnamed “beach babes” from his dream sequence on it instead of Stacy. Jeff Spicoli—the surfer/stoner deviant who provided much of the memorable counter-culture comic relief¹¹—is the story’s outsider, not its main character. The *LA Times* reported that Universal Pictures went through “10 to 15 advertising approaches” because *Fast Times* made Hollywood look “directly at its core audience”

¹¹ One of the most beloved scenes occurs when he emphatically yells, “You Dick!” to Mr. Hand when he tries to embarrass him for being late to class. As recently as March 13, 2015, late-night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel played the “You Dick!” clip when he interviewed Sean Penn on his show, saying that the two words were “the greatest two words ever said on film.” Hyperbole aside, the emotional satisfaction/catharsis of this kind of rebel teen continues to resonate.

(Pollock 20). To David Weitzner and Ken Markman, Universal's directors of marketing and advertising, respectively, the best strategy was to appeal to the "12-year old-demographic," through "irreverence...[,] defiance of authority...[and] anarchy" (Pollock 22-24). Spicoli fits this marketing plan, though the marketers were remiss in failing to recognize the innate irreverence of Stacy's narrative, too. Sean Penn's portrayal of the California surfer brings the levity needed to balance premature ejaculation, getting caught masturbating, and romantic rejection. The uneven construction of how a teenaged girl has to figure out how to get support and money for an abortion is no laughing matter either. In significant ways, the generic marketing push of Spicoli helped the commercial film hide its more daring independent film structure. Not only did *Fast Times* operate on a low budget,¹² but it employed an ensemble cast of mostly unknown actors, followed a loose plot, lacked clearly defined antagonists, and featured a female protagonist in an open ending.

Historical Context of the Late 1970s-Early 1980s: New Teen Representation

Fast Times introduces protagonist Stacy Hamilton as an alternative representation to the pre-bride character in teen films, and her agency reflects the kind of regard second wave feminists hoped to foster in mainstream audiences. Stacy has the freedom to explore what work, independence, sex, friendship, and family mean to her without having the narrative direct her toward marriage at the

¹² In the same 1982 *LA Times* review, Pollock says that the budget was both \$6 million and \$9 million dollars. According to *The Numbers.com*, the budget was \$4.5 million. The official theatrical run grossed just over \$27 million according to multiple sources.

end of the film. This may not seem revolutionary, but positioning Stacy's non-pre-bride conflict as the center of a popular comedy is unique. Other films featuring non-pre-bride protagonists around the same time such as *Foxes* (1980), *Little Darlings* (1980), *Cattle Annie and Little Britches* (1981), and *Ladies and Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains* (1982) are not well known today.¹³

The national newspapers reflected the dominant 1970s ideology that was uncertain about young female protagonists who did not follow pre-bride conventions. Notably in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* young women are depicted as possible initiators of sexual exploration. Although this initiation was often depicted in commercial teen comedies with male protagonists as acceptable and a rite of passage, the same cannot be said for young women. Numerous reviewers did not see Stacy's role as the protagonist, primarily because the narrative failed to emphasize her beauty, a defining signifier for a pre-bride. The *New York Times*' Janet Maslin complained that *Fast Times* "had no chief character" and that the film was "too fluffy and insubstantial to accommodate anything raw"—for example, the detailed abortion scene and the more explicit sex scenes Universal Pictures had cut ("Film Review; Ridgemont High"). *The Wall Street Journal*'s Joy Gould Boyum condemned the entire teen genre as "fantasy sociology," and dismissed Stacy as a "sweet looking 15-year-old who wants nothing more than to lose her virginity." She

¹³ These (mostly) independent films address teen rituals of sex, drugs, and emancipation. Unlike *Fast Times* and *Sixteen Candles*, they are nearly impossible to rent or find playing via cable stations, even though they star acclaimed actresses like Jodi Foster, Diane Lane, and Laura Dern.

also accused the film of failing to “carr[y] any of its characters or situations much beyond weary cliché” (Boyum). *The Washington Post*’s Rita Kemply held that Stacy “learned this lesson: Boys don’t ask for seconds if they go all the way on firsts,” blatantly misreading Stacy’s agency (Kemply).¹⁴ In point of fact, Stacy rejects the “second” attentions of Ron Johnson (the first man she sleeps with who continues to call and send her flowers), and more importantly, she is not defined as a character by the experience. All of these reviewers regarded Stacy Hamilton as a failure of narrative characterization instead of an innovation of a new one.

Roger Ebert’s review in the *Chicago Sun Times* also condemned *Fast Times*, awarding it a single star, and I find it emblematic of the difficulty critics had when asked to accept a young female protagonist in a non-pre-bride role. Ebert asks how its director and producer could put her, “a fresh and cheerful person [,] into such a scuz-pit of a movie.” He then blasts the comedy as vulgar, embarrassing, gross, and humiliating, stating, “There is a difference between [fun] raunchiness and gynecological detail.” This is a particularly interesting choice of words, as he goes on to accuse Heckerling of being “sexist” for her “mishandling” the depiction of pregnancy and abortion because of her failure to understand “the women’s

¹⁴ *The Washington Post* published two reviews, one by Kemply and one by Richard Harrington on the same day. Harrington, at least, recognized Stacy as the main character; singling her out as “the catalyst for almost everything that happens in the film,” he still condemned *Fast Times* as “pedestrian,” and, “at best, ‘Ridgemont’ is drive-in fodder for high-school kids who don’t care what’s on screen” (Harrington WP 13 Aug 1982).

movement" ("Review of *Fast Times*"). I disagree with Ebert on all counts, as did Jennifer Jason Leigh.¹⁵

Ebert's review reflects the dominant mood of 1982 in that it resists normalizing the shifting of agency in heterosexual practices. Ebert even contrasts *Fast Times* to *Porky's*, which he refers to as a "good" example of a perfectly acceptable, vulgar "adolescent sex romp."¹⁶ His review wrongly predicts that audiences would be "grossed out" instead of amused by Stacy's and Linda's lunchroom carrot scene. Accordingly, the box-office sales proved his prediction wrong.¹⁷ Three months after the film's release, Pauline Kael published a more positive review in *The New Yorker*. She praised the clever dialogue and the music that helped "ease" numerous awkward moments. She attributed the success of the film to the fact that the characters "gained independence" and were not judged for their choices ("The Current Cinema: Rice Krispies" 145). She does not condemn Stacy and Linda for adopting more agency regarding sex.

Indeed, the promise of a titillating sex comedy is part of the film's appeal. This is signaled by its title. The adjective *fast* points to the film's central concern: the

¹⁵ In the September 11, 1982, *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, Leigh said that "teenage test audiences had found the scene 'too graphic,'" and the actress was "disappointed that the re-cut version eliminated the sense of awkward hesitancy between the two characters, who weren't ready for sex."

¹⁶ In his *Porky's* review from 1980, Ebert awarded it only half a star more than *Fast Times*, yet 1 ½ stars is hardly a ringing endorsement.

¹⁷ According to *TheNumbers.com*, *Fast Times* debuted with \$2.5 million at the box office on August 13, 1982. The film's domestic peak came three weeks after its initial release in August, making \$14.5 million over the weekend of September 3, 1982. The production budget was estimated at \$4.5 million, and its domestic gross total was over \$27 million.

acceleration of childhood into adulthood through sexual experience.¹⁸ Heckerling does her best to extend the perils of “fast” to teens of both genders. Stacy is not free from making difficult choices or suffering from her mistakes, but neither is she cloaked in shame. Her brother supports her, she is not publicly humiliated, and she does not die at the end of the film. In Robin Wood’s positive assessment, *Fast Times* shows that “it is possible to reflect (hence reinforce) the progressive tendencies in one’s culture, not merely the reactionary ones” (197).

A cluster of moderately successful comedy films emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s that depict what Tim Shary identified as teens on quests to “lose their virginities”—a subset in a wave of “sex craze” film plots like *Little Darlings* (1980), *Porky’s* (1982), *The Last American Virgin* (1982), *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Risky Business* (1983), *Class* (1983), *Private School* (1983), *Losin’ It* (1983), and *The Sure Thing* (1985), among others (Shary 2005: 62-64). A majority of these, but certainly not all, present conflicts for young male protagonists who want to cross over into adulthood via sexual experience. Contextually, the levity in these films around sexual activity among unmarried teenagers reflected a culture in the

¹⁸ The colloquial term “fast” has historical roots in popular culture that are connected to pejorative meanings, especially when used as an adjective before “woman” who is regarded negatively if sexually active or initiating sex. Richard Grant White, an early American literary and social critic most known for his book *Words and Their Uses* (1870), wrote about the conversational use of the term “fast” in an article called “Popular Pie” published in *Galaxy Magazine* in October of 1874. In it, he laments how the word’s meaning is changing due to “a degrading perversion of the word *fast* used metaphorically” in conversations and publications in the recent past (537). At first he acknowledges its use could apply to both genders: “This fastness of living, when it invades and modifies ‘social existence,’ produces in the end fast women and fast men...[,] [like] a man who has more money to spend than he has time to spend it in.” He concludes, however, by associating the degraded meaning of “fast women” as a “descriptive term for common harlotry” (538).

midst of redrawing moral boundaries in the new age of sexual liberation. Shary argues that *Fast Times* stands alone among that group of “virginity quest” films because Stacy’s romantic double, “Rat,” whom Shary only refers to as “the virgin,” preserves *his* virginity and seems “the better for it” (Shary 2005: 64). Shary acknowledges Stacy as the film’s protagonist, but essentially reduces the film’s argument to favor the (male) romantic double’s outcome instead of Stacy’s. Recast in this light, Stacy’s foray into sexual exploration becomes a failure or a cautionary tale instead of one in which a heroine gains a “happy ending” by overcoming trials, mistakes, and challenges on her own. In contrast, it is important to think about the film, and Stacy’s role in it, as examining the trials of white, middle-class teen independence, regardless of the protagonist’s gender, as opposed to being just a cautionary tale about the “loss” of virginity.

Fast Times unwittingly grapples with burgeoning sexual identity in a culture adjusting to new legal forms of birth control. Although the high value placed on female virginity in the 19th and early 20th centuries began to diminish long before the 1960s, that decade has been popularly associated with “free love,” pharmaceutical birth control, and relaxed social norms.¹⁹ As *Fast Times* shows, and Lara Marks argues: “By diminishing the risk of pregnancy, the oral contraceptive

¹⁹ In *Virgin: The Untouched History*, Hanne Blank notes that the Western birth control movement had started by the end of the 19th century and had made significant social gains. Pre-marital gynecological visits, venereal disease testing, hospital births, and even the establishment of “self-help” literature written by women regarding sexual relations were established during this time (219-220).

undermined the powerful psychological weapon women had previously possessed to deny sexual intercourse. After all, men could argue that as there was no risk in having intercourse why should they not do so" (qtd in Blank 229). The raunchy "sex-quest" films with young male protagonists seem to anxiously add "with me" to the end of "why should they not do so." *Fast Times*, in contrast, has one of its male characters remain a virgin. Moreover, if the sexual revolution created the first generation of women unburdened by the fear of pregnancy as the defining component of their sexual identities, Stacy and Linda represent the first wave of post-revolution daughters in this new territory. Stacy's control over her own sexual affairs is one of the most striking examples of her independence, and a true divergence from the pre-bride paradigm. *Fast Times'* commercial success and non-punitive narrative seem to affirm the idea that young female characters can become agents of sex enacted "for pleasure" at much younger ages than was true for previous generations.

It is reckless to claim that films can be used as an example of the "real" behavior of any social group, but stories that connect with audiences usually manifest socially significant trends that can be profitably analyzed as cultural reflections. David Considine argues in the *Cinema of Adolescence* that, historically, American films about young people are egregiously "unsuccessful in realistically depicting adolescence" and that Hollywood's portrayal of teens is predominantly

negative (9).²⁰ Although Considine mentions a few films from the early 1980s, most of his analyses pre-date my project. Crowe's narrative is moreover based on real teenagers he got to know over nine months, and he outlines the younger generation's pursuit of less rigidly defined gender roles within interpersonal relationships, as well as in professionalization, education, and intellectual pursuits. More importantly, the film includes conversations between young women about topics that were completely absent from and had been considered culturally taboo in previously successful films.

To appreciate what a dynamic example Heckerling's film is in its historical context, it is important to describe the film in relation to the late 70s. In *Virgin Territories*, Lisa Dresner argues that *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) and *Little Darlings* (1980) reflect a fleeting transitional moment between two social movements. She asserts that the two films ultimately align with the 1970s feminist demands for "sexual empowerment" and for equality before Reagan's "sexual abstinence" message became dominant in the 1980s. She describes what I also see as a temporary moment of independence afforded to young female protagonists via "sexual decision-making as intelligent, responsible, and important...[instead of]...romantic or infantilized" characters (174). Nonetheless, the idea that young

²⁰ He highlights the teen "gangs" depicted during the Great Depression, empty-headed "bobby-soxers" attending "endless proms" during the '40s, which morph into the image of the juvenile delinquent (via James Dean) in the '50s. He notes the absence of "altruism" shown by teens on screen during the 1960s and contends that the images of hedonism—surf, sand, and sex—contribute to that continued negative bias. He then cites images of addicted, tormented, and anguished teens as evidence of continued negative bias in films produced during the 1970s (9-10).

women would pursue gratification outside the pre-bride marriage plot is almost completely absent from popular films for the next fifteen years. Stacy paved the way for Rose (Kate Winslet) in *Titanic* in the 1990s and Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) in *The Hunger Games* in the new millennium. All three behave intelligently and responsibly to the benefit of the common good and/or their own self-interests outside of the marriage plot.

Raymond Williams' definition of culture acknowledges its complexity "in terms of process, social definitions, traditions, institutions, formations and in dynamic interrelations." For Williams, dominant culture does not just passively exist (121). Looking at culture requires acknowledging the "active" participation or "practice" of a "realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits" by people living in it at that moment (112). In terms of pre-brides and independent heroines, *Fast Times* stands out for its lack of a marriage plot trajectory, parental guidance, and moral restrictions on female sexuality. *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* telegraphs the liberated spirit of the 1970s for the future, in stark contrast to the hegemonic conservatism that follows it into the 1980s (and beyond).

Questions of sexual—or lack of sexual—activity are almost always part of the narrative when the teen protagonist is female. Judgments about young women being sexual in commercial films usually reinforce conservative values. The main theme expressed by these (mostly marriage plot) narratives is that successful, beloved young women preserve their virginity for marriage or risk becoming outcasts within

their families or communities at large. One of the reasons I choose to start my analysis with *Fast Times* is that this now²¹ highly regarded and popular comedy breaks with this tradition.

Fast Times Narrative: Agency, Roles, and the Future

The themes that emerge from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*'s narrative reflect the changing social and political landscape affecting American youth and illustrate the evolution of female protagonists. Themes regarding agency, redefining gender roles, and family emerge in all of the films that will be studied over the next two chapters. Each of these themes will be discussed through narrative character analyses here, and they will also provide a template for the explorations of the next five films in this dissertation as well.

On the one hand, *Fast Times* might look ordinary because it utilizes conventional approaches to some of the common “firsts” meant to signify teen transitions through rituals involving sex, drugs/alcohol, and other minor deviancies; but *Fast Times* is actually innovative because of the way it presents “the virgin” narrative for young women. Historically, a young woman’s value is so closely tied to her biology—in stories, within her own family, and in her community—that the expectation that a narrative will address her virginity is anticipated without question. It is directly shaped by her parents’ perspective of her. *Fast Times* looks at

²¹ *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *Titanic* are the only films out of six studied here that have been selected for the Library of Congress’s National Film Registry.

virginity and sexual experience through several characters, both male and female. As much as I argue that Stacy's innovative position in the narrative creates a path for young women in future commercial films, I also think this film presents emerging ideas about men who defy dominant sexual norms. They, however, will not be discussed in any depth in this dissertation.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High rushes its characters through their loss of innocence without judging them harshly for their mistakes. For Heckerling (and Crowe), this story comes from the kids being forced to transition into adult situations/responsibilities before they are ready. The transformation affects their attitudes toward work, sexuality, problem solving, and interpersonal relationships. *Fast Times* offers a liberal response toward this theme because the narrative lacks antagonists to blame. At the same time, the film communicates a sense of loss, as it asks its characters to cope with loosening boundaries that used to separate "adulthood" from "childhood." While the director and writer both say that "kids" prematurely playing "adult" roles come at a great cost, the narrative reveals what hard-won independence looks like for the central female protagonists. The narrative gives Stacy agency, in particular, by allowing her to tell her own story.

The film also presents opinions about this perceived age of lost innocence through its constructions of gender behavior, at times allowing characters to embody traits usually assigned to opposite genders. *Fast Times* shows female characters in positions of power and control without being humiliated. Similarly, male characters are not shown as one-dimensional pursuers of sexual conquests;

instead, the narrative gives them a chance to employ their intellect, and the film also rewards emotional maturity and awareness. What “girls” and “boys” might be approaching differently directly reflects the social changes wrought by the political activism that helped shape the American landscape by the end of the 1970s. Significantly, in its attempt to reach broader audiences, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* resists showing any or all of these changes as simply positive or negative.

Teen Places: Regulated and Unregulated

Today, teenagers spend a great deal of time in heavily regulated spaces. By regulated, I mean overseen by some kind of authority or institution. All of the texts featured in this dissertation show how characters behave inside and outside of these regulated spaces. Certain settings like schools or malls dictate behaviors, and historical contexts shape what is considered “normal” or “taboo.” Besides looking at individual characters, therefore, I will also look at the settings in which they appear.

Fast Times begins at a mall—a familiar location frequently found near suburbs in the United States and one that is (still) heavily associated with congregating teenagers, although it is used only in two of the films I selected for this study (both by Heckerling: *Fast Times* and *Clueless* [1995]). The opening montage shows that teenagers are both consumers and workers within the mall, demonstrating Tim Shary’s claim that the American shopping mall itself emerged in the 1980s as the new icon of youth independence (Shary 2014: 7). Steve Bailey and James Hay argue that the mall, as a location, serves as a “semi-public” place between the “individual” (home) and “social” (public school) (225). *Fast Times* uses the mall

as a place for teens to accumulate experience and gain independence by making money. The fact that the female protagonist and other teenaged women are observed *working* in the mall alongside young men in the story is new for a commercial film.

Stacy's job at the mall emancipates her from having to ask her parents for money; they, in turn, have fewer regulatory powers over what she does. They are not, in fact, seen on screen. One of the most profound realizations *Fast Times* offers, but never explicitly discusses, is that Stacy herself comes up with the money needed for the abortion without having to ask or involve anyone else after Mike Damone fails to help pay for it. This distinction is part of what makes her character so different from the pre-brides who came before her: by making her own money, she avoids public judgment and ridicule. Her sexual history is kept private—the kind of privacy men have enjoyed forever.

Fast Times also shows the seedier side of the mall for teens. Although mall culture is known for its teen population, the truth is people of all ages are there. Older men, like the twenty-something Ron Johnson (D.W. Brown), interact with Stacy as patrons. The narrative shows how she demonstrates her interest in him, lies about her age, and accepts his invitation to meet. Although the film has Stacy lose her virginity to Ron Johnson in a dingy, graffitied baseball dugout, she is not punished or ridiculed for doing so, though the tryst does communicate a broader unease about potential predation in a place outside the protections of home or school.

The teens who populate the world of *Fast Times* are unsupervised, moreover, almost everywhere. According to Crowe and Heckerling, the studio constantly pressured them to put more adults in the film because they didn't think adults would bother to come see it if it was "just a bunch of kids" in an "R" rated film (Heckerling and Crowe DVD Commentary). Crowe was adamant his journalistic work had uncovered their absence from the lives of the teens he had gotten to know. In his original book, he said, "The only time these students acted like kids was when they were around adults" (12). The film definitely operates from a place adults are not usually privy to seeing and reinforces the teens' role as storytellers.

Many different kinds of high schools are featured in films with teens, but there are a few predictable places within them, such as classrooms, lunchrooms, hallways, bathrooms, and gyms. The most regulated of these spaces is the classroom, where teachers have authority. *Fast Times* does not single Stacy out in the classroom, and this, too, demonstrates her independence. She does not seek attention or approval from teachers, and her position as a "good" or "bad" student has no bearing on the plot itself. The narrative shows the classroom as having little impact on her identity.

The bathroom is often featured in teen films because it provides a place for characters to reveal secrets, desires, and problems. Bathrooms can also signify a moment of character vulnerability while he/she reveals abjected material or discusses taboo subjects. Filmmakers typically rely on bathrooms to help show what a character is thinking by using a mirror, and teens do indeed spend a great deal of

time looking into bathroom mirrors. Bathrooms are appealing to teens, even in regulated spaces, because they offer some semblance of privacy and also allow a reliable separation by gender.²² *Fast Times* contains bathroom sets in the school, the mall, and at home. Bathrooms are particularly important for revelations of sexual independence by secondary characters like Stacy's brother Brad and her friend Linda. Brad and Linda both practice breaking up with their significant others while standing in front of a bathroom mirror, and those scenes reflect larger contextual conversations about changing expectations related to gender roles and relationships.

Protagonist: Stacy Hamilton

Stacy is an unusual protagonist because the narrative allows her to question what she wants instead of showing how she *is wanted*. The narrative does not dwell on her physical beauty because the question of her desirability is not what drives the story. This position is a marked shift from pre-bride narratives, which solely focus on demonstrating a young woman's desirability to a young man and/or the community. Leigh is a beautiful actress, but Stacy's desire for self-discovery is more important than her looks. She is also unique in that the narrative does not make her *extreme*; she is not the most popular girl in school, nor is she an outcast who must change in order to be accepted. She does not have to do much to own sexual

²² After viewing close to 100 films featuring female teen protagonists for my specialized doctoral exam, I noted the presence of mirrors in 100% of the films (even the animated ones!).

experiences with older men like Ron Johnson and Mike Damone, but she learns that without an emotional connection these experiences are unsatisfying.

Stacy's social maturation emphasizes experiences with friends, school and work, while minimizing parental influences. Her choices do not lead her directly to adulthood, and some of her decisions are clearly mistakes with uncomfortable consequences, but instead of being condemned, she is given more time to consider what she needs in a *fast* world.

Secondary Characters

Commercial films often feature secondary characters who help reinforce stereotypes. For example, the romantic double in an *Indiana Jones* film looks a lot like a slightly older independent heroine: she will be female, beautiful, employed, smart, strong, and pursuing her own quest. Indiana's conquest of this kind of romantic double helps establish his desirability without making the relationship the driving force of the plot, because one of the conventions of the hero-quest film is usually that it will be a marriage-free adventure. Other times, secondary characters can introduce taboo subjects or depict critiques of conventions or stereotypes. The indie film *Heathers* (1989) is noted for being one of the first to show how bullies "imput[e] homosexuality onto anyone they dislike" (Kaveney 57), paving the way for commercial films like *Mean Girls* (2006) to feature a secondary character named "Janis Ian"²³ (Lizzy Caplan) whose personality construction is singularly shaped by

²³ The real Janis Ian is a lesbian American folk singer known for her melancholy ballad "At Seventeen," released in 1973, sung from the perspective of an "ugly duckling" girl in high school.

this exact style of bullying, except on a young woman instead. A few of the secondary characters in *Fast Times* reinforce some of the more emergent ideological themes carried forward by the protagonist, which may have existed in independent films that came before it, but are striking here for their critique on status quo assumptions expected in a commercial film.

Linda Barrett (Phoebe Cates)

Linda, Stacy's older "best friend," plays against type. Sexually experienced teen women are often depicted with contempt, even if they are participating in stories outside of the marriage plot. In *Fast Times*, Linda is a loyal friend and trusted confidant whose sexual experience is not shamed by the narrative. A more typical paradigm would be to have the sexually experienced minor character pose as a "friend" to the protagonist but act cruelly, erecting obstacles in the way of her "friend's" goal. Typically, she befalls a terrible/debilitating fate before the end of the film (e.g., Rizzo [Stockard Channing] in *Grease* [1978], Heather Chandler [Kim Walker] in *Heathers* [1988], Courtney [Rose McGowan] in *Jawbreakers* [1999], or Regina George [Rachel McAdams] in *Mean Girls* [2004]). In such films, dramatic irony increases the audience's negative emotional response as they observe the protagonist's "friend" setting traps for her. Tying an unlikable character to sexual experience heightens the audience's desire to see the heroine remain a virgin; it also perpetuates competition among young women who are regarded as enemies who fight for a finite number of resources. The paradigm helps perpetuate myths about female friendships bred on distrust, discontent, and suspicion. *Fast Times* offers a

different view. The narrative does not positively reinforce Linda's dedication to "Doug" (the never-seen fiancé who lives in Chicago) because he breaks up with her. She reads her response letter to this break-up to Stacy in the public bathroom at the dance, and although Linda cries, she also finds support in her friendship. The use of her words "like adults" reinforces the director's lament that the "kids" are growing up too soon, but the ability to find strength, maturity, and support also make Linda, too, one of the new independent heroines. Linda is not devastated and rendered aimless without marriage; she wipes her tears away with a smile, saying, "I don't have to sink to his level. I can go out with anyone I want, practically." She even thanks Stacy for "cheering her up," and clearly what has cheered her is not Stacy's advice but her willingness to listen. Most crucially, the narrative does not condemn Linda for being a non-virgin without a boyfriend or a fiancé; the end of the film informs the audience that she is now in college.

Brad Hamilton (Judge Reinhold)

Brad is the sole family support for his sister Stacy. The theme of lost childhood develops in different ways for him than for her. For example, he acts more like a manager than as a part-time employee at the burger place where he works while he attends high school. He's expected to illustrate enough maturity to appease older, irate customers, and observed failing at this. He makes payments on an old car he bought himself. The way he describes his relationship with his girlfriend seems more like a middle-aged sexless marriage than a teenage romance. As his break-up monologue in the bathroom mirror is delivered alongside the spray-

painted words “Big Hairy Pussy,” the insult undercuts the courage he’s trying to build. He is humiliated and punished: he gets fired, his girlfriend dumps him, he is forced to wear an obnoxious pirate costume at his next job, and he gets caught masturbating by the woman he desires. Yet he becomes likable by supporting his sister after her abortion. The most intimate moment of the entire film comes when he surprises Stacy by picking her up at the clinic. When Brad embraces her, he is seen as important, compassionate, emotionally strong, and supportive—and she is seen as a person, not a sexual object. The scene defies a previous generation’s ideas about how families are expected to react to the consequences of young women engaging in sexual activities. Young men and young women are allowed to make mistakes in *Fast Times*, and they are able to reconcile them in new ways.

Jeff Spicoli (Sean Penn)

While making *Fast Times*, Heckerling was constantly visited by the studio, who worried she wasn’t making a comedy. “Spicoli,” she says in the audio comments included after the end credits on the 2004 DVD, “was the spice. He was the relief from all the other heavy stuff happening with the other characters” (Heckerling and Crowe DVD Commentary). Of course, it is the “heavy stuff” that drives the narrative, with Stacy at its center. Unlike Stacy, Rat, Brad, Damone, and Linda, Spicoli does not mature by overcoming negative experiences. Sean Penn’s strong performance as the “surfer-doper” is most likely the reason this film got away with presenting many counter-cultural ideas.

As the lovable anarchist/clown, Spicoli provides a good contrast to *Fast Times*' principal characters because he fully embraces his stereotype; he is comfortably predictable. Under pressure from the studio, Heckerling added Spicoli's dream sequence after the rest of the movie had been shot to get more of him in it (Heckerling and Crowe DVD Commentary). The unnamed women in Spicoli's dream serve as a good example of the accepted/desired/standard dominant culture representation of "desirable" or "funny" young women behaving in a teen "sex-quest" comedy, and the original poster depicts how Universal's marketing plan reflects this. Spicoli's "dream babes" are barely clothed, and they look directly at the camera. Though no one is touching their bodies, their squealing, giggling, and breathy sounds reinforce their pleasure at being seen by the viewer—not just by the male character in the scene. They also provide a contrast to how differently Stacy and Linda's characters are depicted as subjects (as opposed to objects).

In essence, Spicoli is revered as the best part of the movie precisely because he maintains his childlike qualities while engaging in more adult behavior using drugs and alcohol. Always he maintains a stunning optimism in the face of authority. He breaks a lot of rules, but he is not punished for this. There is no pity evoked for Spicoli, even when Mr. Hand (Ray Watson) forces him to talk about history on the night of the dance. He still seems to arrive on time, and he's even assured that he will "squeak by" in a class for which he has done little to no work.

Mark “Rat” Ratner (Brian Backer)

Crowe attended several public viewings of *Fast Times* when it came out and witnessed two frequent reactions to the failed love scene between Stacy and Rat: loud outrage or nervous silence. Young men shouted “Pussy!” or “You blew it!” or “No!” They were part of a generation of men who felt that their masculinity was threatened by their lack of control over the “new” woman’s relationship to her sexuality. The response suggests that “fast women” are to be taken under any circumstances because a man’s transition into adulthood depends upon completing sexual relations. *Fast Times* thereby questions the idea that sexual conquest of women by men is what is needed in order to transition into adulthood for both genders. Rat’s brave rejection of Stacy’s sexual advances signals his attention to his own emotional needs: he is not yet ready to participate in this mature activity. The narrative gives him space to cogitate. Knowing that his best friend impregnates Stacy does not change his interest in her either. She is not “used” or cast aside by him. The summary at the end shows them together, rewarding his desire for intimacy with her before sex: they haven’t “gone all the way yet.” This also allows the narrative to undercut its “too bad they’re so young” theme and to entertain the idea that consenting adults do not necessarily engage in sexual encounters in a disposable way either.

Cinematic Style: *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*

Formalist analysis acknowledges that we only process narrative in movies through cinematic style. This section consequently looks at how Heckerling's execution of cinematic style relates to the narrative, character definition, and themes. I will not discuss all aspects of style, but I have selected those that principally contribute meaning to the film, and to the films I will discuss in subsequent chapters. The bulk of my analysis will focus on the mise-en-scene, editing, and music.

Mise-en-Scene

Sets and Props: Malls, Bedrooms, Graffiti and Carrots

Fast Times begins with an immersion into a world where kids operate without adults, and their absence is consistent through almost all of their activities at home, school, work, and play. Heckerling chose to film on location in a suburban, multi-level shopping mall, the Sherman Oaks Galleria Mall in Van Nuys, California. She shows the mall as a place where teens, and especially Stacy, gain independence and autonomy in a way none of the other sets provides. The opening montage at the mall emphasizes an egalitarian message as the Go-Go's song, "We Got the Beat," plays over a variety of personal and impersonal moments among teen crowds. No adults are present. The pronoun "we" is repeated over a dozen times. Women are not the only objects the camera tracks, and men are not the only subjects it champions. The sequence provides a good example of Shary's claim that the mall symbolizes "teen independence" as the shots show teens working, eating, shopping, dating, and attending movies there. "Perry Pizza," where Stacy and Linda work,

doesn't appear to have a manager or any men working in it at all. Framed in close-ups and medium shots, we see several young women make the food, control the cash register, and even close the restaurant at night. These young women are not seen, then, only as consumers or vulnerable employees who need protection by adults or male management but as workers who can prioritize and carry out responsibilities. The movie theater where Rat works looks dark and somber by comparison. His usher's uniform is made to look like a tuxedo. He watches the food court, a place where, he says, "all the action is." Mike Damone, the ticket scalper, conducts "business" at the mall outside other stores but is often featured standing next to Rat. In the end, the mall enables Stacy, a lawful employee, to address her pregnancy without adult help. Mike Damone, who earns money by taking advantage of people who cannot gain access to the supplier, is viewed much less favorably, even if he also "works" at the mall.

The teens' bedrooms reveal surprising incongruities between independence, maturity, creativity, and neglect. Spicoli is seen as a generally congenial character, but his cluttered room and van suggest he has little to no contact with a nurturing family, even if the naked centerfolds covering his walls also communicate independence (or emancipation from childhood). Damone's bedroom decor of rock posters and stolen street signs does not suggest that his parents are helping him decorate his room either. In contrast, Stacy's room is quite impersonal. Besides the stuffed bear and doll propped up in opposite corners, her room looks more like a guest bedroom that her mother decorated with an old-fashioned, washed-out, peach

floral bedspread and curtains. Unlike Spicoli and Damone, who are seen relaxing in spaces they have claimed, Stacy is seen trying to sneak out of hers. The film makes a telling observation here: while young men may be afforded the luxury of gaining autonomy while still ostensibly in their parents' care, independent heroines must leave their houses to find personal spaces or establish a non-child identity outside of their own families.

Several areas in and around Stacy's house are highlighted, including the backyard pool, the driveway where Brad washes his car, outside windows (used for spying into or sneaking out of), and, of course, the changing room by the pool. Besides the single line of "Goodnight, Stacy," uttered by her mother as she tucks her into bed, no other parent is heard or seen in the film in any of these spaces. The adult absence creates a discernable emptiness in the "home" space, even as it highlights the teens' independence. From a comedic perspective, "kids" performing bland domestic chores in a home without parents can seem awkward or funny, like Stacy and Linda applying "cold cream" in front of a vanity mirror while they discuss sex—theirs is after all a beautification ritual usually associated with middle-aged women who have much more life experience.

Heckerling uses the spray-painted words "Little Prick" as part of the set to break with pre-bride narratives that traditionally tie sexual experience to failure. She shifts public shame about sexual experience from a young woman to a young man through vandalism. After Damone fails to provide money, transportation, or support of any kind to Stacy, her friend Linda calls him "a little prick," and these

words become part of the set in two places. In black spray-paint, his car door and his locker at school both say “Little Prick” the day after Stacy’s abortion.²⁴ The use of the spray-painted words on parts of the set makes his indiscretion difficult to hide and shames him for failing to take responsibility for the consequence of an unwanted pregnancy. Stacy is never connected to the vandalism or shamed about her abortion; she keeps her sexual history private, much as men have in the past. By the time Damone gets to school, enough people have seen “Little Prick” on his school locker, and though they are not privy to what he did, the words call into question his masculinity. This undercuts the joy of unprotected sexual conquests so often portrayed in comedies during this time (*Porky’s* [1981], *Animal House* [1978]).

Heckerling’s use of props also helps define important components of characters without relying on dialogue or conflict. After Stacy confronts Damone about her pregnancy and her need for half of the money for the abortion and a ride to the clinic, Heckerling presents a scene with Damone on the phone in his bedroom. A subjective shot of a handwritten list focuses on “People Who Owe Me/Expenses.” Stacy’s request for \$75 is itemized as “Abortion” under the second column. One shot conveys his financial and emotional deficiency.

Another place Heckerling uses sets and props in tandem with editing to demonstrate Stacy’s and her friends’ independence is the lunchroom scene. A carrot

²⁴ Perhaps this would have had a more humiliating dimension if the R-rated film had included the full-frontal nudity of him in the pool house from the “X”-rated version. According to Heckerling, both she and Leigh were angry about showing the young woman’s frontal nudity but not the young man’s (Heckerling and Crowe DVD Commentary).

addresses the film's central concern about young women and sexual agency without making them the objects of the scene. Heckerling admits the studio complained about the "carrot scene" being too sexual but not "sexy" enough. They wanted her to focus more on the actresses' lips to make the actions more pornographic (Heckerling and Crowe DVD Commentary). Instead, she cuts from their conversation to a table of young men watching Stacy practice fellatio on a carrot with a complete lack of expertise. The young men are not implicated because they applaud the girls. The girls are a little embarrassed, but they smile, understanding this "lesson" has been performed in a public space. Robin Wood praises this scene, and Heckerling specifically, for creating a place in the narrative where "the women cease to be objects of the male gaze, their autonomous desire is used to express [themselves], not merely an appreciation of male beauty" (R. Wood 196). Stacy and Linda possess the kind of agency a pre-bride is never allowed to have: showing curiosity about being sexually active while not being treated like a sexual object. The lunchroom set and the carrot prop do not paint sex as glamorous or romantic. One need look no further than the original poster for the film or Spicoli's dream sequence in Figure 1 to see how sexualized women are supposed to act and what they need to wear to show they enjoy being looked at. Even more striking is the fact that Linda, the slightly older and "experienced" friend, is not portrayed as a "mean girl" or depicted with contempt by the narrative; she supports Stacy emotionally throughout the entire film. While she is also a source of peer pressure (e.g. "I lost my virginity at age

13. It's no big deal"), she is not driven to undercut her friend's reputation or "ruin" her as a competitor.

Independent Costumes: Work Uniforms, Layers, and Agency

Throughout the film, Heckerling's intent was to make the principal actors look as young as possible. For her, the dramatic tension derived from what she saw as "children" becoming "adults" too soon. Marilyn Vance,²⁵ her costume designer, did research about contemporary teen fashion by scoping out local malls, schools, and clubs before she designed the majority of what the characters were going to wear (Heckerling and Crowe DVD Commentary). She makes Stacy look younger with layered clothing and long hair (often just combed straight on each side or braided at work), she also mixes masculine and feminine tailoring in their work uniforms.

After the opening montage featuring several young women in uniforms performing various jobs as food-court employees and others, the first scene features Stacy, Linda, and two other young women working at "Perry Pizza" in the mall. They are framed in a medium shot, so we only see them from the waist up. Figure 2 shows how their uniform shirts look distinctly masculine: tailored, red and white pinstriped, and button-down with red bowties. These are not easily washed polyester, fast-food uniforms; they are garments which need ironing and care in order to look professional. The next shot is medium-long and reveals the bottom half of the uniform which cuts the girls in half, quite literally, with a white, frilly

²⁵ This was Vance's first feature film. She would go on to earn sixty-one credits for costume design, including several of John Hughes' teen films like *The Breakfast Club*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *Pretty in Pink*, and *Some Kind of Wonderful* (not *Sixteen Candles*, though).

apron, tied in a big bow at the back. Underneath it are mid-length, puffy skirts made from the same pinstriped material. Behind the counter, with the exception of some bows in their hair, they look like members of a barbershop quartet, but when they deliver pizzas to the customers at their tables, their feminine status is reinforced. The costumes add to the idea that these young women are gaining resources, and independence, even while they demonstrate a femininity that, via costume, would have previously restricted their access to money and movement.

As the film's central figure, Stacy avoids some of the negativity associated with "fast" women because she is not dressed as a sexual object when in public. When she attends school, she and Linda wear several layers of clothing and are often fully covered from their necks on down. For example, Linda wears a heavy jean jacket and a bright red bandana around her neck in the lunchroom, while Stacy wears a bulky sweatshirt over a button-down oxford shirt. These layers effectively camouflage their breasts and hips, concealing the maturity of their bodies, giving less opportunity for audiences to spend time evaluating them physically. When Linda gives Stacy the carrot lesson (a childhood snack turned into phallus) fully clothed, it reinforces Stacy's position as an active subject as opposed to a passive object constructed for scopophilia.

Editing Emotion: Abortion, Humiliation, and Compassion

Heckerling's editing choices emphasize gender equality from the very beginning of the film with The Go-Go's singing "We Got the Beat." The opening montage expresses the new "MTV" associative-style editing familiar to its 1980s teen audience: layering multiple dramatized moments chosen for their visual or emotional impact onto a pop song. There are plenty of shots focused on body parts, but they are not exclusively focused on young women. Robin Wood argues that Heckerling's pitch for equality is not just developed in the narrative but also communicated through the film's editing, which "construct[s] a position for the female spectator that is neither masochistic nor merely compliant" (194). Wood praises the opening sequence for its economy: "the second shot—Mike eyeing a girl—is answered instantly by a third, in which two girls eye Brad" (196). In this sense, there isn't a clear gender assignment for "the looker" or the "looked at," and this subtle disruption of generic and stereotypical conventions articulates a major difference from what Shary deemed the "virgin quest" cycle because, as Wood argues, Heckerling "extend[s], vari[es], and subvert[s]" conventions (197). Since editing allows a director to isolate and magnify moments of action while controlling their time and pace, and places these moments in relation to one another, the sum of Heckerling's editing choices add up to a more complex expression of teen perspectives. Her style presents a vivid pushback against pre-1980s conventions that objectify young women. In some ways, the editing especially shows how her female

characters resist being powerless rather than “good” abstinent objects or “bad” sexually active villains.

Heckerling’s coordination of shots during the sunny day/cloudy day masturbation sequence with Linda and Brad is a powerful example of how editing can change the conventional objectification of women in film. The scene shows Brad’s fantasy, then his reality. Phoebe Cates’ beauty, in sunshine or in clouds, frowning or smiling, is not diminished. Thanks to editing we do see she is uncomfortable with being objectified. The fantasy starts off like a music video, set to the Cars’ “Living in Stereo” song, as Brad cracks the window to spy on Linda sitting in her bikini on a diving board on a cloudy day. As his fantasy begins, sunshine sparkles off the pool surface, and Linda emerges from the water smiling at him, her red lipstick un-smudged. She walks in slow-motion toward Brad (wearing a business suit) while she unsnaps her red bikini top. Heckerling cuts between Brad’s fantasy and to him masturbating in a bathroom wearing his fast food uniform. The real punch-line comes when cloudy-day Linda, frowning because she has water in her ear, interrupts Brad’s fantasy by walking into the bathroom where he is masturbating. By walking in on Brad’s fantasy, Linda manifests her subjectivity. As a supporting character, she reveals an emerging component of female independence: she can undercut objectification by adopting a gaze herself. This scene is iconic and beloved, but it also violates male scopophilic tradition that demands secrecy.

Stacy’s abortion sequence, arguably the most emotionally challenging part of the film, also shows how Heckerling twists conventions in order to support an

independent heroine. She focuses on Stacy's brother Brad's looks, which communicate compassion, not possession. Stacy's abortion is accomplished in a series of shots of a little over one minute. Without dialogue, Brad's empathy is demonstrated through eyeline matches: he doesn't just pull away from the curb after dropping his sister off at a bowling alley. Instead, the camera shows him looking in his rearview mirror, and then cuts to a P.O.V. subjective shot in his driver's side mirror reflecting the image of Stacy crossing the busy road to the clinic. There is no close-up on or reaction shot of Brad's face. The next shot is of Stacy after the procedure is over, lying to the nurse that her boyfriend is waiting to pick her up downstairs. When she leaves the facility, the camera, for a moment, cuts to a shot of Brad looking directly into the camera but seen from Stacy's point of view. He is waiting for her in front of his car with a small grin. He is protective and nurturing, but not judgmental. He agrees to keep the abortion a secret when she asks. There is a sense of Stacy's ownership of her own experience in this moment. He does not pressure her to reveal her sexual partner (or threaten to "kill him"). The film is not focused on his duty to defend Stacy's "honor" or virginity. This is certainly a deviation from the roles brothers/family play when sexual transgressions are discovered in marriage plots.

Music and American Girls: Go-Go's or Somebody's Baby?

Heckerling's non-diegetic music choices support Stacy's independence throughout the film. During the abortion sequence, Stevie Nicks' song "Sleeping Angel" begins playing while Mike Damone is on the phone struggling to get money for Stacy's abortion. The lyrics "you're asking me to trust you/well there's little of that around" actually compete with Damone's dialogue before the scene shifts to Stacy, pacing in front of her parents' house, waiting for a ride to the clinic. Nicks' voice underlines the narrative's empathetic alignment with her point of view. Most importantly, the music helps shift the focus of moral conflict from "the abortion" to Mike's failure to be a supportive, sexually active young person.

Several montage scenes anchor the center of the action with music, and while songs sung by female singers like Nicks and The Go-Go's emphasize women's voices and the perspective of female characters, the soundtrack also features songs sung by men that focus on questioning dominant roles for young women. For example, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' song "American Girl" plays over the opening first day of high school montage. The up-beat guitar sounds like an energetic rock anthem that favors sensation over depth, but this changes when the lyrics begin. The camera is focused on Stacy, seen walking in the hall wearing several layers of clothes, awkwardly finding her way in an unfamiliar place. As she moves, the audience hears this:

Well she was an American girl
Raised on promises
She couldn't help thinkin' that there
Was a little more to life

Somewhere else
After all it was a great big world
With lots of places to run to.

The lyrics point to a moment in American culture specific to young women who might be exploring options apart from the “promises” made by previous traditions. The montage acknowledges standard gender expectations—a young man kisses pictures of naked women pasted inside his locker, and a cheerleader applies lipstick while looking into a mirror inside her locker—but Stacy represents a new “American Girl.” Unlike marriage plot narratives, this scene is not used as the “before” part of a makeover story that will mold her into what a suitor wants or needs. By the end of the sequence, there are several male students seen in decidedly “uncool” moments, like Rat getting gum all over his book and clothes. Part of this is comedy, of course, but traditional gender roles are not revered, and the music helps underline this.

Jackson Browne’s “Somebody’s Baby” becomes somewhat of an anthem accompanying Stacy’s exploration of sex and relationships. The song is used twice, played over Stacy’s two unsatisfactory sexual encounters with Ron Johnson and Mike Damone. It calls attention to desire and voyeurism. First, when Browne sings “Well, just look at that girl,” we understand the singer is watching someone he doesn’t know, much like the audience in the theatre watching Stacy. The lyrics begin as she stands on a street corner in the dark, save for the streetlight illuminating the words “Wasted Youth” in spray paint behind her. The repeated line, “She’s got to be somebody’s baby,” communicates attraction, urgency, and desire; it also suggests

that she is a stranger. The same section of the song is played over the scene with Mike Damone in the pool house, when the two have sex without emotional intimacy. Stacy learns, unequivocally, that having sex with men does not mean they are going to take care of her or that she will “become theirs.” The narrative gives her the space to question the urgency of “she’s got to” and to reassess her own readiness.

In addition to promoting young women who try new roles, the music also underlines children performing adult roles in both comedic and dramatic moments. Mike Damone advises Rat to play *Led Zeppelin IV*, side one, when he gets her in the car. Instead, Rat, who does a lot of things awkwardly, plays the menacing opening bars of Led Zeppelin’s “Kashmir,” which sounds like a labored march toward something ominous. Heckerling fought with the studio on particular song choices, and they forced her to use a few she felt were incongruent with the mood she intended. On the DVD commentary track, Crowe and Heckerling discuss agonizing decisions over music placement, choice of songs, and the battles they lost or won as an important part of the production and their vision for the film.²⁶

²⁶ Led Zeppelin was willing to give Crowe the right to use their most famous song (and prized 70’s teen anthem) “Stairway to Heaven,” but the record company refused to release the rights to Universal for the soundtrack. Heckerling vehemently protested the studio’s push to include what she called “Southern California Rock Songs” (I interpret this as the shallow, quasi-new-wave, “G-A-D” chord songs), which Universal owned the rights to. She acquiesced on a few and was quick to point out how incongruent they were with the flow of the scene (and the film) when they came up during her DVD commentary. For example, “Raised on the Radio” by The Ravyns has this refrain: “I was raised on the radio/just an all-American boy/playing with my favorite toy.” After that song Heckerling says, “God, I hated that music” (Heckerling and Crowe DVD Commentary). In fairness, it fit the scene (Brad washing his car), but now that I know it was a forced inclusion, I can see how easily the scene could have been cut as non-essential (or have been added as filler).

The inclusion of The Go-Go's songs was paramount to Heckerling, whose passionate fight to get "We Got the Beat" placed at the beginning of *Fast Times* set the tone for the entire film. The opening moments establish this with a solo drumbeat as the Universal logo appears on screen. For twenty seconds, the catchy instrumental rock intro accompanies a series of shots that gives viewers a sense of the scope and liveliness of the mall. A long tracking shot of a row of backsides wearing jeans could be viewed as sexist, but the unisex nature of jeans makes gender difference less definite. Then, lead singer Belinda Carlisle's voice is heard emphasizing that "the beat" belongs to "kids" of both genders equally. Heckerling's kids are responsible for creating and living their own identities, for better or worse. *Sixteen Candles*, released just two years later, would abruptly change direction.

Thirty-five years after its release, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* maintains its popularity in a way few comedies manage to do. Its depiction of teenagers balances pathos and hilarity sprung from frustration, humiliation, and resilience. The film is known for the clownish Spicoli, but its authenticity is grounded in Stacy's unique narrative arc, and that is why, I think, it is still moves audiences. Crowe speculates that Universal greenlit John Hughes' first three films as a direct result of *Fast Times*' financial success, opening the market for the teen genre (King). And though Hughes' directorial debut, *Sixteen Candles*, does not feature an independent heroine like Stacy, many of his future films would also feature young female protagonists, which increased the visibility of young women as leads.

Section II: *Sixteen Candles*

As teen comedies, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and *Sixteen Candles* are similar in the sense that they are commercial productions from the same era. They feature young woman as main characters who share the pain, anxiety, and embarrassment found in stories about the uncomfortable transition between childhood and adulthood. And they continue to be widely viewed. This is no easy feat because trendy teen films are not known for their longevity.²⁷ They also represent two vastly different ideologies. If *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* broke rules and carved out new directions for female empowerment, *Sixteen Candles* does the opposite. Where *Fast Times* actually gave its characters freedom to grow and to experience adolescence, *Sixteen Candles* strips its characters--especially its heroine--of power and agency and romanticizes dependent regression.

Plot and Production History: *Sixteen Candles*

Plot

Sixteen Candles adopts a paradigmatic marriage-plot. The protagonist, Samantha “Sam” Baker (Molly Ringwald), a sophomore in high school, feels unimportant and invisible to her own family because they forget her sixteenth birthday; she also feels invisible to her community at large. Sam’s family includes

²⁷ *Little Darlings* (1980), produced by Paramount Pictures, grossed \$34 million in its domestic run (better than both *Fast Times* and *Sixteen Candles*), and features teen female protagonists. The film was not available on VHS until 1992, or on DVD until 2012 and is still unavailable for live-streaming. It was not broadcast on cable channels after 1982 (HBO). The Universal Pictures production of *Cattle Annie and Little Britches* (1981), starring Diane Lane, grossed \$115 million domestically but never aired again on any format.

her father, Jim Baker (Paul Dooley), her mother, Brenda (Carlin Glynn), her older sister Ginny (Blanche Baker), her younger sister, Sara (Cinnamon Idles), her brother, Mike (Justin Henry), and two sets of grandparents; Helen (Carole Cook) and Fred (Max Showalter), and Howard (Edward Andrews) and Dorothy (Billie Bird). The large cast of characters comprising her family is a testament to the film's radically different narrative emphasis, for *Fast Times* featured virtually no parents at all. Sam's two love interests are the senior "boy" Jake Ryan (Michael Schoeffling), and the freshman known as "The Geek" (a.k.a. "Farmer Ted") (Anthony Michael Hall). She desires Jake and rejects The Geek. Her best friend Randy (Liane Curtis) and the clown/exchange-student, Long Duk Dong (Gedde Watanabe), play minor roles. Jake's girlfriend, Caroline (Haviland Morris), serves as the antagonist/obstruction to Sam's desire, though none of the other female cast demonstrates much support for each other either. The film covers about thirty-six hours of Sam's life while she attends school, rides the bus, greets both sets of her grandparents, attends a high school dance, participates as a bridesmaid in her sister Ginny's wedding, and ends the second day by getting what she desires: a chaste kiss from Jake Ryan over a birthday cake with sixteen candles.

Production History

John Hughes both wrote and directed *Sixteen Candles*, so this gave him enormous flexibility. According to Susanna Gora, who researched the production and recorded several interviews with the cast and crew, Hughes completed the entire screenplay in about three days, inspired by a picture of actress Molly

Ringwald²⁸ that he kept on the wall near his desk as he wrote. Gora quotes Ringwald, who later found out about this fact and confirmed it: “he wanted to meet the girl who was in that picture” (25). Ringwald did not have to audition for the part. *Sixteen Candles* was filmed during the summer of 1983, with both principals—Molly Ringwald and Anthony Michael Hall—just fifteen years old and virtually unknown.²⁹

Giving new directors moderately priced teen comedies with relatively unknown ensemble casts offered lower risks for major studios in the early 1980s. Just as Heckerling debuted as a director for *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* in 1982, John Hughes was given the green light for his directorial debut on *Sixteen Candles* in 1984. Hughes’ experience as a comedy writer for *National Lampoon* magazine and his work in television contribute significantly to his cinematic style. In both Susanna Gora’s book and the cast interviews included on the 2008 “Flashback Edition” reissue of the DVD, the rarely interviewed Hughes is said to have been “one of the kids,” frequently clowning around with his cast while getting their input on dialogue, sets, and even costumes (Gora 38). Though he could not claim to possess the same journalistic experience that Crowe had, his powers of observation and sensitivity to social and cultural cues garnered praise for “authenticity” from critics and fans alike. Hughes’ successful blend of seemingly new characters pulled from ideas about gender equality yet applied these to a classic marriage plot. He achieves

²⁸ He had seen her in *Tempest* (1982), Paul Mazursky’s modern adaptation of the Shakespeare play.

²⁹ According to Gora, Hall and Ringwald were dating during production. Michael Schoeffling, the actor who played Jake, was seven years older than Hall and Ringwald during production, and he apparently wanted little to do with the teens off set.

authenticity by mixing gender cues. Sam wears a leather trimmed hat, uses vulgar language, and scowls—yet is also at times submissive, tolerant, and chaste. She has an affinity for long skirts and lace.

Hughes, an ex-advertising executive-turned comedy writer, had a prolific screenwriting career, and his many credits have led writers to say he was instrumental in either “constructing” or “restarting” a new phase in teen genre films that emerged in the 1980s. He enjoyed multiple box-office successes.³⁰ Although he wrote *The Breakfast Club* (1985) first, its production was sidelined because Universal Pictures thought the light comedy of *Sixteen Candles* would have broader appeal. Principal photography was completed over six weeks during the summer of 1983, near the Chicago suburbs where Hughes himself attended high school. The film was released nationally on May 4, 1984 (Gora 33). Many of Hughes’ movies, including *Sixteen Candles*, were filmed in and around the northern suburbs³¹ of Chicago, Illinois, and Hughes is often cited for his “real” depictions of suburban Midwestern American life. The budget is reported to have been between \$5-6.5 million dollars and its domestic box-office take was a modestly successful \$25 million. Like *Fast Times*, the numbers here don’t quite capture the movie’s enduring popularity; after an initial theatrical run, there was a consistent demand for rentals,

³⁰ Hughes had written successful comedies for Twentieth Century Fox (*Mr. Mom* (1983)) and for Warner Brothers (*National Lampoon’s Vacation* (1983)) prior to *Sixteen Candles*. He would go on to direct *The Breakfast Club* (1985) *Weird Science* (1985) and *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (1986). He wrote two other films for Paramount Pictures with female protagonists, *Pretty in Pink* (1986) and the less popular *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987), both directed by Howard Deutch. He is credited with writing forty-seven developed scripts.

³¹ He filmed in and around Evanston, Skokie, and Highland Park, all northern suburbs of Chicago.

live-streams, and repeated showings on both commercial and private television stations. Hughes is sometimes praised and criticized as a filmmaker for creating new “teen” figures for both genders. Certainly, he updated the American teen girl as a pre-bride and provided a particular kind of Midwestern American life in a conservative era grappling with young women trying out new identities won by second wave feminist activism from the previous era.

Sixteen Candles enjoyed mostly positive critical reviews and a “PG” rating from the MPAA. The use of profane language, nudity, and alcohol are quite tame when compared to *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, which earned an “R” rating two years earlier. Today the film would probably fail to garner general audience approval for its comedic treatment of underage drinking, racism, nudity, and date-rape.

Critics have written more broadly about Hughes’ body of work in the teen genre because of these films’ commercial successes, longevity, and cultural impact. Catherine Driscoll posits that “the Hughes teen film is spectacularly coherent, but not simple” because he produces narratives about negotiating social limits and stereotypes (51). Tim Shary believes Hughes’ films mark an evolution in the genre from the overt sex-driven comedies of the late 1970s and early 1980s to a “place toward more serious and sensitive [about] representations of teen relationships” (2014: 10). Roz Kaveney credits him with positively changing representations of teens because his characters finally lose “that blandness of affect, and lack of recursiveness and reference, which is often termed innocence” (12). Jon Lewis

attributes the popularity of Hughes' films to "a nostalgia for 1930s screwball comedy and Capra-esque Libertarian populism" (138). Calling Hughes a "multihyphenate teen specialist" who created films during the age of AIDS, Tom Doherty points out that Hughes merely capitalized on the "Production Code-like ferocity" imposed on the new PG-13³² rating of his films with a "G-sensibility," which excluded the "once-required content of teen pics—coupling, nudity, voyeurism, and desperate surrender of virginity"—to appeal to teenagers chastened by the AIDS scare (201). Doherty did not name *Sixteen Candles* in his list of examples—citing *Pretty in Pink* (1985), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), and *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987); but, arguably, *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *Sixteen Candles* (1984) actually do tackle the "required content" of the teenpics that came before them. I agree, however, that the value placed on chastity Doherty recognizes is illustrated in characters played by Molly Ringwald in both of those films. For example, the naked woman that Sam and her friend spy on in the shower belongs to the fully mature, sexually active Caroline, whom even her boyfriend rejects in favor of the virginal/chaste/undeveloped (true) teenaged Sam instead. In many ways, the critics praise two contradictory forces: there is both change and stasis. Hughes gets credit for breaking away from stereotypes, but a closer look shows his collusion with repressive roles for young women. I think progressive changes are heard (loudly)

³² Although the MPAA started the PG-13 rating in 1984 as a response to the violence in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), *Sixteen Candles* was rated PG. In fact, the two films were released on the exact same day, May 4th, 1984 (Jay 220).

through the dialogue and the music, but the visual style points to his loyalty to pre-brides stereotypes.

Initial reviews were much more positive for *Sixteen Candles* than for *Fast Times*, as critics fixated on how “authentic” the 1984 comedy was. Roger Ebert, writing for the *Chicago Sun-Times* in Hughes’ home territory, awarded it three stars. He cites language, specifically, as the reason the film feels realistic instead of condescending, praising it as

a fresh and cheerful movie with a goofy sense of humor and a good ear for how teenagers talk. It doesn't hate its characters or condescend to them, the way a lot of teenage movies do; instead, it goes for human comedy and finds it in the everyday lives of the kids in its story. (“Review of *Sixteen Candles*”)

Using “swear words” is one of the first social rules kids break that bonds them with their peers instead of their parents. Earlier pre-brides didn’t swear, and, in this sense, Sam represents something unbecoming in a well-behaved lady. Indeed, Sam uses the word “fucking” as an adverb at the end of the very first scene in the movie (e.g., “They *fucking* forgot my birthday!”), which makes her *sound* like a 1980s teenager.³³ A closer look at *how* Sam uses the words “fucking” or “shit” or “asshole” shows, however, that while she is superficially contemporary, she still upholds the pre-pride model. Sam does not using the word “fucking” to *speak* about sex. The “freshness” Ebert identifies relates to the incongruence between Sam’s tough teen

³³ Timothy Jay cites a qualitative study he conducted about gender differences in language use in 120 selected American films produced between 1939-1989 that shows male characters use taboo words (i.e. “hell and damn” or “fuck and shit”) four times more than female characters. His research also shows that female characters swear slightly more when they have the lead roles (Jay 223-234). The increase after 1968 (post-Production Code) shows a huge jump in usage across the board.

slang and her innocence. Unlike *Fast Times*, which he criticized as “gynecological” because the female protagonists speak about sexual practices (without using swear words), the discourse about sex in *Sixteen Candles* is transferred to visuals—a written “sex quiz,” a pair of underwear—which confirms Sam’s status as a virgin. Meanwhile, the narrative is condescending to characters like Jake’s actual girlfriend, the non-virgin Caroline, as well as to numerous supporting characters like Long Duk Dong.

Pre-brides are not supposed to talk about sexual practices directly. The critique offered by Ebert of *Fast Times* reinforces a general discomfort with young women discussing certain male processes, like ejaculation. Hughes does, however, keep up with his contemporaries: he makes Ginny’s getting her period a punch line on her wedding day. Ginny’s father and brother are allowed to talk about “her period” directly, but when trying to explain why Ginny is so “grumpy,” her mother is only allowed to use the euphemism that Ginny’s “monthly bill” came early.

Janet Maslin’s *New York Times*’ review echoed Ebert’s fatigue with the “teen sex comedy” phase: “John Hughes’s *16 Candles* [sic] is a cuter and better-natured teen comedy than most” (“Film Review; ‘16 Candles’”). The description of the narrative as “cuter” and “better-natured” communicates relief from adhering to “social norms.” A month after the film’s release, Pauline Kael’s May 28, 1984, review in the *New Yorker* also praised it for being less “raucous” than other recent teen comedies, saying, “it’s closer to the gentle English comedies of the forties and fifties” (“The Current Cinema: The Candidate” 101). She astutely noted the appealing and

problematic traits Sam seems to embody as well: “she plays a free-spoken modern cutie, and it’s perfectly clear that Samantha’s freedom is the result of a pleasant middle-class home and loving parents. There’s nothing submissive about her, but she isn’t rebellious either” (“The Current Cinema: The Candidate” 102). While all three critics expressed a kind of relief, Kael’s intuition about Sam’s paradox is an important one; Hughes does an effective job of obscuring the residual ideology of the pre-bride with comedy. Here, the teens and especially Sam miss the autonomy they have in *Fast Times*.

Historical Context of the Mid-1980s: Backlash and Pre-Brides

The year *Sixteen Candles* was released had already been made famous by George Orwell back in 1949, when he published his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which predicted a future of perpetual war, surveillance, and authoritarian rule. As the 1980s economy continued to decline, more and more Americans turned away from the communal idealism supported by the previous era’s prosperity and moved toward individualism or American exceptionalism. This was the same year Apple Computers, alluding to Orwell’s novel, aired their famous dystopian mini-film as a commercial during the Super Bowl, warning about the dangers of conformity with marching skinheads in a mind-numbing, technologically sophisticated, black-and-white future. In the commercial, the figure who breaks the screen of the giant talking head is a young female athlete wielding an enormous hammer. She is sweaty and unadorned, save for her red shorts, and seems like she could be Katniss Everdeen’s predecessor. Though Steve Jobs had the vision, neither

Apple Computers nor young female warriors would successfully resurface for another dozen years. Instead, filmmakers like John Hughes created productions that appealed to a growing conservative base that privileged a patriarchal vision of the self, the family, and the country as a whole.

John Hughes' vision for Sam in *Sixteen Candles* privileges a father's view of his daughter instead of her own. The film's narrative also demonstrates how teen rituals for entering adulthood were transitioning from those of a permissive culture to a more restrictive one. The shift fits what Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan concluded in their analysis of how politics and ideology connect to American films. They saw a culture "in decline" during the 1980s:

[Films of this era try] to come to terms with severe economic, political, and social crises and to adjust to a world in which the United States had much less power, both economically and politically. Films portray the extremes of anxiety, tension, hope, and fear undergone in this process of transformation and themselves participate in and further the process of social change. (7)

Many historians recognized the decline of the progressive era by the mid-1970s, but the election of republican President Ronald Reagan in 1980 marked the next significant conservative shift. His landslide re-election in 1984 continued the regression. The dynamic social movements of the 1960s and 1970s inspired conservative counter-movements that emerged as the dominant culture status quo throughout the 1980s. Cultural hegemonies, as Raymond Williams theorizes, work to incorporate and neutralize subordinate or counter cultural ideologies to support their positions of power. Samantha Baker is a good embodiment of this kind of transition. Hughes borrowed somewhat loud, superficial cues that appear to signify

independence from the women's movement for her character but his narrative nonetheless prizes her virginity and punishes supporting female characters who have agency, including her working mother.

Like *Fast Times*, *Sixteen Candles* features experimentation with drugs, alcohol, and sexual relationships, but regards them as problematic. The film's "house party" scenes at Jake Ryan's parents' house almost seem like genre boilerplate now, but they actually function as a cautionary tale for young women. While Jake and The Geek both grapple with some humiliation during the party, both of their outcomes afterward are positive: The Geek gains sexual experience, and Jake connects with Sam. Sexually experienced teen girls and foreign exchange students suffer more lasting damage. Caroline and her drunken friends are infantilized; they speak like children, steal things, damage property, and lose the ability to solve simple problems (e.g., cutting Caroline's hair off instead of opening the door to get it out). The grandparent-sponsored "obedient" foreigner Long Duk Dong, once drunk, becomes a sex-crazed maniac who breaks all the rules of decorum. He even crashes his guardians' car into a lake. The Geek, on the other hand, who has no driver's license and drives while intoxicated (apparently so drunk he blacks out), suffers no negative consequences. Instead, he is rewarded with his first sexual experience in a Rolls Royce with a prom queen on birth control.

In the early 1980s, ownership of the videocassette recorder (VCR), home computers, home video game consoles, and cable boxes expanded the number of choices for home entertainment. The addition of cable channels like Music

Television (MTV) in 1981, Home Box Office (HBO) in 1982, and even Cable News Network (CNN) in 1980 competed for splintering audiences who were no longer watching “general” programming as a family. Thomas Doherty noted that MTV, particularly, helped blur the lines between rock music, film, and advertising, addressing teens as a “perpetual-motion exploitation machine, pulsating steadily and spirally wildly through the space of American culture” (194). The Reagan administration sought to restrict teens’ access to both drugs and alcohol through policies introduced during his first term in office. He initiated the “War on Drugs” in 1982, and his wife Nancy Reagan proselytized their message of abstinence to young kids and teens. By 1983, the phrase “War on Drugs” was heard from characters on television sit-coms, and Nancy Reagan appeared in MTV commercials promoting the prohibition of drugs, enlisting celebrities and star athletes to the cause.³⁴ The campaign was a sharp turn away from the permissive culture that was amused when Spicoli and his stoner buddies fell out of their (pot) smoke-filled van in the high school parking lot just a few years earlier. By the mid-1980s, MTV had been designated as a channel with a dedicated teen audience, and Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” abstinence campaign, while aimed at drugs, also extended its meaning to include sexual abstinence.

³⁴ Besides making a cameo in 1983 on “Diff’rent Strokes,” she appeared alongside Clint Eastwood (as his “Dirty Harry” character) in a number of PSAs sponsored by the MPAA. Michael Jackson, Soleil Moon Frye (a.k.a. “Punky Brewster”), and the L.A. Lakers also participated in the campaign.

Jake makes the point of telling a friend (given only the name “Jock” [Steve Monarque] in the credits) in gym that he is interested in “more than a party.” The Jock questions his judgment, citing his girlfriend, Caroline, as a gorgeous “wo-man” who “likes to party.” Sam, the “good” pre-bride, doesn’t drink; in fact, she doesn’t go to the party at all. When she’s sitting with The Geek in the chopped-up car and he asks her politely if he can “have sex with her,” she tells him no apologetically, saying that she is “saving herself” (her virginity) for someone else. Her effort to “save” her virginity is positioned as a counter-cultural idea instead of a regressive one (or, at least, a non-normative one at this cultural moment): she is ready to have sex before marriage, but she is choosing not “to party.”

The portraits of how birth control is used also demonstrate completely different attitudes about sexually active young women in *Sixteen Candles* and *Fast Times*. Unlike Stacy in *Fast Times*, Sam’s exploration into her own sexuality is treated differently. Even though “the pill” had been legally available to unmarried women for ten years by 1982,³⁵ *Fast Times* does not show anyone using preventative birth control. In fact, *Fast Times*’ treatment of abortion fits the conservative accusation that young girls used the procedure as a method of “birth-control” instead of using preventative measures. The Roe v. Wade ruling that prevented states from outlawing abortions in 1973 helped energize a conservative base to rally indirectly against the women’s movement. The pill also came with a

³⁵ “1972 The Supreme Court (in Baird v. Eisenstadt) legalized birth control for all citizens of [the U.S.], irrespective of marital status” (ourbodiesourselves.org/health/history_of_birth_control/).

major flaw that aided the conservative push during the 1980s toward abstinence: it did not protect against sexually transmitted diseases. Although the connection to transmission through the sexual activities of women would come later in the decade, fears about succumbing to the deadly AIDS epidemic³⁶ helped promote a cultural trend to “return” to traditional representations of young women as they had been before these modern medical technologies were available.

Contextually, several conflicting factors contributed to the volatility of 1980s American youth. There was a “party” culture shaped by MTV in the midst of the onset of HIV/AIDS. At the same time, the “party” culture required the presence of mind-altering substances and needed non-virgins. In 1981, conservatives created a federal agenda to “establish virginity as the only appropriate sexual status for any never-married person” through the “Adolescent Family Life Act” (AFLA), which Congress passed with an \$11 million budget the same year (Blank 239). The act violated the Establishment Clause of the Constitution (separation of church and state), and though the ACLU filed suit in 1983, the case wasn’t settled out of court for another ten years (Blank 239-240). Several critics note the abrupt halt of the teen sex comedy in the mid-1980s and attribute its demise to the arrival of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Tim Shary cites the crisis as the reason the trajectory of the teen sex comedy changed from “promiscuity to romance” by the end of the 1980s (2014: 165). Neither he nor Tom Doherty mentions the fact that more of the protagonists

³⁶ The first case of HIV was reported in 1981; President Reagan mentioned it publicly for the first time in 1985 (Kaiser Family Foundation).

featured in the teen sex comedy also shifted from male to female, privileging a historically less promiscuous point-of-view in general.

If *Fast Times* strongly presents an emergent ideology that features young women pursuing self-discovery and independence, *Sixteen Candles* showcases the clever way cultural hegemonies neutralize emergent values through strategic selections of seemingly progressive character traits while nevertheless reinforcing previously established conservative values. Susan Faludi's research in *Backlash* demonstrates that there was a reaction against feminism in the media and popular culture throughout the 1980s. Specifically, she shows how "trend journalism," which relies more on repetition than fact as a persuasive method, helped perpetuate the presence of "return to gender" headlines like "The New Abstinence," "The New Monogamy," "The New Femininity," and "The Return of the Good Girl" (78-80). Samantha Baker, as a recycled pre-bride, is a great example of these titles.

These "trend stories" were produced to compete for shrinking audiences who had more media choices. According to Faludi, national magazines published just five positive articles about being "a single woman" between 1980-1982. In contrast, "between 1983 and 1986, they [national magazines] ran fifty-three [articles]—and almost all were critical or pitying of being a single woman" (97). While repeated stories for men involved vacations or material goods,³⁷ trendy

³⁷ Faludi listed "fly-fishing, beepers, and the return of the white shirt" as typical "trend stories" aimed at men (Faludi 80).

stories for women admonished single women who “fail[ed] to find husbands, get pregnant, or properly bond with their children” (80).

Even though American culture was transitioning into a more conservative championing of individual progress over community well-being, “individual achievement” did not mean the same thing for both men and women during the 1980s. *Sixteen Candles* does not celebrate Sam’s individuality; instead, it prioritizes her identity as a daughter in a patriarchal family. Samantha “Sam” Baker’s appearance in *Sixteen Candles* in 1984 was a prescient example of the coming backlash against independent heroines in commercial films during the remainder of the Reagan/Bush administrations and well into the 1990s.

***Sixteen Candles*’ Narrative: The Pre-Bride Makeover**

Sixteen Candles is a narrative with a well-defined protagonist, obvious conflicts and goals, comical antagonists, and a closed ending. Though Hughes incorporates plenty of teens breaking social rules, and his dialogue appears to give his characters contemporary sensibilities, the narrative reinforces Sam’s role as its repurposed pre-bride.

The central conflict stems from the fact that Sam feels invisible to her family and to the community at large. It is introduced when her parents fail to acknowledge her birthday before she goes off to school, and as the day goes on, the narrative reinforces her lack of identity literally and symbolically. After a series of marriage plot-type misunderstandings, miscommunications, missed phone calls, and missed opportunities, Jake shows up at the church after her sister’s wedding to talk to her

for the first time. Two things are nevertheless achieved: Sam is finally “seen,” and she wins the love of the object of her affection in the last two minutes of the film. The end of the film is her “beginning,” just like princess-style fairytales have been for girls for centuries.

Narrative Themes

Like historical marriage plots, the film emphasizes Sam’s perspective and gives the audience unrestricted access to other characters who are thinking about her, talking about her, or touching props related to her. The intimacy accorded to the audience ironically takes away from Sam’s ability to tell her own story, and her lack of privacy infantilizes her. Instead of seeing Sam bond with other characters, the narrative pieces her life together in ways even she can’t. In this sense, the audience mirrors her father: we are wiser than she is about her life. Sam is the passive pre-bride, hopelessly adrift without a wise authority figure to guide her; and her private moments are public. The narrative implies that pre-brides gain economic mobility via coupling and that their fathers overwhelmingly approve of wealthier suitors without having to meet them, even if they are older, sexually experienced, or cruel to their previous (deflowered and discarded) girlfriend.

One of the reasons Hughes gets praised for being progressive, cutting edge, or credited with creating “real” characters, is that he sacrifices some core character conventions of the traditional pre-bride. On the one hand, the androgynously named “Sam” seems to play a kind of young male protagonist because she fails to perform feminine tasks for her family and community with selflessness or “goodness.” Stacy

from *Fast Times* exhibits this practice as well. Otherwise, their traits split sharply. Both films suggest that sexual experience is a gateway ritual for young women to adulthood, but the ways sexual experience are portrayed communicate vastly different attitudes about pre-brides as opposed to independent heroines. Whereas Stacy is given the space to talk about sex, pursue contact with boys, make mistakes, and even fail in her sexual relationships, Sam is prohibited from doing so.

Teen Places: Regulated and Unregulated

Unlike the mall in *Fast Times*, *Sixteen Candles* offers no permanent transitional place for teens to move toward independence, but it does offer several temporary or mobile ones. Besides the standard home, school, and the illicit house party, the film features Sam as a passenger on a school bus and several cars that emphasize her dependence. Cars also represent class privilege, education, freedom, and wealth in suburban America. Although the teens in Hughes' narratives are not centered on cars, the vehicles symbolize an agency Sam is barred from accessing in the film, though several young men do, including The Geek, who doesn't even have a license.

Historically, a number of teen films focus on automobiles because they are an integral part of gaining adulthood for middle class rural and suburban Americans. Attaining one's license is a rite of passage into adulthood. In cars, young people can smoke, drink, do drugs, or experiment with sexuality, all without their parents watching. This is an option available not only to young men but also to young women. In *Sixteen Candles*, however, the narrative underscores Sam's dependence.

It also underscores her lower middle-class position; her father participates in a morning carpool. A family with one car does not allow Sam much time to practice driving.

Going from the school bus and her grandfather's car into Jake's car denies Sam's agency, but reinforces the sense that she can gain upward mobility through romance instead. Her ideal fantasy of a "sweet" sixteenth birthday mentions an expensive car and a man to come with it: "A Trans Am and 'a guy'" waiting for her in the driveway. The narrative gives no indication that she will ever drive this car herself.

She is instead seen sitting in the driver's seat of a car in another scene that is symbolic of her entire plight. It is a chopped-up car on blocks inside her high school's shop class. The stasis is apt for both characters in the scene, since they both want something inaccessible to them at the moment. The Geek, who has a crush on Sam, finds her there and is thrilled she cannot get away. She is persuaded to give him her underwear in lieu of losing her virginity, which she explicitly states she is "saving" for Jake Ryan. The Geek uses the underwear to gain entrance into a party where he has sex with Jake Ryan's former girlfriend, Caroline, in a Rolls Royce.

Protagonist: Samantha Baker

Sam reshapes the pre-bride mold for the modern age, which disguises her traditional feminine blueprint. She is not a generous, popular, or particularly likable character; she is alternately surly, selfish, rude, self-absorbed, and contentedly aloof. She protects her virginity without claiming it as a moral code. Her father is not a

wealthy king. Her status as a loner is not necessarily communicated as “cool,” but The Geek validates her beauty, even though she’s demonstrative about not wanting the attention. This kind of “rude” rejection is one of Hughes’ contributions to the conventions of pre-bride validation of beauty, and it is replicated in both *Clueless* and *Twilight* as well.

Upward social mobility is often emphasized by the marriage plot. Jon Lewis writes off Hughes’ work as a kind of nostalgia for the “Depression-era thirties—films that were embedded with the ideologies of austerity and class struggle--...with the triumph of individuality over an arbitrary social immobility” (138). While I agree that Hughes uses comedy to identify class struggle, I disagree that the narrative ultimately champions *her* individuality. The narrative gives her permission to be excused for some of her rude behavior because her family forgets her birthday, but what it really questions is how she builds her identity as a dependent daughter instead of as an independent person. Sam wears stylish clothes but does not buy them with her own money. She doesn’t seem to like or respect the people she knows, and she idealizes someone from a different class whom she has never met.

Sam’s profane language and rude retorts (i.e. “They fucking forgot my birthday,” “I’d shit twice and die,” “Go to hell,” and “Yes, you’re a total fag”) seem appropriate for a macho, confident character, but Ann De Vaney claims Hughes authorizes “young male characters to articulate a specific old macho discourse, classed and white... [while] Hughes’ girls, on the other hand, are more covert in their sexual discussions, sometimes writing things they will not utter, or speaking in

code" (205). De Vaney specifically cites the "underwear" scene and the "sex quiz" as examples of "biases sanctioned by conservative, traditional discourses: it is impolite for females to speak openly about sex; [however], boys will be boys" (206). This is a sharp devolution from Stacy's search for independent, personal gratification (just two years earlier); Stacy asked questions, took risks, and made mistakes. Sam ultimately trusts her father, one of the three men who eventually "see" her by the end of the film. Though she claims to be invisible, she must work hard to thwart tenacious attention. And even though she says, multiple times, that Jake Ryan "does not know she exists," the film repeatedly shows him watching her.

There is satisfaction in getting to see a protagonist "get" what she desires most. The marriage plot template reinforces old paradigms quite powerfully. In fact, it could be argued that the film attributes Sam's "grumpy" nature to her attempts to assimilate into the "modern" roles ascribed to teens. Married life for her sister Ginny is unappealing. Sam complains about having to wear the "dipshit princess bridesmaid's dress," but she's rewarded when she wears it because Jake finally "sees" her in it. Her demeanor then changes. She stops swearing. She is still wearing the dress at the end of the film, claiming that all of her wishes have come true.

Several characters reinforce Sam's insecurity about being invisible in comedic and somewhat cruel ways. The idea that no one knows she "exists" is repeated throughout the film by her best friend, her sister, her family (who have forgotten her birthday), and in school. When Jake asks his friend "Jock" what he

thinks of Samantha Baker, he replies, “I don’t. There’s nothing there, man. It’s not ugly. It’s just [beat] void.”

Hughes gave Sam visibility by cherry-picking character traits typically assigned to young male characters or independent women and then attaching these to a dependent pre-bride. The gender-neutral name “Sam” and masculine short hairstyle signify androgyny more than femininity. But Hughes dresses her exclusively in skirts and dresses, and the visual juxtaposition intimates her internal character construction as well. I will offer further examples of this in the mise-en-scene section.

Secondary Characters

Caroline (Haviland Morris)

Caroline is not a direct antagonist to Sam, but the narrative depicts her with contempt. On the one hand, while Randy and Sam spy on her taking a shower, Randy grudgingly admits that rumors about Caroline’s character are all positive, making her “impossible to cut up.” Besides saying that she is supposedly “real sweet,” the only evidence offered about her “perfect” character is that “her brother is deaf and everybody in the world worships her.” The amount of power Caroline possesses as a sexually active, independent young woman is threatening to the pre-bride paradigm. She does not have to try hard to be seen. When she suspects Jake is “screwing around” on her because he seems distracted, she says, “Just remember one thing: I can name twenty guys who would kill to love me.” He asks her if that is a threat, and she answers without hesitation that “it’s a fact.” From that point on, she is no longer regarded as the kind, popular, care-giving, desirable girlfriend the

audience spied upon in the shower earlier. Instead of translating her responsibility for sexual activity as evidence of maturity, the narrative undercuts her confident self-awareness, and makes her threatening, ugly, and suspect. She is not attentive to Jake and his needs.

Caroline and *Fast Times*' Linda fulfill parallel roles, but the difference in the way the narratives treats them again reflects an ideological backlash against sexually active young women. Both characters are positioned as beautiful, experienced upperclassmen involved in seemingly mature relationships with young men. The audience is invited to view their wet, naked bodies without their permission. Neither of them looks immature, and their sexual experience is well known to their fictional communities. Linda, however, shows that she is a supportive friend to Stacy in multiple ways (even if she isn't always right), and though she suffers the humiliation of being dumped by "Doug" at the end of the film, her reputation is not destroyed in the process. In contrast, Caroline is infantilized, degraded, disfigured, and literally given away without remorse.

Jake's unfulfilling relationship with her supposedly stems from her fondness for parties, but it could be argued that her most unattractive trait is the power she seems to have over him. He is apparently unable to stop Caroline from inviting everyone over to his parent's house, for example, or to prevent people from coming inside. He sits in his room pouting while strangers wreck the entire house. In the kitchen he tells The Geek that he blames Caroline, personally, for the destruction many other people wrought. He brags about all the different ways he could "violate

her” if he wanted to, but he has lost interest. In response, the Geek spits his drink out and asks him what he is waiting for.

The Geek (Anthony Michael Hall)

This character is listed both as “The Geek” and “Farmer Ted,” though most critics refer to him as “The Geek.” The Geek’s appearance is defined by his braces, buttoned-down oxford shirt, jeans, strawberry blonde hair, and jacket tied across his slender waist. Like a child, he wanders into Sam’s space uninvited and laughs nervously when she crudely shuts down his brave attempts at communication. She calls him a “fag” and tells him to “go to hell” on the bus. The callous nature of this interaction undercuts the idea that Sam is invisible; her quick insult feels rehearsed and practiced. The “Geek” uses words like “interface” and “floppy disks,” much like a rising group of young men who would later become economically successful as part of the next movement of masculinity powered by technology.³⁸

The smart, awkward, risk-taking “Geek’s” interaction with Sam ultimately pays off; however, he attains the status of “King of the Dipshits” because he produces “proof” of a sexual tryst by publicly displaying her underwear. The Geek also cites this act as a sacrifice to Jake, convincing him of Sam’s stellar interior: “There are not many girls in contemporary American society today would give their underwear to help a geek like me.” Even though Sam rebuffs him, insults him, and rejects his affection, then, she nevertheless “helps” him achieve higher social status.

³⁸ It was probably no accident that producers cast Anthony Michael Hall to play Bill Gates himself in a biopic several years later in the television production (TNT) of *The Pirates of Silicon Valley* in 1999.

Other Minor Female Characters

Unlike Stacy's stable relationships with her sibling and peers in *Fast Times*, Sam's conversations with other female characters reinforce the idea that she lacks friends. None of her female companions actively plots against Sam's ambitions, as happens in movies like *Grease* (1978) or *Mean Girls* (2005)—but they are all dismissive of her desires. Sam's distracted, working mother, Brenda Baker (Carin Glynn), doesn't understand her need for attention, and her older sister, Ginny, demeans her when Sam reaches out for advice. Sam's grandmother invades the integrity of her body by fondling her breasts (while her Grandfather cracks jokes about needing to find his magnifying glass in order to see them), and her friend Randy reinforces her insecurities about being insignificant. This unstable community of relatives and friends pushes Sam back toward her father and/or young men for support. Sam's father uses coded language to tell Sam that her older sister has had things come "too easily" because she is beautiful (and knows it) and is at risk for having a dissatisfying life. Like Caroline, Ginny overindulges in drugs before her wedding, and she acts like an uncontrollable child throughout the ceremony. According to Gora's interview with the cast, Carin Glynn pleaded with Hughes to allow her character (Sam's mother) to apologize for forgetting her birthday, arguing that Sam's mother would have been horrified. He eventually wrote in the small scene (35). Sam's father nonetheless becomes her main source of support.

Jake Ryan (Michael Schoeffling)

Jake Ryan is a senior in high school of medium height, pale complexion, dark hair, with an athletic build. The narrative never reveals what his career ambitions might be, but his upper-class standing is defined by his parents' house, expensive cars, his formal clothes, and their unconcern with letting an underage, drunk teenager drive his father's Rolls Royce. Relationships seem to come as easily to Jake as they do for Ginny, but Jake is not punished by the narrative in the same way Ginny is. Though Jake is adored by fans who view Sam's desire and exploration of her "crush" as romantic, Jake does not really illustrate his stature as an ideal boyfriend or as a man. The narrative only shows that he prefers the adoring, mute staring of a girl he doesn't know over the ones he does know, as evidenced by the way he talks to and treats his girlfriend, Caroline, in the film. Because the film ends at the beginning of the relationship between Sam and Jake, we are not privy to whether she, too, will continue gazing at Jake to his satisfaction in the future.

Sixteen Candles' Cinematic Style: Nostalgia and Comedy

Hughes' and his team's choices of costuming, sets, camera distance, editing, and sound underscore comedy, but the style also encodes nostalgia, which helps organize the narrative's return to a marriage plot structure for Sam. The production design communicates what the characters do not say about family values and the American work ethic. When one focuses on how Sam's representation changes from the beginning to the end of the film, the cinematic elements also reveal a persuasive argument for a return to traditional femininity. Sam begins with a frown and ends

with a smile. Sets, costumes, material objects, and music encode a return to social boundaries befitting an earlier era that support her emotional transformation.

Mise-en-Scene

To achieve *Sixteen Candles*' look, Hughes personally picked out the locations for Jake's and Sam's family homes in the Chicago suburbs. The very first scene shows what this means: a quiet street with so few cars that an old pick-up can drive down the middle of the road and throw newspapers out both the passenger and drivers' side windows. As the newspaper hits the front door to Sam's multi-level brick home, the house alarm sounds. This moment is emblematic of the film's perspective that the family must be protected from outside influences. The female teen protagonist will be the narrative's focus, but her position is going to be determined by her father.

Sam's home illustrates how difficult it may be to be seen in a cramped space shared by a large family. The inside of the Baker house belongs to a 1980s American suburban middle-class family but one that is not all that well off. Sam's mother shouts all four names of her children in the first scene to wake them up. Immediately six people simultaneously need to use the one bathroom, and the house is cluttered. Every room is full of things, and an early sight-gag shows how overstuffed the closets are. There are two ways to think about this: first, it demonstrates the trademark (bloated) consumption of the middle class, but it also suggests that the family lacks a stay-at-home mother. The narrative sympathizes with Sam's dad, who sacrifices his autonomy by "carpooling" to work in the morning

so Sam's mother can use the one car for her work. The narrative subtly indicts Sam's mother, Brenda, for Sam's invisibility because she is the one, specifically, who forgets Sam's birthday when directly asked what day it is. Sam's father restores his position of moral authority by being the parent who remembers.

Sam doesn't lack material goods or personal space. None of the children shares rooms, and Sam's spacious room seems like an ivory tower away from the others. She has her own phone line, which her father complains about wanting for himself (and he is, once again, gently championed for his sacrifice). This certainly undercuts the idea that she is neglected. On the one hand, Sam's personalized space seems to underline a respect for her individuality; on the other, it demonstrates how her parents are able to monitor her and will ultimately influence the development of her identity. She does not have a car or a job to take her away from her place in the home.

The teenagers' rooms in *Sixteen Candles* quickly communicate a lot about each of them. Sam's impressive room is featured several times. Her bedroom walls, bed sheets, and nightstand are all draped in pink, but the furniture, ruffled curtains, telephone, and enormous iron bedframe are all white. The pink and white décor calls attention to her position as a little girl rather than a teenager. Her room is cluttered, like the rest of the house, but certain items—like white ice skates and pink ballet slippers—amplify this theme. The collection of beauty products covering most of the flat surfaces in her bedroom undercuts some of the childish dolls and dried flowers, while the darkest contrasts are rock posters featuring the young men of The

Stray Cats, who play the remake of “Sixteen Candles” on the soundtrack, and the counter-culture pop band The Culture Club.³⁹ After the first scene, Sam is ousted from the sanctuary of her room; her grandparents will occupy it when they come for her sister’s wedding.

Sam’s siblings’ rooms, though shown less often, also reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Her sister Ginny’s room is less pink, though wallpapered in flowers and pink buds. There are four mirrors, and she is also seen wearing a magnifying mirror around her neck during her scene with Sam, emphasizing her narcissism. Even though Sam patiently listens to Ginny, the elder sister goes back to her mirrors when Sam starts talking and quickly silences her after just a few sentences. In contrast, Sam’s brother Mike (Justin Henry) has a brown room adorned with sports’ equipment like skis, a football, and a basketball. One wall is covered in license plates, a stolen “PED WALKWAY” street sign, and a few posters of semi-clothed women. His room may be filled with sports’ gear, but his soft appearance doesn’t match a sportsman’s body type, and he is also seen drinking cola and listening to his Walkman, part of a new sedentary middle-class reality.

In sharp contrast, Jake’s room, where he hides during the party, is quite organized. He has a Chicago baseball pennant on the wall, but other than that, his grey walls and sheets represent more adult décor. An antique drawing of an old ship takes up most of the wall behind his bed, and a head-shot of Caroline sits near his

³⁹ Whose poster Susanna Gora discovered came from Ringwald’s own room.

bed stand. He turns her picture over when he attempts to contact Sam the first time from his bedside phone.

Jake's house is, of course, the site of the unregulated "teen" party. When Jake finally leaves his room during it, he discovers that his house is covered, end-to-end, in clutter and garbage. The clutter is a visual reminder of Sam's house, where almost all of the surfaces are covered in unorganized things. The damage the party inflicts onto Jake's posh home might be read as a way the upper class interprets what a danger it is to mingle indiscriminately with the middle class.

Instead of participating in the race for adulthood via sexual conquest, Jake rejects the party and the girl passed out in his room that he could "violate"; he respects his parents' things like a mature adult. His turn toward Sam, who seems to offer something "more than a party," is a conservative one. The last scene reinforces the smooth surfaces of the uncluttered, upper-class home as they sit on the shiny mahogany dining room table. Did he spend the day cleaning the house that had been completely trashed twenty-four hours earlier? Did he bake her the cake they are sitting in front of? This domestic scene, while steeped in traditional marriage plot overtones for Sam, is a considerably new interpretation of how masculinity will accept shared domestic responsibilities in the new era. Jake will clean, cook, and sweetly encourage Sam to make her wishes with a darker, implicit caveat: if her attention waivers from him, or he feels threatened by competition, she could end up discarded, like Caroline.

Sam's Costumes Start Leather and End Pink

The pre-bride's dilemma is always centered on self-presentation, and the way Hughes layers Sam's costuming reveals the old blueprint in a much more straightforward way than does the narrative.⁴⁰ She begins the story with Sam looking like an unhappy modern teen (see Figure 3) and transforms her into a happy pre-bride by the end (see Figure 4). In Sam's first scene in her bedroom, a medium shot frame her with wet hair and bare shoulders with delicate lace straps as she assesses herself in the mirror. The shot is very intimate. Sam is disappointed by what she sees; her skin isn't the right color, her "bod" needs "four more inches." As the camera pans out, the audience sees the straps are part of a pink camisole—a modest garment meant to cover her breasts and torso. The audience does not see Sam in her "bra," but they are reminded of her intimate garments throughout her day at school as these lace straps are left uncovered by her off-the-shoulder top. On the one hand, Hughes undercuts some of the rigid rules for pre-bride femininity with Sam's masculine short hair, her leather trimmed hat, her foul language, and frequent scowl; on the other, he neutralizes the effect by dressing her exclusively in dresses and skirts. The lace straps remind viewers they have already seen Sam in her underwear, even if she has several layers over this in public. The skirt she wears to school almost reaches her ankles, and her outfit to the dance is made of gauzy, pink layers. The final scenes complete Sam's makeover into traditional femininity

⁴⁰ John Hughes worked with two costume designers: Mark Peterson dressed the men, and Marla Schlom dressed the women.

seen in Figure 5. Besides the flowers she wears and carries, the bridesmaid dress is pink and so long it hides her feet completely. The tulle of the wedding veil is hard to distinguish from the folds of her own gauzy gown.

The bridesmaid's dress is a powerful symbol in pre-bride narratives, often signifying the end result of a makeover trope. Many films featuring pre-brides, like *Clueless* (1995), utilize the makeover as part of the spectacle of the plot. In *Sixteen Candles*, the makeover is subtle. She complains about the dress, but she finally connects with Jake when she wears the traditional feminine costume. Sam is not "given away" by her father inside the church at the altar, as mentioned, but as Jake leads her away from the church to his red Porsche, her Dad gives her an impressed "thumb's up," consenting to her departure. Sam and Jake have never spoken, but the audience knows that he knows she is a virgin who wants to have sex with him. She does not know he has this knowledge nor that he has held her underwear. The last scene of the film shows her still wearing the bridesmaid's dress. When she sheds her modern clothes, adorns her hair with ribbons and flowers, and stands in a church, she has completed the pre-bride makeover. The story concludes as all marriage plots do--at the beginning of her relationship with the object of her desire (from a higher social/economic class).

Jake Ryan spends a lot of time on screen handling her underwear, which as The Geek says, will help him become "the King of the Dipshits." The image of Jake's holding on to her underwear is a particularly powerful example of how her sexuality has been commodified.

In strong contrast to *Fast Times*, Hughes silences conversations between young women about sexual curiosity, offering instead a “sex quiz” during Sam’s study hall. In a series of fourteen shots, Sam reveals her lack of sexual experience and names her “ideal” sexual partner. The written quiz substitutes pronouns like “it” for “penis” and “sex,” and the secrecy is compounded by the fact that Sam is trying to take this quiz while she is in the highly regulated space of the classroom. The editing gives the audience more knowledge than Sam has about how much Jake actually sees her. Curiosity about a young woman’s sexual status is still relevant, but it is no longer discussed with friends openly. It is hard not to be curious about why Sam has been asked these questions and why the “friend” who gives the quiz is never revealed.

Sixteen Candles’ Music: Remake, Reuse, Recycle

From “16 Candles”⁴¹

Girl, you're only sixteen
But you're my teenage queen
You're the prettiest, loveliest girl
I've ever seen. (Dixon and Khent)

The title of John Hughes’ film was stolen from a doo-wop song written in 1958, and it is easy to imagine Hughes typing up his screenplay with the picture of Molly Ringwald hanging nearby and these lyrics running through his head. Even though The Stray Cats remake “16 Candles” for the soundtrack, the updated version is

⁴¹ Dixon and Khent’s song uses the numeric “16” in its title while the title of the movie uses the spelled word.

faithful to the sound and style of the original. The imitation is unlike a lot of music picked for the soundtrack, but nevertheless points forcefully to the overarching theme. Samantha Baker is not the “loveliest, prettiest, teenage queen” when she is first introduced, but she gets “remade” into one—not by becoming more modern—but by becoming less so. Like the updated song, she is faithful to the original. In this sense, she starts out as a “modern” girl and ends up embodying a pre-modern one.

The original soundtrack was lauded for its punk/new wave sound. Like Heckerling, Hughes made use of the MTV style of associative editing, making the music a prominent part of the narrative. A closer look at the songs, however, reveals that the music promotes residual ideologies in new tones. A number of songs originated before the appearance of the feminist movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. In addition to the title song, “Love of the Common People,” a folk ballad produced in 1967, was remade by Paul Young in 1983 for the film. Nick Heyward’s version of “Whistle Down the Wind” was originally written in 1961. Van Morrison sang “Gloria” in 1965, although Patti Smith’s 1975 version is featured in the film. A few older songs like Darlene Love’s “Today I Met the Boy I’m Gonna Marry” (1963) and instrumental overtures like “Farmer John” (1959), “Dragnet Theme” (1959), and “The Twilight Zone Theme” (1959) were used for comedic effect. The remakes feature lyrics that reinforce the values of a pre-bride protagonist, even though the music sounds like they are part of the progressive new wave/punk era. This mirrors Sam’s predilection for swearing like a 1980s teenager while adhering to a pre-bride identity more reminiscent of the 1950s.

Paul Young's updated version of John Hurley's folk song "Love of the Common People" became a chart-topping hit in 1984, alongside the likes of Michael Jackson's "Thriller" and Van Halen's "Jump." The song's dominant sound comes from an electronic synthesizer, accented by the distinctive "Ah-ah-yee-ah" echo of the female back-up singers. "Love of the Common People" is featured when Sam is first introduced in her room, and it plays at low volume as she looks at herself critically in the mirror. The refrain emphasizes Sam's position as a child:

You better go home where it's warm
Where you can live in the love of the common people
Smiles from the heart of the family man
Daddy's gonna buy you a dream to cling to (Hurley and Wilkins)

The song values her identity in the world as one given to her by her father. Near the end, after the singer croons that "living on a dream ain't easy" and that "family pride" will help her keep the chills away, religion is invoked:

That faith is your foundation
And with a whole lot of love and warm conversation
But don't forget to pray
it's making you strong
it's where you belong (Hurley and Wilkins)

The lyrics are not prominent in the film; certainly, the back-up singers stand out more, but the father-centered, faith-based dream the lyrics communicate does not accord with the spirit of new-wave/punk rendition.

In contrast, Hughes plays Darlene Love's original "(Today I Met) The Boy I'm Going to Marry" (1963) over the scene between Sam and her engaged sister, Ginny, to (comically) critique Ginny as someone who is unsophisticated. The lyrics are difficult to hear during the scene, but the big band sound and the harmonizing of the

back-up singers enhance the retro style of her bedroom, which is formal, antique, floral, and adorned with mirrors. Most of the lines start with the pronoun “he” or “the boy,” and the repetition emphasizes the joy the female singer will find as a wife. Ginny, however, does not quite fit this model; the only reason she seems to be excited about getting married to Rudy (John Kapelos) is that he has been “totally enamored” with her “for six months in a row.” The song contrasts with the film’s largely contemporary sound, yet its message adheres to the pre-pride paradigm.

The Thompson Twins penned one of the most popular songs on the soundtrack, “If You Were Here” (1983), which is lyrically at odds with the rest of the songs in the film.⁴² Their breathy, synth-pop ballad is played over the final two minutes of the movie, during the peak of the end-is-the-beginning marriage plot finale. Curiously, however, the actual lyrics of the song tell a story of an established relationship in trouble, more akin to that of Jake and Caroline or Ginny and Rudy:

If you were here
I could deceive you
And if you were here
You would believe
But would you suspect
My emotion wandering, yeah
Do not want a part of this anymore (Thompson Twins)

⁴² This song, published as a video on Youtube.com in 2007, boasts 1.9 + million views. Instead of presenting live action “moving pictures,” the “video” features the song playing over the still in Figure 4, á la John Keats’ lovers frozen forever on the Grecian Urn. There are over a thousand comments posted by users, some of whom posted within days of my viewing the video in July of 2016. The “comment section” below the video serves as a kind of message board for fans who share words of praise for the film, the song, and the nostalgic feeling this particular song brings to people re-listening to it. Some identify it as the sound of “the 1980s,” while others quote lines from the movie itself--“Who me?” and “Yeah, you,” uttered by Sam and Jake, respectively, while across the street from one another—and seem to be the viewers’ “romantic” favorites.

The song starts to play when Sam finally sees Jake looking directly at her at the church, and the lyrics most clearly articulated during the scene are “If you were here” and “You would believe.” The other lyrics are obscured either because character dialogue is spoken over them or because the words are difficult to understand as sung. The emotion being expressed by the song contradicts the scene, but the allure of the musical style efficiently distracts the audience from the incongruity. This contradiction is emblematic of how a popular film can be complicit in repackaging nostalgia and presenting it as emergent to the status quo. *Sixteen Candles* covers up the regressive position of its dependent pre-bride with witty dialogue and contemporary music, and the film gets lauded as an ideal production for its “authentic” representation of young women.

Chapter One Conclusion

Overall, Stacy Hamilton and Samantha Baker both represent ideologies prevalent during a period of cultural transition. While Stacy reflects a value system that supports her self-discovery outside of the marriage plot, Sam symbolizes societal pushback toward tradition. By the end of the 1980s, more of Hughes’ protagonists appeared in commercial productions, but a few successful independent films featured independent female teen protagonists like Baby (Jennifer Grey) from *Dirty Dancing* (1987) and Veronica (Winona Ryder) from *Heathers* (1989). There was still great interest in seeing productions featuring non-pre-bride heroines. The following chapter will look into the next decade’s transformation of the two character prototypes as they absorb and reflect several transitions in American

political and social culture, the film industry, and the losses and gains made in moving from comedy to drama in *Clueless* (1995) and *Titanic* (1998).

CHAPTER TWO:

1990'S REPRESENTATIONS: A *CLUELESS* PRE-BRIDE & A *TITANIC* HEROINE

This chapter considers the ideological divergence of the pre-bride and the independent heroine character types in major American film studio productions made during the 1990s, and how their contributions complicate and expand the meaning of representation during a decade many cultural critics see as the beginning of third wave feminism or the “post-feminist” era. The two protagonists I selected for this decade are Cher (Alicia Silverstone) from Amy Heckerling’s *Clueless* (1995) and Rose DeWitt Bukater (Kate Winslet) from James Cameron’s *Titanic* (1997). The unexpected financial successes of both films⁴³ signify the growing popularity and marketability of both progressive and traditional young female protagonists in mainstream productions. This chapter tracks the continuing growth of the two character types from the previous decade as compelling, salient, and popular representations while also being reflective illustrations of cultural anxieties, eruptions, and political shifts in the face of the increasing sexualization and commercialization of youth culture during this period.

My analysis of the protagonists from *Clueless* and *Titanic* goes against most of the popular critiques of both films. Cher’s role in *Clueless* is often embraced as a progressive example of post-feminist “Grrrl Power” fashion reclamation, while Rose

⁴³ The prohibitive production cost incurred by *Titanic* (around \$200 million) was the main reason it was predicted to sink, even if it drew a decent-sized audience.

in *Titanic* is dismissed as a distressed damsel in a bloated melodrama fashioned by the male gaze. I argue that Cher's provocative looks and witty idiolect are undermined by her regressive narrative arc, while Rose's transformation successfully disconnects her from melodrama and rewards her with the agency traditionally granted to a male protagonist.

Both *Clueless* and *Titanic* reflect an awareness of feminist criticism and the cultural disfavor of past representations/gender performances of femininities, but they offer different approaches for reclaiming remediated femininity through myth. While both narratives begin with their protagonists bound in strict hyper-feminine constructions, they distinctly diverge along ideological paths by their narratives' ends. In this chapter, I will illustrate why *Clueless* is a recuperation of traditional femininity mislabeled as the "post-feminist" future that paves the way for regressive roles in future blockbusters like the *Twilight* series and explore how Rose breaks from a corseted stereotype into an industry-changing independent teen heroine role, making room for champion heroines like Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* during the next decade.

Broad Social/Historical Context: The American 1990s

The 1990s is a less cohesive decade in terms of having a singular event or social/political force dominating pop culture, but it does witness the onset of the Information Era: tailored individualism over community consensus in family life, politics, and entertainment. The twelve years of the Reagan/Bush administrations ended in 1992 with the election of moderate Democrat Bill Clinton, who inherited

the “back to tradition” gender politics directed by a strong Republican recuperation⁴⁴ effort centered on renegotiating patriarchal authority, which rewards subordinate social positions for women professionally and within their own families. The appearance of more female protagonists in big studio productions after *Titanic* showed an awareness for a social/political context that responded to a general regard for gender equality, but the translation of commercially successful representations of teen heroines was as complex as the social clashes happening during the last decade of the twentieth century.⁴⁵

Just like automobile and telephone technologies transformed the U.S. when they were mass-produced and connected regions via roads and wires, the end of the twentieth century was also marked by new technologies that remarkably changed daily life during the last decade of the millennium. Cellular phones and personal computers, two domestic tools often associated with youth and change, were costly and exclusive at the beginning of the decade but ubiquitous by 1999. They were also the main tools that brought on the cultural transition into the Information Era, a confusing new age of opinion and fact conflation, wherein ideological paradoxes emerged alongside revelations on multiple media platforms. Significant growth in

⁴⁴ I’m using this term as Michele Barrett defines it in “Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender” (1985): “Recuperation: the ideological effort that goes into negating and defusing challenges to the historically dominant meaning of gender in particular periods” (Barrett 82).

⁴⁵ Besides the four films of *The Hunger Games* franchise (2012-2015), some non-pre-bride heroines featured in big budget successful commercial films include *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001), *Lara Croft: Cradle of Life* (2003), *V for Vendetta* (2005), Disney’s *Brave* (2012) and *Frozen* (2013), *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), *Divergent* (2014), *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016), and *Wonder Woman* (2017).

multicultural populations,⁴⁶ a global economy, the dot-com boom, and contentious factionalism regarding race, religion, gender, and regionalism unsettled political governance at every level. The U.S. economy thrived during the Clinton administration, but the rise of “identity politics” gained popularity, and socio-cultural conflicts were recorded, shared, and televised in ways they hadn’t before. Advertisers, filmmakers, television producers, and print media outlets saw their industries fundamentally change shape to reach increasingly harder-to-get self-selecting audiences. The regular and wide use of the Internet during the second half of the decade created a global forum for the connection of commerce and ideas, but, at the same time, it also provided an unrestricted platform to undermine them. In some ways, the white, wealthy hegemonies presented in *Clueless* (1995) and *Titanic* (1997) during this transition capitalize on masculine, white American culture’s desire to recapture a moment in history in which they enjoyed uncontested dominance, and their use of female teen protagonists instead of traditional male heroes also invites us to analyze conflicts between female independence or feminine tradition.

Cultural historians and feminist scholars regard the 1990s as a time period that foregrounded divisions in feminist ideology in an increasingly sexualized youth

⁴⁶ According to the 2000 census, “during the 1990s the U.S. population grew by the largest amount ever measured. Reversing a three-decade decline in the rate of growth, the total population grew by 13.2%...[largely] attributed to births...[:] the white population grew by only 5% in the fastest-growing cities, compared to 23% for African Americans, 69% for Asians, and 72% for Hispanics” (Schwartz vi).

culture. Using the term “postfeminist” to mark the decade is less clear, as Chris Holmlund pointed out in her 2005 essay “Postfeminism from A to G,” noting that postfeminism has been around since women gained the right to vote, though its use as an adjective applied to texts has only been active since the 1980s (116).

Postfeminism could be regarded as a term foisted onto feminists by the dominant culture as a silencing tool and as a means to help quash concern about emerging inequities. That being said, the deepening disconnect between second wave feminist ideology and emerging feminisms within identity politics accelerated during the decade, as women responded to the previous decade’s cultural backlash that attributed women’s unhappiness not to the lack of equal opportunity in chosen professions but to “men shortages” and “infertility epidemics,” among other myths (Faludi 3). Third wave feminist sensibilities critiqued the heteronormative, highly privileged, white feminist ideology that led the fight for equality during the civil rights era, sometimes at the expense of unique individuality, and also sought reclamation of traditional femininities that were perceived as erased or marked as taboo during the struggle for achieving equity.⁴⁷

The 1990s were well known for featuring highly sexualized images of young women in pop culture texts, yet recognizing the difference between empowerment and exploitation, especially when looking at popular texts, is sometimes difficult

⁴⁷ Holmlund separates three third wave feminist discourses into types: academic, chick, and grrrl (115). *Clueless* could be interpreted as “chick” feminism, while *Titanic* expresses more “grrrl” discourse.

because the process of commercialization caters to the least controversial choices, which sometimes has the effect of sterilizing content. The first half of the decade reflected a youth culture in retreat from the slick, commercialized status quo vision of youth offered by MTV during the 1980s.⁴⁸ In its place, the dressed-down “grunge” aesthetic, adapted from the Seattle, Washington, music scene of the late 80s and early 90s, emerged as a movement with distinct subcultures separated by gender. The “grunge” subculture began in the Pacific Northwestern U.S. in the late 1980s through young musicians looking for alternative identities from the Rock-n-Roll genre that was marketed by MTV. What is largely recognized as “grunge” usually refers to the mainstream (male) movement led by popular bands like Nirvana and Pearl Jam, but it also includes the less popular Riot Grrrls (female) subculture along with it. Both *Titanic* and *Clueless* directly and indirectly respond to the youth grunge subculture context of the decade.

Grunge subculture tropes echoed punk rock aesthetics—a genre of music tied to anger, shock performance, and rebellion—and added apathy, rejection, drug use, anti-establishment themes, and anti-commercial odes. In “White Noise: Grunge, Britpop and Beyond,” Rupa Huq identifies grunge as “inseparable from its white

⁴⁸ During the 1980s MTV continuously played music videos of numerous all-male bands who borrowed styles from traditional images of femininity. For example, many wore long hair styled with beauty products (gel, hairspray, mousse) and used heavy makeup (lipstick, rouge, eye-shadows/liners) in their videos, and also dressed in brightly colored outfits, which were often skin-tight and contoured. Popular all-male bands like Duran Duran, Motley Crue, The Cure, Bon Jovi, Van Halen, INXS, and many others participated in this style. The 1990s “grunge” movement idealized stripping away all of the production that feminized men. Many of them still wore their hair long, for example, but the overall look was strictly “unmodified” (and often accused of being unwashed, greasy, dirty, or generally unkempt).

constituency” of alienated youth and cites “theories of grunge as the soundtrack to a dispossessed generation” focused on “suburban despair” (139). Instead, the “anti-fashion charity shop chic” incorporated the signature “uniform” of lumberjack flannels and ripped jeans meant to mirror the “dressed-down ethos...captured in Nirvana’s song-title ‘Come as You Are’” and incorporated everything from music production to personal hygiene (139).⁴⁹ This counter-culture ethos fizzled quickly, however, as plaid flannel shirts were mass-produced and worn by teenagers from coast to coast because of their exposure on MTV. By the mid-90s, the male-oriented grunge movement had been absorbed by the mainstream, but the Riot Grrrl subculture had not.

Often described as “aggressively female” in reference to bands like Hole, L7, and Pussy Riot, Riot Grrrls emerged as an equally unkempt, feminine counterpart to their grungy brothers’ movement of disillusionment with the status quo. Though Riot Grrrls were less cohesive, popular, or organized than mainstream grunge boys, they wanted to destabilize the objectification of their bodies as “the norm,” and their sub-culture movement contributed to the reclamation of traditional femininities associated with third wave feminism. In her chapter “Girl Power: The Politics of Pop,” Christina Lee contends that the Riot Grrrl movement became a target for mainstream appropriation as the underbelly or subculture of “a femininity that was

⁴⁹ Because it was derived from the working class of the damp Northwestern U.S., flannel “work” shirts, dirty and ripped jeans, large boots, and skull caps were often the signature style of these groups (though they would loathe to admit they had a “style”).

vehemently anti-establishment, political, aggressive, and subversive” (Lee 65-66).⁵⁰ Part of this reputation comes from the Riot Grrrls rejection of performing status quo beauty, embracing physical expressions and movements that have been long deemed “rude” or “unbecoming” for young women, like the poses struck by The Lunachicks band in Figure 6. Instead of smiles or sultry poses, Riot Grrrl publicity photos featured artists wearing frowns, grimaces, or sticking their tongues out in unflattering poses (hunched over, legs spread, middle fingers up). They wore “messy” makeup outside lip-lines and eye-lines, and also used the opposite side of the makeup color wheel: instead of pinks and reds, they used black, green, purple and blue. Their clothing was also a disruption of status quo beauty and a political statement indicting scopophilia of female bodies. Linda Rosier’s famous photograph of Bikini Kill’s lead singer, Kathleen Hanna, in Figure 7, is a classic example of the reclamation and interruption. While she is wearing a suggestive halter-top that only covers her breasts, the word “SLUT,” written in ink across her stomach, acts as a rebuke both to the observer objectifying her body and the insult used against her for displaying her body. Her hair in pigtails also calls attention to dressing like a child, something Hanna and other third wave feminists did on purpose “to reclaim their youth from a male-dominated culture that sexualized them when they were too young to fight back” (Nicholson). Marketers depoliticized and repackaged Riot

⁵⁰ In addition to music, Riot Grrrls invented a new type of publication called “Zines” that gave young women a medium to discuss topics such as rape, incest, and other tabooed subjects that were absent from mainstream media.

Grrrls as “empowered femininity” by erasing the offensive words and keeping the sexualized clothing. The difference can be seen in Hanna’s picture in Figure 7, taken in 1992, and that of seventeen-year-old Britney Spears taken from her “Hit Me Baby...One More Time” video in Figure 8 in 1999, which sexualizes the plaid uniform associated with school girls by shortening the skirts, buttoning only the middle of their shirts, and baring their midriffs and thighs. *Clueless* and *Titanic* are productions responding to the ideological push and pull between the Riot Grrrl image of angst and the cheerful, materially-motivated, hyper-feminine image offered by the “Girl Power” marketers.

Writers like Ann Powers saw the campaign for “Girl Power” as disingenuous because these sexually mature presentations of immature bodies were not an expression of agency but an ideological reshuffling campaign to sell material things like “abstinence and record albums” to young women who had gained attention and power by consuming products, media, or texts pre-packaged and mass-marketed as expressions of their “own” identities (76).⁵¹ She distinguished elements of “Girl Culture” as ones that focused on reclaiming what young women already have—“muscles, guile, sex appeal—and [the ability] to use [them]” (77). *Titanic* reflects the Girl Culture context of the 1990s because it dismantles traditional feminine ideals instead of reinforcing them. *Clueless*, though it looks and sounds progressive, and

⁵¹ She cites wildly popular rock stars of the moment like Gwen Stefani (“I’m Just a Girl”), Alanis Morissette, and Fiona Apple as examples of rock “girls” who “can be larger than life without sacrificing their femininity” (77).

even seems to resist tropes of tradition, actually reinforces them with the materially driven mixed messages of “Girl Power” culture, which refocuses the protagonist as the object of a gaze instead of an agent with her own view.

Section I: Everybody Loves *Clueless*

I will not make the claim that *Clueless* isn’t a well-written, humorous, crowd-pleasing film. There are jokes that make light of contextual trends so well it almost makes the critiques seem like universal truths, regardless of political ideology. For example, it is hard to oppose Cher’s attack of the ill-fitting “droopy pants” fad many young men sported during the 1990s from a functional or aesthetic perspective, and many would probably still agree with Cher’s dad that her white Calvin Klein dress looked much more “like underwear!” than stylish teen fashion. *Clueless* also features secondary characters rarely associated with Cher’s social class and economic stature: her best friends are gay, African-American, and drug-users open to reform. Most reviewers found something positive to say about *Clueless*, but not many fully endorsed it either.⁵² The critiques of *Clueless* were often with endorsements like Janet Maslin’s: “As a pampered Beverly Hills clotheshorse, she’s mostly a one-joke princess, but the joke happens to work” (qtd in Chaney 242). Like Maslin and Denby,

⁵² Snippets of these reviews reprinted in Chaney’s book reflect cautious endorsements that identify what is both appalling and compelling in Cher and the film from popular publications like the *Los Angeles Times*, *Variety*, *New York Magazine*, the *NY Times*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Washington Post*, *Time*, and *The USA Today* (Chaney 239-248). David Denby from *New York Magazine* asked, “How can virtue be encased in an ethos of consumerist narcissism?” but also added, “their posing conceals a small gift of poetry” (qtd in Chaney 241).

many reviewers pushed aside their disapproval with a recommendation and called *Clueless* “fun.”

This section challenges the idea that Cher is a harmless, “fun” representation of a mainstream teen heroine, however, and looks at how she fits easily into old courtship narratives, albeit with some modern amendments.

Production and Plot: *Clueless*

Plot

Clueless is a parodic comedy set in early 1990s Beverly Hills, California. It employs conventions of the Hughes’ “teen” film centered on high school, and includes social cliques, at least one non-white character, gormless adults, unsupervised parties, witty teen idiolects, non-diegetic pop songs, and kissing at the end. Cher Horowitz (Alicia Silverstone), the protagonist, narrates the story in voiceover. She is observed alone, with her friends and family, at home, in the car, at school, in the mall, and at a party and wedding over the course of the school year. She lives with her widowed and divorced father, Mel (Dan Hedaya), a successful but dour litigator, in a posh mansion replete with servants in Beverly Hills, California. She attends high school with her African-American best friend, Dionne Davenport (Stacey Dash), and her makeover protégé, Tai Frasier (Brittany Murphy). While gay character Christian Stovitz (Justin Walker) and entitled antagonist Elton Tiscia

(Jeremy Sisto) vie for position as Cher's romantic double, her college-aged, ex-step-brother⁵³ Josh Lucas (Paul Rudd) ultimately fulfills this role.

The film's central conflict revolves around Cher's desirability, and her central skill is performing makeovers. Her high school teachers include a lesbian gym teacher, Ms. Stoeger (Julie Brown), her speech teacher Mr. Hall (Wallace Shawn), and her English teacher Miss Geist (Twink Caplan), the latter two being the targets of one of Cher's matchmaking schemes. Other minor peer roles include Dionne's boyfriend Murray Duvall (Donald Faison), "stoner" Travis Birkenstock (Breckin Meyer), and antagonist Amber "WhatEver" Mariens (Elisa Donovan). The story ends at the wedding of Mr. Hall and Miss Geist, attended by Cher, her friends, and Josh. Though she makes fun of the idea that she's going to get married ("As if! I'm only sixteen. And this is California, not Kentucky"), the story ends like *Sixteen Candles*, with the young bridesmaid (Cher) kissing the man (Josh), from whom she has been trying to win affection for most of the film.

***Clueless* Production History: "Executives Didn't 'Get' It"**

Clueless, rated PG-13 by the MPAA, debuted on Wednesday, July 19th, 1995. It was a surprise hit for Paramount Pictures, winning the second spot at the box office behind blockbuster *Apollo 13* (1995), and earning \$15.8 million its first weekend, more than its entire production budget (Chaney 239). Its success was also an embarrassment for 20th Century Fox, who had previously sold the script because

⁵³ Josh's mother and Cher's father were briefly married a number of years before, so Cher and Josh had lived as step-brother and step-sister at an earlier time.

they didn't see the appeal of a film "so female-oriented," according to director-screenwriter Heckerling (Weinraub). *Clueless* stayed in theatres for an additional six weeks, taking in \$56.6 million (domestic) during its full box-office run. *Clueless* also found critical success for Heckerling, who earned many positive reviews, was eventually nominated for a Best Original Screenplay by the Writers Guild of America and won The National Society of Film Critics Award for Best Screenplay.

The genesis for *Clueless* began in 1993 when 20th Century Fox asked Heckerling to develop a TV series centered on popular characters in high school (Chaney 3-4). Several other television shows featuring teen ensembles were popular at the time, including *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990-2000) and MTV's new "reality" series *The Real World* (1992-2013),⁵⁴ though some male-led teen films failed to make money for studios for a number of years.⁵⁵ Heckerling said the executives at Fox "didn't get" her script, specifically the focus on three female leads, and pushed her for an ensemble cast with male protagonists instead, but she refused. The problem was grounded in the marketing side of a Hollywood studio film that prioritizes generic conventions over novelty and considers young female *subjects* (not objects) as novel (therefore, risky) at the time. As Heckerling tells the story,

⁵⁴ The show is credited with starting the entire "reality" genre. The original show picked seven to eight young adults to temporarily live together in a new city in one residence while being filmed non-stop.

⁵⁵ 20th Century Fox cited *Airheads* (1994) and *PCU* (1994), specifically, as examples of the dying "teen" genre. Neither film made more than \$5 million at the box office, much less than they cost to make.

“everybody passed” on her project until Scott Rudin⁵⁶ liked the script, which started a bidding war that he eventually won, and landing it at Paramount Pictures⁵⁷ (Chaney 10). Rudin was able to reduce the budget to under \$13 million by keeping the production shoot to a very short fifty-three days (Chaney 70). The final cut was ninety-seven minutes long.

Unofficially, *Clueless* is often regarded as an adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Emma*, and while Heckerling acknowledges Austen as an inspiration *after* she had written Cher’s character, the text is not credited as a true adaptation.⁵⁸ Instead, as an inspiration, *Clueless* escapes the overt criticism advanced by certain feminist critics that classic adaptations tend to excuse the replication of sexism that binds the text to its original historic time period. *Clueless* doesn’t quite fit the category of adaptation, parody, or satire, but plenty of critics identify parts of the film that fit some of these modes. Karlyn identifies *Clueless* as a hybrid of the romantic comedy and the teen film, which “invoke[s] the unruliness of classical romance comedy but recode[s] it in new ways” (78). While I agree that *Clueless* recodes fantasy with an

⁵⁶ A prolific producer of both independent and commercial films since the early 1990s, Rudin has produced a number of films featuring tweens or teens ranging from *The Addams Family* (1991), *Clueless* (1995), *The Truman Show* (1998), *Wonder Boys* (2000), *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001), *School of Rock* (2003), *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009), *The Social Network* (2010), and *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012).

⁵⁷ Paramount also owned Nickelodeon and MTV, so they were interested in (or at least open to) the prioritizing of a teen “market” that featured female teen protagonists, too.

⁵⁸ The Writers Guild of America (WGA) nominated Heckerling’s screenplay for best “original” screenplay. She said she had “unfortunately” told people about *Emma*, so the Academy Awards decided it should be considered in the “adaptation” category (she says her screenplay is an adaptation in the same sense that *West Side Story* is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*). Emma Thompson’s 1995 adapted screenplay of Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* won the best-adapted screenplay at the Oscars, WGA, The Golden Globes, and numerous other venues that year.

eye toward the oft-avoided demonstration of female teen power/desire, the text offers a mixed message, one structured in patriarchal ideology. Critics like Catherine Driscoll count *Clueless* as evidence of an exhausted genre that relies on convention to slightly revise otherwise generic “teen queens” (56), in contrast Kathryn Karlyn claims that *Clueless* is a positive expression of “Girl World” in the post-feminist era. Ford and Mitchell single out *Clueless* as a film that “packs a positive message for a generation of young women in desperate need of good role models” (72). The history of the production shows how the film could be interpreted as both progressive and conventional. *Clueless*, like *Sixteen Candles*, telegraphs a conflation of cherry-picked post-feminist sensibilities and uses them to reinforce the pre-bride paradigm.

Clueless Narrative: The Flattering Parody

Cher was designed to be unconditionally happy, and everything in the plot is distorted to fit into that outcome in a residual patriarchal structure of power. The distortion fits Gerald Mast’s definition of a “parodic plot” as “deliberately contrived and artificial; it is not an ‘imitation of human action’ but an imitation of an imitation” (5). The intent of a parody usually includes an unflattering critique of its subject, but *Clueless* doesn’t really do that to Cher or the values she represents. Instead, the conflicts and resolutions reinforce more of what Wes Gehring defines as a “parody of reaffirmation” in that the overall effect produces “a tension between genre expectations...and a parody that is comic without deflating the characters involved,” which effect “adds a poignancy not normally associated with parody” (7). Yet Cher is

not depicted with contempt by the comedy of manners from which she is partially derived, but rather highly regarded by the narrative. From this angle, the film also communicates positive reinforcement of conservative values regarding the newest version of a pre-bride character.

The film is shown from the perspective of a young woman who has limitless material resources and who operates at the paragon of her social hierarchy—she is wealthy, white, blonde, thin, heterosexual, and untroubled by consequences resulting from poor grades, sexual assault, or armed robbery. The central conflict focuses accordingly on finding worthy suitors. Cher is not burdened by desire for class mobility, but maintaining class is implicitly of central importance. She has trouble recognizing reality without the help of men, and her eventual romantic double, Josh, helps challenge her about attending to the decisions she needs to make about the kind of person she wants to be. Her desire for Josh's approval ends up creating positive outcomes for people around her, and in Cher's world, good outcomes can also be interpreted as good intentions. *Clueless* is striking for its use of contradictions and overlooked for the way it rewrites the script again for pre-bride adapting to third wave feminism as it emerged in the 1990s.

Narrative Themes: Contradiction, Regression, and the Closed Ending

Like *Sixteen Candles*, *Clueless* presents a marriage plot with a sense of humor. Through voiceover, the audience experiences Cher's point of view so closely it seems like she has been given the power to tell her own story, but unrestricted access to her viewpoint actually undermines her agency because she is often

contradicted by images and actions happening on screen simultaneously. In this sense, Cher and Sam are relegated to subordinated positions in their own stories because everyone else “knows better,” including fathers, friends, boyfriends, and the viewing audience, which infantilizes them. Cher participates in teen rituals at home, school, and parties, but unlike an independent heroine, her search for her authentic self is hyper-focused on how her appearance can please the male gaze. The film’s exploration of virginity, dependence, and self-worth are skewed toward a capitulation that reinforces her position as a pre-bride.

Narrative Spaces in *Clueless*: Independent or Dependent?

The spaces dedicated to teen rituals and tests of independence in *Clueless* are standard: the home, school, mall, house party, and cars. On the one hand, privilege seems to construct Cher’s identity and build her confidence in her everyday life, but a closer look reveals how her narrative makes her permanently dependent instead. She doesn’t master the skills she needs to drive on her own, she shops at the mall with her father’s money instead of earning money by working there, and her rewards in high school are gained through social manipulation instead of academic work.

Her bedroom, like all filmic teen bedrooms, illustrates her identity, class, and dependence. Like Sam’s bedroom in *Sixteen Candles*, it is pink, expansive, and seemingly private. The first claim Cher makes during her first voiceover—she leads a “way normal life”—is undercut immediately as the audience watches her in her underwear flip her hair back in 360 degree mirrors. Her closet contains a revolving,

motorized closet rack, which is connected to custom software designed to help her arrange outfits on her personal computer. She actually touches her computer screen monitor to execute commands, a technology that would not be invented for another twenty years, and this action contradicts her understanding that she lives a “way normal” life by wearing *couture* clothing. Even though Cher appears to have power, authority, and autonomy, they are all dependent upon her being a resident in her father’s home and developing talents best suited to maintaining the lifestyle that provides her with this kind of a bedroom—namely, meticulous self-monitoring and social manipulation.

The mall provides the most stunning example of regressive transformation from independence in *Fast Times* to dependence in *Clueless*. Instead of working to gain skills for financial independence, Cher illustrates how her position of power at the mall has turned into an expression of pure consumption. She has learned to “gather [her] thoughts and regain strength” by *purchasing* goods at the mall when she is troubled emotionally. In one instance, she is troubled because she cannot persuade Mr. Hall into raising her grade, though she has been able to manipulate her other teachers by telling them lies that appeal to their liberal ideologies (i.e., she will write letters for the Clean Water Campaign for Miss Geist, and she cries about how “an evil man” broke her heart to her lesbian gym teacher). When she is at the mall, she has the epiphany that Mr. Hall is unhappy because he is single, and in voiceover she says what he needs is a “good old fashioned ‘boink-fest’” in order to make him happy. This shows how her approach to problem solving derives from values that

emphasize sexual manipulation. Instead of learning how to commit to hard work in order to earn accolades, like her father has, she has gleaned that emotionally manipulating men through sexual practices is an easier/better way to get a reward. On the one hand, Cher's manipulation is treated as savvy by her peers, who also benefit (i.e. "less homework") from their teachers' "boink-fest"; on the other, it shows how she has been conditioned to see sex from her father's point of view instead of her own.

The New Blonde Protagonist: Cher Horowitz

As in the case of the pre-brides who came before her, the narrative emphasizes the value of Cher's beauty, virginity, and goodness in order to show how her romantic double, Josh, wants her by the end of the film. Cher updates the enduring trope of the comedic Hollywood "blonde" stereotype and presents a paradoxical female subjectivity that relies on contrary elements which restructure the virginal pre-bride to a much sexier presentation. In *Sixteen Candles*, Hughes took away Sam's pleasing nature central to the pre-bride formula, and instead emphasized her surliness and colloquial speech as an outcropping of her feminism. At the same time, however, he replaced her quest for self-discovery with an identity steeped in patriarchal valuation through marriage/social mobility. *Clueless* borrows another gift from Riot Grrrl aesthetics: Cher's right to dress however she wants without being punished for displaying her body without modesty. Her goodness is derived from cultivating values belonging to traditionally feminine roles, which redirects her goal from becoming an independent agent to a domestic dependent.

Since she is already at the pinnacle of the social and economic pyramid, the narrative sustains her position by keeping her pair-bond within the family.

Cher is a recalibration, then, of the “good girl” social control construct⁵⁹ presented as a stylish and newly empowered femininity claimed by young women who regard feminism as a fight that has already been fought and won.⁶⁰ *Clueless* demonstrates what Angela McRobbie posits as a pillar of third wave feminism’s sensibility that puts pressure on “individuals, not structures, [as] responsible for the situations in which women and girls find themselves” (qtd in Vered). Cher’s individualism is structured by her voiceover narration, which emphasizes her dedication to her own self-surveillance and offers reassurance about her “goodness” and good intentions. Cher articulates rigid sexual difference through a hyper-feminine aesthetic, which can be interpreted by critics as both empowering and regressive. The stark contradictions between action and interpretation create much of her comedic play in the film.

The makeover is Cher’s central skill, but it is important to look at what the practice ultimately accomplishes for herself and her subjects. As Elizabeth A. Ford

⁵⁹ Family Studies scholar Greer Litton Fox’s concept of the “nice/good girl” theorizes it is a social construct that acts as a form of social control. Fox offers three strategies that restrict freedom and exert control over women’s behavior through confinement, protection, and “normative restriction.” The last “connotes chaste, gentle, gracious, ingenuous, good, clean, kind, virtuous, and noncontroversial” behavior (805). The “good girl” is a standard and a goal (805).

⁶⁰ Cher also fits the group Holmlund describes as pop-culture “chick” postfeminists who represent a backlash or hostility “to the goals and gains of second wave feminism; others simply take these gains and goals for granted. Some like to party, dress up, and step out, taking breaks from work to date or shop” (116).

and Deborah C. Mitchell point out in *The Makeover in Movies*, the makeover is about exerting control, “especially in times of political, economic, or cultural confusion” (68). Transformation is universally appealing, and a teen’s position is inherently liminal. Although Ford and Mitchell argue that the act of the makeover empowers both the doer and the subject, some of the darker results, like Cher’s mother’s death occurring due to a “routine liposuction,” are more problematic. “Routine” implies that this cosmetic, potentially life-threatening surgery is repeated, standardized, and possibly expected in order to maintain impossible beauty standards that belong to the elite social class of women in Cher’s world. As a social practice, makeover skills help condition subjects to see themselves as objects. Instead of gaining agency, the transformations Cher introduces to Miss Geist and Tai reinscribe the same dangerous standards that killed her mother but are nevertheless presented as valuable work and an empowering “choice.”⁶¹

Because Cher updates and combines impossible beauty standards with a revived “good girl” emphasis, her focus on restricting her food intake while making disparaging remarks⁶² about her own body is a troubling. Since Cher’s body happens

⁶¹ Anoushka Benbow-Buitenhuis cites French structuralist Louis Althusser’s notion of “interpellation” in which “individuals are continually socialized to recognize themselves within the dichotomy of labor power relations as the objectified” (43). Cher’s makeovers demonstrate Benbow-Buitenhuis’ concept of the “feminine double-bind” structure of modern beauty culture that relies on repetition and saturation of anti-aging images aimed at women through multiple forms of advertising and media (43-44). The promise of transformation, as seen through capitalism, seems like it could be purchased and practiced.

⁶² Cher says: “I feel like such a heifer. I had two bowls of Special K, three pieces of turkey bacon, a handful of popcorn, five peanut butter M & M’s, and, like, three pieces of licorice.” Special K was a brand of cereal marketed specifically to women in the 1990s as a “diet” product designed for weight-loss. Her list sounds long, but the calorie count is not large (or healthy). The fact that she has counted

to belong to seventeen-year-old actress Alicia Silverstone, a young star who was already established as an ideal beauty through MTV,⁶³ the message that emerges is not the promotion of self-discovery through actions motivated by her subjectivity. Instead, the character and how she is scripted, acted, and played demonstrates the hollowness of objectification. If Cher is an elite representation of beauty who is unable to access her claim to it, how can her makeover positively transform “regular” girls like Tai? Cher’s addition to the pre-pride prototype corsets her without the physical apparatus.

Secondary Characters

Cher’s Father, Mel Horowitz (Dan Hedaya): \$500 an Hour

The first two minutes of the film feature the most significant forces shaping Cher’s life: her friends, her dedication to fashion, and her father, Mel Horowitz. He shares ten scenes with Cher. This is significantly more than in other films featuring female teen protagonists, and which reinforces Mel’s dominant place in her life. His gruff demeanor is not loving, but executive: he is always wearing a suit and tie in his own house, and Cher’s introduction of him captures her childlike position as she describes him: “Daddy’s a litigator. Those are the scariest kinds of lawyers.” She is proud of his authority and does not protest anything about his behavior, even when he is rude, socially inappropriate, or absent. For example, when Cher introduces him

the number of candy items also emphasizes her focus on body control. She also explains that cutting up food into smaller bites helps with weight loss.

⁶³ She starred in three Aerosmith videos as a rebellious “school girl” in Catholic plaid (more Riot Grrrl than “good” girl). It was because of these videos that Heckerling sought her to play Cher.

to her friend Tai, he does not say “hello”; instead, he barks, “Get out of my chair!” at the dinner table, where he ignores Tai completely. Mel is frequently filmed walking, and if the camera is not following behind him, he is seen walking forward while other people walk backward in front of him. Others, like their maid Lucy, run to get out of his way. The cumulative visual effect establishes his king-like dominance over his domain.

Mel’s regressive articulation of masculine power supports the image that successful fathers are wealthy, all-powerful and feared, and the subordinates in his life cater to all of his domestic needs. Unlike Sam’s married father, whose compromised dominance as a patriarch is demonstrated through his need to carpool because his wife works in *Sixteen Candles*, Mel does not have to negotiate his domestic space with a partner. *Clueless* emphasizes the reinstatement of a daughter’s most important role as caretaker as an example of her best kind of achievement. For example, when Cher complains to her dad that she doesn’t think she is “good enough” to be attractive to the smart, politically left-leaning Josh, he does not give her compliments based on her propensity for doing good work, her efforts to raise money for a charity or how her so-called “powers of persuasion” demonstrate a potential talent for practicing law like himself). Instead, he reinforces pre-bride aesthetics that support domestic dependence. He sees her as “the most beautiful girl in Beverly Hills,” an ephemeral quality he would not use as evidence to explain why Josh is valuable. Mel pleads his case by asking her two rhetorical questions both designed to demonstrate her “attractiveness”: “Who takes care of

everyone in this household?” and “Who makes sure that Daddy eats right?” The film contradicts him because Mel refuses to eat and drink what Cher offers him, and the household employs a staff that takes care of Mel and Cher’s needs. Mel finishes the argument by saying he hasn’t seen such “do-gooding” since her mother, who died while trying to continue looking young. Mel has since remarried several times, and though the reasons are not explained, the untold story indicates the disposable, replaceable value of women from Mel’s perspective. Cher is not seen as *helpless* but *helpful* when the complication of identity is reduced to a daughter’s role that exists only to uphold an economically successful patriarchal hegemony and prioritizes the path toward eventual marriage.

Cher’s Love Interest: Josh (Paul Rudd)

Josh’s mother was briefly married to Mel, making Cher’s relationship to Josh tangentially a related one, though not by blood. Mel, who barely spends time with his own daughter, declares emphatically that he only divorces “spouses, not kids.” The declaration reinforces Mel’s moral position as benevolent patriarch as opposed to disagreeable divorcee. It also gifts him with a son he can mentor. Josh has ambitions for law school and a neoliberal set of values that get translated, at first, by Cher as “maudlin and whiny.” When Josh tells Mel he wants to pursue “environmental law,” Mel responds by asking him if it is because he wants a miserable life. Josh has the most influence on Cher, outside of her father, and he is the only one to be critical of Cher’s manipulations of others to get what she wants. He doesn’t seem to have any qualms about pursuing his ex-step-sister, at least seven

years his junior, even though she is at least two years away from the age of consent. He acts as Mel's surrogate, for instance, when he covertly chaperones Cher's date with Christian, with Mel's approval. From the beginning, Cher declares that she will not date "high school guys," though there is no indication that she has dated guys well outside of her age range. Josh's character arc shows him progressing from an unhappy, liberal college student with aspirations to pursue environmental law to a cleaned-up, less grungy law student ready to explore corporate law and litigation. The narrative doesn't spend much time on the consummated romance, but the film ends with Cher catching the bouquet at a wedding and kissing Josh as the credits roll.

Cher's Gay Friend: Christian (Justin Walker)

Christian enters the narrative as an ethnographic outsider because he is a new student, and his performance of masculinity immediately make him stand apart from his peers—partially because he is new, but also because he is eventually revealed to be gay. The language of his well-tailored clothing and inventive vocabulary communicate sophistication in direct contrast to the baggy flannels of his contemporaries, and his confidence seems to match Cher's. In addition, his presence serves as evidence of Cher's mastery of liberal sophistication because his sexual orientation is not cause for moral outrage. Instead of feeling rejected, Christian restores confidence in her mastery of achieving perfect feminine beauty. His homosexuality is depoliticized or neutralized because he ultimately remains asexual. As Gill argues, "a knowingness and easy familiarity with the terminology of

sexual-political critique helps lend credibility to texts that might otherwise be regarded as straightforwardly homophobic, racist and anti-feminist” (233).

Cher’s Stoner Friends: Tai (Brittany Murphy) and Travis Birkenstock (Breckin Meyer)

The contrast between Tai and Cher orders the narrative’s moral hierarchy in favor of pre-bride obedience over independent self-discovery. Cher believes that by giving Tai a makeover she will improve her social stature and, specifically, teach her the “right” kind of femininity. In the script, the part of Tai was described as a “16-year-old schlub in long baggy pants and a shapeless flannel shirt” (Marcia Ross, Casting Director, *Clueless* DVD Commentary). Tai most represents the style of actual teens circa 1995. The “schlub” look translated into Tai’s having badly dyed burgundy hair and no makeup while wearing drab and oversized clothes. Cher calls her “adorably clueless.” However, there is a principal distinction between the two girls that no makeover can expunge in the pre-bride paradigm: Tai is not a virgin, nor is she subtle about her promiscuity. In *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, Tai might have represented a progressive, independent character, but in the *Clueless* context, her morality is permanently compromised. Cher’s virginity trumps Tai’s sexual experience. Tai can be “cleaned-up,” but she is still considered flawed in a narrative that adheres to pre-bride values for young women.

Tai and Travis stand in for progressive ideals, culturally connecting the grunge movement to a hybrid of socialism, hippy culture (e.g. Travis’ last name is “Birkenstock”), and deemphasized concern with gender difference. Heckerling specifically didn’t want to offer “class” distinction as the reason Cher would “look

down” on Travis, so instead she choose “the stoner” stereotype as a way in which Cher can stake a moral high ground. Addressing Travis’ social group as “loadies,” Cher says, “sometimes they come to class and say bonehead things, and we all laugh, of course, but no respectable girl actually dates them.” The “loadies” reflect a rejection of dominant cultural norms and are depicted in *Clueless* as mostly white kids in androgynous baggy clothes and dreadlocks.

Cher’s Black Friends: Dionne (Stacy Dash) and Murray (Donald Faison)

Cher says that she and Dionne both “were named after great singers of the past who now do infomercials.” This is a funny line, but it is also portentous; these real singers of the past pursued ambitious careers and succeeded at making money by singing until they aged. The obsession with beauty and self-monitoring as a source of power crops up repeatedly in this text, though it is presented as “choice.”

Dionne is unique because she does not entirely play a teen black female stereotype. She lives in Beverly Hills and does not seem to suffer any problems derived from strained economic or family hardships. Dionne’s inclusion as Cher’s best friend helps the text signify itself as a neoliberal construction that attends to feminism and minority representation along with the fantasy of unquestioned equality, but an analysis of Dionne shows how the narrative undercuts this ideological stance. Through voiceover, the audience is invited to think about the similarities between Cher and Dionne in the beginning of the film. These are based on their shared wealth and beauty. About Dionne, Cher narrates, “She’s my friend because we both know what it is like to have people be jealous of us,” as the

audience watches Dionne come out the front door from a castle-sized house. Like Cher, Dionne is thin and beautiful; and even though her brown skin, braided hair, green eyes, and prominent nose ring make her look markedly different from Cher, her uniqueness is undercut by her wearing a black and white plaid outfit identical to Cher's (pictured in Figure 11).

Further, while Dionne projects a feminist aesthetic focused on demanding respect when she speaks, many of her actions undercut this representation, which suggests that feminism is just a performance. Her boyfriend, Murray, addresses her as "woman" more than once. She sternly rebuffs this, and eventually she demonstrates that she has trained him to call her "Miss Dionne." From another lens, her emphatic outbursts dovetail into an "angry black woman" stereotype. When she discovers Murray shaving his head at a party, for example, she screams and whines and cries, questioning how their "pictures" are going to look to their grandchildren, and she threatens to call his mother. She also falls apart during her driving lesson. She relinquishes control to Murray and, significantly, also decides to have sex with him after he saves her. Cher's voiceover indicates that the arguing might all be a performance because she sees them being very sweet to each other when they think no one is watching. Dionne is not a virgin, and she only acts like a feminist in front of other people. Privately, she is already planning her wedding: she is a pre-bride fifteen- year-old. Cher also suspects that Dionne and Murray have also watched "that

Ike and Tina Turner movie too many times.”⁶⁴ This is a problematic model for the couple to emulate: will Murray be Ike Turner?

Cher’s Antagonists: Amber (Alisa Donovan) and Elton (Jeremy Sisto)

Amber is an antagonist who serves as an example of what Cher could be like without her optimism or pre-bride “goodness.” Instead of being charming, Amber is saccharine; her quips come off as condescending instead of witty; her outfits look clownish instead of stylish, though they are equally expensive and as constructed as Cher’s are. Amber is shamed at the “Val” party for wearing a dress that Cher had already worn once. Because Amber is positioned in a parody, but is not viewed sympathetically by the narrative, she takes on the exaggerated elements of the typical critique of the privileged teen girl. She is selfish, sarcastic, whiny, mean, and desperate for attention. She thus provides a grotesque contrast that helps boost Cher’s goodness, especially since she ends up with Elton by the end of the film.

Elton is class conscious. Like Cher, he does not dress like his peers. He wears tailored clothes and expensive shoes. Heckerling said that Elton was supposed to be the “male version of Cher” (*Clueless* DVD Commentary), but the comparison doesn’t quite work. Elton is not really liked by his peers, and he does little work to win affection from them or his teachers. He is so unremarkable, in fact, that Cher is unable to see him as a potential date. She chooses him as the match for her protégé,

⁶⁴ *What’s Love Got to Do with It?* (1993) is a film biopic about singer Tina Turner and how she overcame a violent and abusive relationship with her spouse Ike Turner. Although Tina Turner eventually wins her personal and professional freedom from Ike, she had to endure many years of abuse in her marriage.

Tai, instead. She is insulted when Elton rejects Tai based solely on class (e.g., Elton is incredulous when Cher tells him she was trying to set him up with Tai: “Do you *know* who my father is?”), but Cher is also unable to recognize her own class bias toward Tai until Tai shows a romantic interest in Josh. Though Elton is not given credit for it, he admits that he kept the picture of Tai in his locker because it was the artistic eye of *Cher* that he valued. In a different story, that detail would be something an independent heroine would notice and accept as a compliment. Instead, Elton gropes Cher twice and then abandons her in a parking lot when she rejects him. He is last seen vigorously making out with Amber on the dance floor.

Cher’s Liberal Teachers: Ms. Stoeger (Julie Brown), Miss Geist (Twink Caplan), and Mr. Hall (Shawn Wallace)

As briefly discussed earlier, Cher manipulates her teachers by using coded language used to uphold liberal ideology without seriously engaging in it. In order to raise her grade in gym, Cher makes an emotional appeal to Ms. Stoeger, her lesbian gym teacher, that taps into the stereotype that feminists hate men. Cher’s voiceover indicates how she told Ms. Stoeger a lie that “an *evil* male [sic] had broken [her] heart” over background dialogue in which the audience hears Cher telling Ms. Stoeger: “I’m miserable; I can’t eat, I can’t sleep” through fake tears. Ms. Stoeger interjects “comforting” declaratives to her about men like “They’re horrible!” and “and you see, they are *all* like this!” Additionally, Cher placates Miss Geist, her English teacher, by telling her that she would “start a letter-writing campaign to [her] congressman about violations of The Clean Air Act.” There is no indication that Cher had to fulfill this promise, nor that she ever considered honoring it. The

narrative further undercuts Miss Geist's cause because she is portrayed as a weak, easily manipulated character who tries to enlist students into liberal campaigns in her English classes (saving the environment, charity drives). Cher, in turn, is positively reinforced as a good character because she tricks her liberal teacher, not because she starts writing letters for cleaner air. Her values support the conservative backlash against environmental protection laws common during this time in California.

Together, Miss Geist and Mr. Hall are used to parody the valuation of the intellectual class. Because Cher is an agent used to unveil weaknesses in liberal ideology, such as loneliness, Miss Geist is shown as susceptible to being wooed by through two non-consecutive lines from Shakespeare's most famous sonnet. While Mr. Hall shows a little more authority when he refuses to raise Cher's speech grade because her work is "un-researched, unstructured, and unconvincing," he is rendered powerless when Cher uses "the crimson-wave" to intimidate him about giving her a tardy. Before the equal rights era, speaking openly about menstruation would have been a social taboo. Nonetheless, *Clueless* asserts its understanding of feminist progress in ways that are ancillary.

Cinematic Style of *Clueless*: The Blonde Light

Cher's well-lit, brightly colored, boldly stylized world makes an exaggerated statement against the pervasive grunge style undercurrent of youth culture popular during the mid-1990s. Heckerling asked her director of photography, Bill Pope, to make everything look "happy," and told her production designer, Steve Jordan, that

she wanted to create a “sense of fake Europe” that was pre-war—not ancient or falling apart—but something like “Disneyland Europe” (Chaney 90 & 95). Part of the film’s comedy derives from exaggeration and contradiction, especially when depicting the underdeveloped culture of the new, wealthy American class that idolizes what Bourdieu might call “a copy of a copy” of European culture. Pope called her approach to style “Hawksian,”⁶⁵ and he understood that “the milieu of Cher is as important as Cher. She’s nobody without her place” (Chaney 91). Being associated with property is an important component of the pre-bride, and her role in occupying this space is contingent upon her following through with the rest of the paradigm. *Clueless* sells an appealing, modern look for an old role for young women, and comedy helps distract from some of the film’s less modern ideas about independence. Cher’s place is always sunny and dazzling, inside or outside. It also presents a subtext that questions why she would ever want a separate identity than the one that defines her inside her father’s opulent realm.

***Clueless* Mise-en-Scene: Optimistic, Pink, and Peachy-Keen**

The look of the film expresses Cher’s optimism: she is a young woman who possesses the enviable quality of total confidence in her ability to overcome any obstacle. The sets and props of Cher’s world underscore her position of privilege, her access to exclusive resources, and also showcase exaggerated feminine ideals. Cher’s bedroom, like Sam’s in *Sixteen Candles*, is dominated by pink and white. Steve

⁶⁵ Chaney notes that Pope is referring to the work of director Howard Hawks, whose films include *Bringing up Baby* (1938), *His Girl Friday* (1940), and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) (90-91).

Jordan, the production designer, said the inspiration for her room came from a “Victoria’s Secret box” (Chaney 129). Though her room is intended to represent an ideal fantasy, Victoria’s Secret as an inspiration reflects the problems it also encodes: commercializing sexualized images of women and normalizing improbable body standards (Strahan et al. 288).⁶⁶ Cher, as a representation, does both of those things, too.

To create a set reinforcing class privilege and impossible beauty standards, many young women at Cher’s school display evidence of having had plastic surgery, becoming part of the landscape of critical self-monitoring. The camera frequently pans over images of girls with bandages over their noses trying to hide their discomfort and pain—a reminder of Cher’s mother’s death (via liposuction) as well as the troubling idea that “normal” bodies are dysmorphic according to Cher’s beauty standards. The young women are not directly part of the story but are seen sitting in class, walking through the hallways, and on campus. In this sense, they are the part of the set that helps provide a contrast to Cher’s sense of confidence in her personal physical prowess. She will not have to undergo surgery. Yet.

Many of the sets emphasize Cher’s identity as a dependent and offer a positive argument for staying dependent. The enormous chandelier in her home sparkles with hundreds of tear-drop crystals; the white marble floors shine when

⁶⁶ Victoria’s Secret started as a burlesque lingerie store in California in the early 1980s and grew into chain retail for bras and underwear by the 1990s. The store is also renowned for their (sexy) mail-order catalogues and launching careers of the models.

she walks across them, and every single day is sunny, even when she is at school. Her white Jeep is a mirage of independence because no one teaches her to drive. She lives in a house where a maid performs mundane domestic chores, and the nagging mother has been reduced to a prop—a portrait of a mother in a white frame who silently approves of everything she does. The details of her accouterments make a strong argument for her capitulation into being as an object among them.

In contrast to Cher's palatial home, we see her attend what she calls a "Val Party," a place she deigns to attend because of her matchmaking scheme for Tai but one she associates with "cops and loadies." Still, she wears her designer dress to the suburban house party where teens consume alcohol, dance, engage in sexual play, and smoke pot. The interior of the home is a perfect contrast to Cher's home: cluttered, dark, and dominated by red and black. While the venue gives her a reason to be admired for her fashion choices, something she seems to do for herself alone (not to impress a particular young man), she engages in behavior she normally condemns (she smokes pot), and unwillingly kisses Elton in a party game called "Suck and Blow." Between the Val Party and her house, in Elton's car, she is forced to fend off his sexual advances. When she doesn't comply, he leaves her at a liquor store where she is quickly robbed at gunpoint. Her ex-step-brother, a stand-in for her father, comes to her rescue in his car. This series of events occurring in spaces outside her zip code sell the idea that independence makes her vulnerable, while it makes dependence look brighter, more secure, and happier.

Finally, the movie ends not at prom but at a wedding. Like Sam in *Sixteen Candles*, Cher also says dialogue that degrades the idea of getting married so young, but her actions on screen, and those of her peers, clearly embrace the setting. The women fight aggressively for the thrown bouquet, which Josh has asked Cher to win, and since she catches it, her path forward with Josh kissing her at the end completes her transformation to traditional pre-bride.

Burlesque Props and Irrelevant Hardware

Many of Cher's props reinforce her position as a dependent and as an object. Her accessories frequently mix messages between being childlike and sensual: she carries pink fuzzy pens, feather boas, furry handbags, and notebooks wrapped in lace. She owns elite technological equipment, like a personal computer, a cell phone, and a Jeep "to practice driving," but because she lacks sophistication, they end up performing like accessories for a passive object instead of tools for an active subject. She uses her computer to select her outfits, but she later reveals that she "only trusts Polaroid pictures" to tell her "the truth" about how her clothing looks, an activity that requires friends as opposed to expensive software. Her cellular phone, a potential tool for independence, is also rendered irrelevant during crucial moments. When she is robbed, she still has to make a collect call from a payphone. She uses her phone to call Dionne between classes, but they then meet each other in the hallway within seconds. Most tellingly, her powerful and important father buys her a car, but he does not make time to help her practice driving, which surreptitiously communicates the low value of her independence. Tai's critique of

Cher as a “virgin who can’t drive” exposes her fraudulent positioning as an independent agent: she cannot be an authority on sexy makeovers without any actual sexual experience and failing a driving test underscores her position as a dependent.

Costumes, Makeup, & Hair: The *Clueless* Raison d’Etre

More than any other aspect of mise-en-scene, Cher’s confidence in fashion defines her identity, but she sends a mixed message. Her look fits what Ann Powers describes as the “accidental sex appeal” of the Girl Power image, “yet the core attraction of these little outfits--and the young bodies in them--is that they hide sex in plain sight” (78). The effect of “hiding” can be interpreted as burlesque, which is especially problematic when executed by minors, and even more so when it is done by Cher, a virgin who believes she is an authority on makeovers which create looks that motivate attraction. Instead, Cher’s clothes, like her character, sew contradictions together in an attempt to reframe traditional femininity as modern empowerment.

Like Sam in *Sixteen Candles*, Cher wears dresses and skirts almost exclusively, but they do not promote modesty like Sam’s long hems and many layers did. Cher’s dresses and skirts are all very short, and most of her formfitting outfits showcase her bare skin. Cher also wears tulle, the historic fabric of wedding veils and gowns, but just one see-through layer at a time, so her skin or undergarments are quite visible underneath. On the one hand, the sheer layer might be construed as modest, as the thin shirts do cover her bare skin; but on the other, the effect also appears

burlesque—a veiled distraction from rather sexually mature displays of her body. In Figure 9, the frame capture of Cher wearing a black tulle shirt over a white tank top shows how these two layers fail to cover her bra, which is easily seen through both tops. The tulle shirt she wears over her outfit for driving is actually longer than her short skirt. Sam's bridesmaid's dress in *Sixteen Candles* is made up of enough layers of tulle so that it is opaque all the way down to the floor. Cher's bridesmaid's dress seen in Figure 10 looks traditional from the waist up because it is pink and satin, but because the fabric stops at her mid-thigh, some might argue that this modern editing contradicts progression. What she does in her modern dress in Figure 10, however, ultimately mirrors the last shot in *Sixteen Candles* in Figure 5 from Chapter 1: the pre-bride kisses the (older) romantic partner in her pink bridesmaid's dress just before the credits roll.

Cher and her friends are often draped in plaid fabrics, a pattern that signifies old and new trends simultaneously. Not only does plaid connote the bulky, unisex grunge shirts worn by teens everywhere during the 1990s, but the old pattern is also associated with grade-school uniforms in religious schools. Almost every scene in *Clueless* features one of the characters wearing some sort of modified plaid. Cher's yellow Gautier outfit harnesses plaid in a way that signifies youth culture but breaks conventions of the trend by being expertly tailored (not grungy) and pleated like a Catholic school uniform but less modest. What stands out about her in Figure 11 is how sexualized her body is in the outfit. Her midriff is showing, even though she wears several layers. Her socks go over her knees, but the edge of her skirt stops at

mid-thigh. The gap of skin shows her legs between the bottom edge of her skirt and socks, like the gap between her top and the top of her skirt, emphasize the objectification of the reproductive area of her body. Her ankles and her wrists are covered, but the area of her mid-section operates like peek-a-boo burlesque titillation.

Cher, who spends most of her time shopping for and thinking about outfit construction, doesn't seem to understand the response her outfits evoke more than just "looks." For example, the aforementioned Gautier outfit she wears to school demonstrates its power of sexual magnetism. A young man literally throws himself onto her as she's walking into school, and she demonstrates a kind of physical strength usually reserved for superheroes—shoving him away with such force he falls to the ground. She retorts "As if!" out loud, asserting her acknowledgement of her irresistible appeal as well as her wholehearted rejection of any overt sexual response. Hers is a kind of pretend empowerment. Young women identify with her outrage over boundary violations, and the film uses feminist ideology to argue that she has the right to dress in a sexually explicit manner without having to respond politely. But her indignant response uncovers the stereotypes that undergird her position: young men possess no self-control in sexuality, and young women who say "no" must forcefully possess enough physical strength to fend off all attacks. The film also surreptitiously argues that she can wear clothes that "look like underwear!" as her dad says because she is so well watched over by men to insure that she will not be violated. Her father threatens Christian by telling him that he

has “a .45 and a shovel” before they leave on a date, and Josh volunteers to secretly “watch” her on her date for her dad. Even though Cher appears bold and strong in the light of day at school, at night, such advances are harder to fend off, and she is only safe again when Josh saves her.

Cher and her friends translate the “cynical realism” of grunge conservatively in *Clueless* as “whiny” or socially conscious “complaint rock” with a “misguided sense of fashion.” Making over Tai is Cher’s attempt to appropriate the look of Riot Grrrls without their politics or sense of irony. The makeover is a montage, overlaid by Jill Soule’s “Supermodel” song, in which we see Tai trying to stop them from cutting her shirt to expose her midriff. Once Tai acquiesces, she learns the Girl Power language of the body for display and garners plenty of attention from the opposite sex and approval from other girls. She also seems to lose the more charming parts of her personality—the openness, the enthusiasm, and the motivation to share her talents as an artist. This denial illustrates what Gayle Wald identifies as the “proper gendering of economically privileged First World women,” which reads “cluelessness” as capitulated innocence (ignorance) that “paradoxically denies them status as political and intellectual agents” in their privileged identities (105).

Editing the Concrete and the Abstract

The opening credits reflect the film's reimagining of reality from Cher's perspective through a few cuts and sound effects done through editing. The first take shows the standard *Paramount* logo, the name of the company in ivory script arching over a beige mountain in front of a muted sunset, for a full eighteen seconds. The lyric "Looking out a dirty old window," sung in a raspy, punk female voice without vibrato, begins just three seconds before the cut. The opening gloomy effect sets up the contrast of expectations for the narrative that follows the first cut, which sharply changes the tone of music and color. Where seconds before stood the drab yet detailed painting of a mountain, there is now only one large, bubble-gum pink oval surrounded by an opaque screen of electric blue. "*Paramount Pictures*" is named again, but this time, the letters are blocky and accompanied by cartoon sound effects that indicate the silly movements of being "dropped" or "sliding" or "swinging" into place. Realism is cheerfully discarded for garish colors that do not exist in the natural world.

Contrasts are essential to comedy, and many of the sleight-of-hand contradictions of Cher's character are communicated through the film's editing. Since film can only show exterior states, and mise-en-scene can only suggest interior points of view, Susan Ferriss posits that the voiceover technique employed by Heckerling establishes Cher's undisputed subjectivity in the film (437). On the one hand, the voiceover mirrors the self-referential narcissism expected from teens who assume people want to watch them narrate their lives, but, on the other, Cher's

narration also serves to draw attention away from the action or performance in multiple scenes and into her thoughts, which are, more often than not, a naïve interpretation of the events as they unfold. This enhances the comedy elements and reinforces her role as an innocent as opposed to an agentive manipulator. For example, it absolves her from the responsibility of wearing clothes designed to attract attention, like the yellow Gaultier outfit in Figure 11, which (ostensibly) causes a male classmate to attempt groping her as she is walking into school. Through voiceover editing, Cher explains how disgusting and unworthy high school “boys” are to date, even though much of the movie shows the painstaking care and attention she dedicates to perfecting how she is represented through clothing. None of her skirts falls below her mid-thigh, and the exquisite tailoring maximizes her body contours. When she shoves the young man away, shouting “As if!” the effect is funny, but a question emerges, too: Why does she feel she needs to dress in a sexually explicit manner if she is not seeking sexual attention? Perhaps she is merely demonstrating the new pre-bride paradigm that says that power is derived from conforming to a mature, sexy representation of the self while remaining militantly virginal. As Doherty points out, “the voiceover illustrates the disjunction between Cher's perceptions and reality, and her confidence in her own misguided views for it emphasizes her outspokenness” (qtd. in Ferriss 437). The post-feminist Cher is given a platform for her voice, even if what she says undercuts her ability to be taken seriously.

The opening montage after the credits nods to Heckerling's *Fast Times* opening, but there are stark differences that suggest a regressive step back for independent, young women since 1982. In just thirty-five seconds of screen-time, there are sixteen cuts featuring Cher and her friends shopping on Rodeo Drive, riding in a jeep, drinking milkshakes, wearing bikinis at a pool, and shopping at the mall. Although most of the film adheres to basic conventions of Hollywood continuity editing with Cher featured in the center of each shot, the montage is markedly different. Just like the swap of the realistic Paramount mountain for cartoon shapes during the opening credits, the montage sets up a modern tone that is contrary to the more conventional editing in the rest of the film. The constant cuts, sometimes less than a second of screen time, are meant to express the life of the extemporaneous teen, one free from adult influence. The frenetic pace, the canted camera angles, and the shaky handheld photography read like a 1990s music video on MTV, promoting "The Kids of America," an upbeat remake of a song that still claims, however, that "life is cruel/life is never kind," though the blitz of images also helps distract from lyrics like that. Unlike the rest of the film, Cher is not at the center of each shot, and the camera frames sexually implicit, disconnected close-up images like the girls' naked thighs at the edge of their mini-skirts when they are seated, a young man swallowing a cherry, and Cher licking whipped cream off her fingers. These are not the images of young virgins who seem to adhere to chastity and modesty, and this point—looking sexy—seems to be where the difficulties arise between conservatives and second wave feminists alike. Cher dresses in a sexually

explicit manner, and her father is not allowed to say she can't, ostensibly, because of feminism, but instead of understanding the power she possesses by dressing for sexual attention, she remains totally indifferent to it. Where feminists see this undressing as scopophilia or exploitation, conservatives combat that critique with the argument that women displaying their bodies in a way that used to be forbidden is now "empowerment," and "covering up" colludes with old mores of modesty. Cher's first narration makes fun of the montage, predicting that anyone watching might wonder if they were watching a "Noxzema commercial." Noxzema is a skin cleanser marketed to teens, and skin is the most dominant feature in the montage itself. From then on, Cher takes the center of the frame, and between smoldering looks at herself in the mirror, she is featured in just her camisole and underwear from multiple angles—even on her own computer screen—in less than one and a half minutes of screen time. Once the film stops the frenetic cuts, trading in the shaky camera for grounded cinematography, the rest of the film follows the Classical Hollywood preference of unobtrusive storytelling as it resets the definition for a classical "good" girl as well.

Music: Just a Girl?

The soundtrack for *Clueless* combines an eclectic group of genres not usually featured together, like rap, punk, surfer, rock, grunge, and rhythm & blues. "Kids in America" is the first non-diegetic song featured in the film, one that Heckerling had considered using to open *Fast Times* in 1982. Instead, she used an updated version by The Muffs (Chaney 127). There is a stark difference between opening montages

in Heckerling's two films, and Kim Wilde's original, stripped down version of the song does not match Cher and her friends shopping on Rodeo Drive. The difference between the original and remade versions of the song confirms the instinct Heckerling must have had when she looked at her opening "Noxzema commercial" with Wilde's version: it was much too grungy, unrefined, and punk to fit into Cher's world. The Muffs' version makes the refrain sound more like an exclamation of pride—"We're the kids in America!"

Karyn Ractman brought No Doubt's "I'm Just a Girl" to Heckerling toward the end of production, and Heckerling lamented not being able to use it more prominently (Chaney 223). Lead singer Gwen Stefani captures the third wave spirit, certainly, and the joke of the title highlights the contradictions and struggle implicit in the political position of being regarded as "just a girl" as well. Heckerling uses the song within the first few minutes of the film, as Cher picks up Dionne for school. Stefani's girlish chorus, when set in *Clueless*, does not conjure the muscular, liberated image of the artist making fun of the notion that a multidimensional person is "just" a girl; instead, the film reverts the meaning back to the idea that girls are helpless dependents. The song plays just before Cher remarks that she "totally paused" at a stop sign she drives through with a smirk. Stefani's anger, that she's "had it up to here" with being reduced to "just a girl," is contradicted by Cher who reinforces that, perhaps, girls like her are not only not oppressed or angry but also unable to operate machines of liberation, like a car. This assumption, that "girls" can't handle the challenge of driving, is reinforced with Dionne's highway debacle

later in the film. When Cher drives with Josh on the wrong side of the road, she argues that she doesn't need to learn to park because "everywhere has valet." Cher's demonstration of being "just a girl" thus makes the argument for an infantilized nature instead of an independent one.

The use of the American National Anthem during Cher's poorly informed but excellently performed debate speech about how the U.S. should provide open borders to fleeing refugees is a subtle but supportive nod to a growing anti-intellectual conservative backlash against evidence-based facts. Cher was not scripted to pronounce "Haitians" as "Hay-tee-ans," but when Silverstone made the mistake, Heckerling blocked anyone from telling her it was wrong. She said, "There's a cockiness to Cher when she's just going down the wrong track" (Chaney 136). On the one hand, the film applauds the moral "goodness" of Cher's encouraging the opening of American borders to asylum seekers fleeing conflict; on the other, Cher's patronizing treatment of her maid, Lucy—who might have been an asylum seeker from El Salvador—reveals much more about the ideology behind Cher's world. The National Anthem, symbolic of the kind of automatic, unquestioned patriotism conservatives demand from citizens, effectively shuts down debate about her integrity and, more importantly, criticisms of the argument itself. David Kitay, the composer for the music in that scene, describes the effect as "very American;...that everything is just good—her world is good" (Chaney 137). The cockiness combined with the constructed "good world" based in fantasy instead of reason is an accurate way to describe the pretty, thin, eternally young pre-bride who is not encouraged to

cultivate critical thinking or self-reliance when finding her authentic self but, instead, how to effectively manipulate others into maintaining her resources. Besides lying and cheating to get out of working for her results, Cher uses sex appeal, social class privilege, and toxic self-surveillance to maintain an idealized femininity.

Like *Sixteen Candles*, the narrative and style prioritize comedy in *Clueless*, sometimes relying on exaggeration and contradiction to evoke emotion and tone. In this sense, some of the social gaffes can be excused as being in the service of the comedic drive, and while this may be true, the reinscription of traditional femininity in Cher should still not be overlooked. Cher begins with more agency than she has at the end, destined to marry a lawyer like her father and, perhaps, headed toward a life that equates her value with maintaining impossible beauty standards. *Titanic's* narrative arc reverses this transformation.

Section II: *Titanic* is not a *Teen* Film (but...)

Fast Times at Ridgemont High, *Sixteen Candles*, and *Clueless* all qualify as moderate-level, studio production comedies, regardless of their social critiques and character trajectories. *Titanic* is markedly different. It is special from an industrial and historical perspective because of its unprecedented costs and financial success, but it is culturally significant because it achieved its success with a teenaged independent heroine driving the narrative. Teenaged girls helped make it a historic

success, though they are far from the only ones who flocked to see it.⁶⁷ *Titanic* changed the way the film industry regarded female teen protagonists in studio productions after 1997 and broadened the possibility for bigger films featuring young female heroines in non-pre-bridal roles in the new millennium.

In some ways, *Titanic* operates as a kind of pop-culture palimpsest—a rewritten version of history that is not trying to hide its alteration. Several hundred works have been created about the doomed, maiden voyage of the R.M.S. *Titanic* from Europe to America in 1912, including books, songs, poetry and films using a mixture of both fictional and non-fictional accounts of the tragedy.⁶⁸ Many cultural critics argue that the American Dream continues to buoy the resilience of the story itself, keeping it relevant even 105 years later. While the film concerns itself with re-enacting the destruction of the ship, the narrative is dedicated to the authenticity of its social themes that are anachronistic in light of its historical context, including representations of a self-determining heroine.

⁶⁷ *Newsweek's* film critic David Ansen wrote that "45 percent of all the women under 25 who have seen the movie have seen it twice. And 76 percent of all people who have seen the movie at least twice plan to see it again. What particularly surprised the studios is that 37 percent of the audience is older than 25--a larger percentage of adults than was expected" (Ansen).

⁶⁸ "In his *Titanic* bibliography, D. Brian Anderson lists nineteen fictional films as well as fifty-two documentaries and TV shows on the Titanic disaster, made from 1912 up to 2005" (Koldau 16).

Production History and Plot: *Titanic*

Plot

The R.M.S. *Titanic* tragedy of 1912 is so famous in American culture that its name alone is still used in the common vernacular as a metonym for an enormous disaster. The luxury ocean liner was a technological marvel built for speed and safety while carrying some of the world's most (and least) prosperous people on its premiere voyage from Europe to America. When it crashed into an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean on April 14, 1912, it took a little over three hours to sink into the ocean. There was a massive loss of life because the ship lacked enough emergency lifeboats to carry all of its passengers. The 1997 film *Titanic* consists of two narrative periods that bridge the flashback past (1912) and the frame present (1995 or 1996 in the film) and conflate historical facts/artifacts of the disaster with a fictional, romantic narrative.

The larger frame begins and ends at the *Titanic* wreckage itself, starting with Brock Lovett (Bill Paxton), a modern treasure hunter, and working backward toward 1912, through a sub-frame narrated by 100-year-old Rose Dawson Calvert (Gloria Stuart). The larger frame develops the story of Lovett and his research team's expedition to find a historic diamond, dubbed "Le Cœur de la Mer" ("The Heart of the Ocean"), that supposedly went down with the ship in 1912. Lovett's team finds a (fictional) safe from the wreckage that houses a hand-drawn nude of the film's seventeen-year-old Rose DeWitt Bukater (Kate Winslet) wearing nothing but the diamond necklace, which they share with the media. Lovett then receives a

call from the 100-year-old Rose Dawson Calvert, who claims to be the woman in the picture, and he flies her to his expedition's base.

100-year-old Rose narrates the flashback of the story, but her voiceover only intermittently describes the actions played out by the young version of herself. It is young Rose who is the focus of my character study. Young Rose's story begins as she boards the *Titanic* in Southampton, England, with her two primary antagonists, American steel heir and fiancé Cal Hockley (Billy Zane) and her mother Ruth DeWitt Bukater (Frances Fisher), along with Hockley's manservant Detective Spicer Lovejoy (David Warner). They are first-class passengers on their way to America. Over the course of the story, 100-year-old Rose narrates her depression about her arranged marriage to Hockley, her rejection of her social position in her family, and her meeting with the bohemian third-class passenger Jack Dawson (Leonardo DiCaprio), a young artist from Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin,⁶⁹ as she is contemplating suicide. Jack convinces her not to jump overboard. Over the course of the 194-minute film, Rose falls in love with and initiates an erotic experience with Jack, breaks her engagement to Hockley, and decides to leave her family just before the ship hits the iceberg. Hockley tries to frame Jack as a criminal who steals the diamond necklace, and Rose has to rescue Jack from being drowned below deck before the ship goes down for good. Many characters, both heroic and villainous, die, including Hockley's manservant, Jack's closest friend Fabrizio (Danny Nucci), the ship's Irish designer

⁶⁹ "Chippewa Falls" is also where the iconic, tie-wearing 1970s folksy/feminist Annie Hall (Diane Keaton) is from in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977).

Thomas Andrews (Victor Garber), the ship's Captain Edward Bernard Smith (Bernard Hill), as well as Jack himself. Before Jack dies, he makes Rose promise to survive and to live a fulfilling life, even without him. Bruce Ismay (Jonathon Hyde), Hockley, Ruth, Molly Brown (Kathy Bates), and Rose all survive, but Rose's choice to live an independent life means disguising herself from her family and Hockley as Rose "Dawson" when the survivors arrive in New York aboard the rescue-ship *Carpathia*. At the very end, the film shows that old Rose kept the diamond as a secret. She throws it into the ocean just before she "perishes" from "natural causes" aboard the 1997 vessel. The frame narrative ends with Lovett's gaining nothing but a story, and then shifts to a kind of dream sequence in which old Rose is replaced with young Rose. She has returned to a fully restored Titanic, and is welcomed by a standing ovation from all the other passengers as they were in 1912. Finally, the film closes after seventeen-year-old Rose is greeted by Jack with a kiss by the clock at the top of the ship's grand staircase.

A *Titanic* Production in Every Sense

Titanic's Canadian director, writer, producer, and editor James Cameron is known for featuring strong adult female characters in big budget action films. Rose fits into the succession of physically and mentally strong female protagonists overcoming catastrophes that he has created throughout his career, including Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) in *Terminator* (1984), Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in *Aliens* (1986), Helen Tasker (Jamie Lee Curtis) in *True Lies* (1994), and Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) in *Avatar* (2009), among others. Though Rose is the only teen among them,

all of these characters are put through enormous physical trials. They're forced to temper their emotions while they are in peril, something usually demonstrated only by male action heroes. Cameron writes and directs most of his films and is credited with producing the first and second highest grossing films of all time.⁷⁰ A self-professed "tech-nerd" who has long been obsessed with the ocean, many of his films concern unexplored depths in settings that investigate unknown landscapes like the deep sea and outer space. His earlier works favor horror and suspense, two emotions he successfully evokes in *Titanic* without having to rely on them to drive the narrative.⁷¹ Though his scripts are rife with clichés and catch-phrases,⁷² he has an astute sensibility for broad appeal through many of the choices cinema offers a storyteller besides dialogue, and his critique of class rigidity by idealizing the American Dream myth through the sub-frame of Rose and Jack's story proved to be successful with international and domestic audiences alike.

In 1995 Cameron shot footage of the real ship's wreckage at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean and initially convinced Twentieth Century Fox to invest in his "historical" tie-in for a film he pitched as "*Romeo and Juliet* on the *Titanic*" (Realf). *Titanic* is technically a co-production, released by Fox and Paramount Pictures. They

⁷⁰ *Titanic* held this spot for twelve years without adjustment at \$1.8 billion (international gross), and *Avatar* (2009) now stands as the highest at \$2 billion (international gross). Stats are from *TheNumbers.com*.

⁷¹ As a director, Cameron's resume started with *Piranha Part Two: The Spawning* (1981). The next film he wrote and directed was *The Terminator* (1984). From there he wrote and directed *Aliens* (1986) and *The Abyss* (1989) before continuing the *Terminator* franchise that includes sequels, shorts, and videogame narratives well into the 2000s.

⁷² Notably, the record-breaking number of Oscar nominations did not include "Best Screenplay" among them.

each invested \$60 million in the project, though they both added to this sum as the budget escalated in exchange for various rights (like exclusive domestic distribution for Paramount). In the end, both companies recouped their investments and made a significant profit (Allen 60). Cameron experienced considerable difficulty in building a model replica of the ship 775 feet high (90% scale), and viewers are treated to a kind of immersion into 1912 that was impossible to achieve in prior films about the disaster.⁷³ Cameron built the ship and also filmed its destruction. The actors faced months of difficult shooting in cold water,⁷⁴ but after the final product was edited and finished, even the most discriminating critics marveled at the spectacle the film created, especially Cameron's attention to set detail and special effects. Fans pointed out that the very length of the film—194 minutes—is the exact amount of time it took the *Titanic* to sink after it hit the iceberg. After numerous delays and challenges, including twelve dives to get footage from the real wreck, and exorbitant costs of dressing hundreds of elaborately costumed extras and lavish sets, *Titanic* premiered on December 19, 1997, with a PG-13 rating from the MPAA.

The enormous production is an important part of the story of the film, and the highly publicized woes of its staggering budget were most likely known by audiences who flocked to see it in late 1997 as well. *Titanic* broke records: "it sold

⁷³ This includes the moderately successful American production *Titanic* (1953) and the British *A Night to Remember* (1958), which was one of the most expensive films produced by the Rank Organisation (Chapman 180). There is also dispute as to whether it ever made a profit (Chapman 184).

⁷⁴ A seventeen-million-gallon tank of water was constructed (for \$57 million) at a studio complex in Santa Rosarito, Mexico, the largest tank ever constructed for a film (Boles).

more tickets in its first year than any other in history” (Lubin 7). It was the most expensive movie made in the 20th Century with a budget of around \$200 million, and it generated the most as well—\$1.8 billion in ticket sales internationally. It had the longest box-office run at number one for fifteen consecutive weeks from December of 1997 through April of 1998, and it undercut some of its critics by winning eleven Oscars, including “Best Picture.” None of the awards went to the actors, but Cameron gained four personally.

Because of its historic success, the film has been analyzed across many disciplines, and its enduring popularity extends far beyond the film industry itself.⁷⁵ Since this dissertation is concerned with tracking evolving representations of female teen protagonists in popular films, Rose fulfills many of the criteria I’ve outlined as an emergent independent heroine, even if she fails to be consistently recognized as a feminist hero, an exalted literary figure, or even a representative of class mobility. Instead, I think Cameron reshaped an old story with the help of a female teen protagonist driven by a need for liberation. He said he based Rose’s character on Dadaist artist Beatrice Wood, a muse for French artists Marcel DuChamp, Henri-

⁷⁵ The 1912 disaster was an immediate focal point in popular culture in its day, and has since been the subject of numerous songs, poems, plays, books, and films (both fictional and documentary styles). Since Titanic’s wreckage was discovered in 1985, several international exhibitions mined its wreckage for artifacts, including the Titanic museum in Belfast (opened in 2009), and American John Joslyn opened two replica museums built in the shape of the ship in Branson, Missouri (2006), and recently in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, in 2010. Joslyn, a film producer, was hired as part of a team in 1987 to film a \$6 million retrieval exhibition.

Pierre Roché, and François Truffaut (B. Wood).⁷⁶ Wood, born into a wealthy, “socially conscious” family in San Francisco in 1893, became an artist instead of a debutante in 1912, and pursued a life/career in visual arts and theatre performance (B. Wood). Her experience of young adulthood is parallel with Rose’s timeline in Cameron’s film. Unlike Rose, however, she had the full support of her mother to pursue her bohemian lifestyle, and she was married only briefly once (B. Wood).⁷⁷

It makes sense that Wood’s life would inspire Cameron to create Rose from a cultural context of backlash and conservative recuperation of traditional gender identity. Though he may not have followed through in all categories, there is other evidence of authorial intent to change the conventional heroine paradigm consciously. For example, Cameron, upon hearing that feminism author and psychologist Dr. Mary Pipher approved of his revamped modern heroine, said, “She should like the movie. I read her book [*Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*] before I wrote the script” (Cameron qtd in Nash and Lahti 65). Published in 1994, Dr. Pipher’s book made cultural waves of its own, as her thesis was a warning about the fragmentation of identities young American girls face in the post-civil-rights era landscape. Her therapy “helps girls become whole adults in a culture that encourages them to become forever the object of another’s gaze”

⁷⁶ According to her website, her relationship with DuChamp and Roché is the basis for both Roche’s semi-autobiographical 1953 novel *Jules and Jim*, as well as Truffaut’s 1962 film of the same name (Beatrice Wood).

⁷⁷ Wood lived to 105 years old, and even met Cameron, but declined to watch *Titanic*, though she knew it was supposed to be based on her life (Wood).

(Pipher 253). It might also be coincidental that Kate Winslet, whom Cameron sought to play Rose, had just starred in Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996) as the character Ophelia, since the intersection of Rose and Ophelia's characters meet in the water, but while Ophelia drowns, Rose survives. If Cameron had read Pipher's interpretation of Ophelia in Shakespeare's original *Hamlet*, he might have wanted to change the destructive side of the pre-bride paradigm in her character:

As a girl, Ophelia is happy and free, but with adolescence she loses herself. When she falls in love with Hamlet, she lives only for his approval. She has no inner direction; rather she struggles to meet the demands of Hamlet and her father. Her value is determined utterly by their approval. Ophelia is torn apart by her efforts to please. When Hamlet spurns her because she is an obedient daughter, she goes mad with grief. Dressed in elegant clothes that weigh her down, she drowns in a stream filled with flowers. (20)

Rose's rejection of her prescribed role reflects her struggle to achieve agency beyond the limitations of the pre-bride character.

Even though Cameron made a significant effort to construct a female protagonist whose actions would break gender conventions, few critics saw it this way. Many critics dismissed the film, due in part to the fact that it was so popular, but possibly also because of some critics' bias toward the "woman's film," as Janet Maslin articulated in her 1997 *New York Times* review ("Film Review; A Spectacle"). In fact, just two years after *Titanic*'s release, David Lubin began his analysis of *Titanic* for the distinguished *BFI Modern Classics*' book series by remarking that few of his friends, colleagues, or students admit to ever having seen the film. He concurs that critics are not "unjustified in finding it a crude, tawdry, manipulative example of

cinematic art” (Lubin 8).⁷⁸ The denial points to a cluster of criticisms that inhibit the critical study of a teen heroine like Rose in a commercial film because the female audience is directly tied to its success and used as evidence to prove its lack of sophistication or meaning. Young women who saw the film repeatedly were indicted as “groupies,” and the film, grouped with melodrama, was found to reinforce gender stereotypes.

Several contemporary scholars of films featuring teens fail to mention *Titanic* as a historically influential text with regard to depictions of teen characters.⁷⁹ Notably, Christina Lee leaves *Titanic* out of *Screening Generation X: The Politics and Popular Memory of Youth in Contemporary Cinema*, as does Catherine Driscoll in *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction*, published in 2009 and 2011 respectively. The essays in *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies* feature only one *Titanic* reference, by Maureen Turim, and that just to summarize it as nothing more than “classic melodrama” and romance constructed for maximizing tears (34). Turim’s summary aligns with the attitude of a number of critics who regard the film as an affirmation of values from a bygone era. Thomas Doherty maintains that *Titanic* only serves as a nostalgic reinforcement of “archaic gender dynamics” that yearn for the time before AIDS and feminism with a recycled plot that champions romance

⁷⁸ Lubin cites French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* about the intimate nature of connecting one’s identity to popular texts: “the consumption or non-consumption of popular culture artefacts (*sic*) is a means by which individuals in a society define for themselves and others their social position, their status” (qtd in Lubin 7).

⁷⁹ When I started this dissertation in 2015, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* was the only one of my films that had been voted into the Library of Congress National Film Registry. *Titanic* was officially added in 2017.

over money (205). Timothy Shary grouped *Titanic* with other “non-confrontational period romances” he deemed “safe” for studio productions grappling with an increasingly confusing and sexualized teen culture (Shary 2014: 224). Instead, Shary offers *To Die For* (1995), *Wild Things* (1998) and *Cruel Intentions* (1999) as films of the time period with female characters that demonstrated more credible cynicism toward dominant culture (Shary 2014: 227). The films he cites were all produced by Sony and rated “R” for strong sexual content: although they challenged status quo representations of teen protagonists, teen audiences were barred from seeing them.⁸⁰

A film’s mass appeal, then, carries the burden of being snubbed by scholars, who adhere to the spirit of the Frankfurt School and Theodor Adorno’s preference for elite culture, “the best society has to offer, as that which is not [easily] consumed or readily understood by the masses” (Lewis 4). The sheer volume of ticket sales for *Titanic* undercut its critical relevance. While Nash and Lahti vigorously argue that “the single most important aspect of the enormous appeal” of *Titanic* is the star presence of Leo DiCaprio (65), this premise reduces the complexities offered by the film’s heroine, specifically to its target demographic. Of course DiCaprio’s star qualities and physical appeal contribute to the film’s overall appeal, but the film evokes emotion related to female heroism that punches back at subsumed identities

⁸⁰ According to the-numbers.com, *To Die For* and *Wild Things* both had production budgets of \$20 million, with neither making more than \$29 million in domestic ticket sales. *Cruel Intentions* had an \$11 million budget and made over \$75 million/domestic. It is billed as the “teen *Cruel Intentions*” with incestuous overtones.

that erase pre-brides like the one Rose was destined to be when she first boarded the ship. She does not become part of Cal Hockley's or Jack Dawson's identities—she becomes herself.

Some critical analyses about *Titanic* and its success that have emerged since the late 1990s agree that the young female protagonist's position is new. Susan Sydney-Smith sees Rose's position as progressive, affirming that her story helps present "a celebration of 20th-century female emancipation" and that Rose's modernity is articulated "by her knowledge of French art, Freud, and her lack of modesty" (187). Rose also fits Linda Seger's definition of an "active heroine": one who is not defined by men, who is in charge of her dynamic actions and reasoning, and who achieves transformation by the end of the text (165-166). Rose looks conventional in her period costumes, and she does, indeed, fall in love in the narrative. She also weeps at appropriate moments. Her choices, however, are progressive: she chooses to pursue a life in which she has agency and gains authenticity through independent experience. She does not give up or collapse after Jack, her great romantic lover, dies; instead, she resolves to carry on without him. Although this trajectory does not happen on-screen, she brings evidence of having lived this resolve via "her pictures" aboard Lovett's boat, which I will discuss later in *mise-en-scene*. Critics like Doherty and Shary are correct to identify the storyline as conventional because male protagonists have achieved this arc over and over, but historically young female protagonists have not, so in that way she therefore defies convention.

The heroine's performance in *Titanic* is also historic on a commercial level. The character had mass appeal in a market that previously did not include independent teen heroines in big budget productions. *Titanic* has a lot in common with epic blockbusters⁸¹ that came before it, but it is also distinct for its deviation from convention. The film celebrates and sanitizes violence through technological spectacle; it features easily defined "good" and "evil" characters; it champions American Individualism/heroism; it reconstitutes the audience as teens through its romance plot; it aims for a mass audience by blending genres, and successfully mixes inter-textual, generation-specific references with contemporary or more recent conventions to create a new effect. Like all blockbusters, it relies heavily on music to help create mood. Nonetheless, *Titanic* deviates from blockbuster conventions in one key way: its protagonist is not a white male. While critics and scholars may dispute *Titanic*'s specific genre (is it a "disaster" film, a melodrama, an historic epic?), Rose's role as its heroine is undisputed.

Titanic Narrative: She's a Beauty

Ships, for reasons I cannot properly locate, have been personified historically as female through pronouns. As a metaphor for Rose's teen construction in 1912, it works. Men create the vision for her and build her. Men run her, steer her, and own her completely; even if there are women on the ship, they are not allowed to be in

⁸¹ Based on the post-WWII blockbuster model presented in Thomas Schatz' essay "The New Hollywood."

charge of her. The metaphor works well for Rose's miserable beginning as a literal pre-bride because she is not in charge of her own ship. She has been constructed for grand display: corseted, polished, buffed, and educated in order to have her power harnessed by her owners (her parents and her fiancé). When she is contemplating suicide, 1997 Rose reflects through voiceover, "I saw my whole life as if I had already lived it...I felt like I was standing at a great precipice, with no one to pull me back, no one who cared, or even noticed" (*Titanic*). The marriage plot teaches pre-brides that conformity and loyalty lead to happiness, identity, and security, but the cost is a loss of personal agency. Rose is beautiful, and she appears to be adored—all set for a secure life among the most powerful class—but her complaint comes from the rarely seen side of the pre-bride marriage plot: her erasure after she accepts the proposal. Her claim that she is unnoticed is a paradox. Her construction emphasizes anticipated inspection from head to toe. Her clothing is stunning—brightly colored, flawlessly tailored, and bejeweled—made to catch the light. Her shoes are dyed to match her dresses exactly. Her red hair almost bursts as a flame under her hats—a contrast that demands to be seen. But her complaint is a feminist plea: she doesn't want to live a life without agency. In the process of becoming "a lady," she has been dehumanized, and feels like a well-built ship instead of a person. Through a patriarchal lens she can be read as "spoiled" because she has all of the gifts and none of the appreciation for her position; however, if she is viewed as a heroine, she illustrates the suffocation of a person who feels owned, not in charge of her own destiny. The story reveals other unappealing tenets of patriarchy: pre-brides are

vulnerable to abuse, infantilized, and made powerless because of their capitulations in order to maintain their positions. As the story progresses, the corsets, the hats, the buttons, and tightly wound hairstyles on Rose come undone. By the end of the film, Rose is wearing a man's coat, a shredded dress, and wouldn't seem out of joint at a Riot Grrrl's concert in the 1990s. No longer a "first-class lady," she has turned away from the well-run, structured life and chosen self-reliance. She possesses "The Heart of the Ocean," but she doesn't have to reveal it—or sell it—to anyone in order to succeed or survive.

From Rose's perspective, the story of *Titanic* is less about luxuriating in the pleasure of looking at opulent fashions and sets, and more about seeing the satisfaction of rebuilding one's self in the face of overwhelming tragedy without depending upon the approval of one young man or pleasing one's community. Susan Sydney-Smith argues that elder Rose's "insistence on telling the story 'like it was,' interpellates and thereby draws us into a new version of female-centered history" (188). The drawing scene demonstrates the appealing shift in perspective that many critics failed to recognize. Rose's request to be drawn naked—to be observed without being touched—to be desired while luxuriating in the powerful position of being respected while doing something not quite respectable (as in disrobing in front of a young man who is not your husband), goes beyond DiCaprio's star appeal, which numerous critics specifically cited as the main reason "45 percent of women under twenty-five who had seen the movie had seen it twice" (Nash and Lahti 64). The scene showcases how Rose pursues her erotic desire instead of just succumbing

to the demands of Jack's desire, which is the usual convention. Instead, the agency she finds in desire gives her power and control over her own body—something she does not possess in her own family. As an example of an independent heroine, she illustrates the same kind of agency Stacy had with her body in *Fast Times*. They both disrobe and display their bodies without shame, or constructed demure femininity, which would have been a standard part of Rose's world view in 1912. Neither of them is bridled with inhibitions about being devalued personally; they both pursue a sexual experience without compromising their self-worth.

Thomas Doherty's critique credits the film's success to "battalions of moonstruck teenage girls" who were fooled by glossy repackaging of old "courtship" (206), but this popular, nostalgic view fails to consider the full agentive powers of its protagonist. Doherty sees the time "when young love could be recklessly consummated in the backseat of an automobile" (206) from a male protagonist's point of view, and from this perspective, the courtship plot is nostalgic and conventional. But the protagonist is Rose, and her initiation of sexual experience is not usual or paradigmatic, and it certainly violates old courtship rules. Not only is she not punished by the narrative with a pregnancy, death, or a marriage to someone she does not love, but she is seen as a character who goes on to live a full and rich life beyond her "consequence-free" tryst. The tragic end of the *Titanic* did not leave Rose broken and pining for her "one and only" true love but with the courage she wrenched from breaking distinctly oppressive social and moral codes. This young woman's "undressing" does not end with a firework display of "special,"

romanticized love before the credits roll but, rather, with the reassurance of a positive relationship between experience and resilience. Marriage, eventually, is part of her life, but it is not her only reason for living.

Narrative Themes: Freedom, Confinement, Transformation

Titanic is a spectacle film that seems through Rose's character to argue against spectacle. Like everything else about *Titanic*, the themes are also large but not unconventional. The political ideology favors neoliberal individualism and class deconstruction, and it privileges American creativity over European heritage. Unlike *Fast Times*, there is no lament for lost teen innocence, but because the protagonist is female, her gender adds dimension to a role usually performed by male heroes, amending generic themes enough to offer more dynamic analyses.

The narrative works with elements of style to pursue themes surrounding freedom and confinement, wealth, and an individual's role in her own family. Because the tragedy hinges on life and death, the need for survival organizes their values quite plainly. The antagonists live by patriarchal rules that favor order, confinement, and loyalty by using intimidation, violence, or deception to stay in power. Hockley, Frances Dewitt-Bukater, Lovejoy, and many of the upper class fulfill these roles. The heroes pursue creative, material, and literal freedom. Rose, Jack, and most of the third-class passengers fulfill the morally privileged position in the film.

The Ship of Dreams: Teens Create Space in Confinement

There is no high school, family home, or mall in this historical fiction, but the setting creates communal, private, and even secret spaces for its characters aboard the ship. Communal spaces outside, like the deck of the ship, are mostly reserved for non-first-class passengers. Communal spaces for first-class passengers are inside, like the private chapel and the large dining hall, which require meeting a dress code in order to enter. Jack shares the “outside” with Rose, and she brings him into the exquisite spaces reserved inside for the upper class.

While the *Titanic* is advertised as the largest ship of its kind, it is too small for 2,200 people to command a lot of personal space, and it effectively depicts teen confinement and class differentials. The film’s political theme shows that wealth buys personal space but not freedom. The flashback narrative begins by showing how the ship enables Jack’s agency and denies Rose hers. For example, Jack’s access to freedom is depicted right away, as he and Fabrizio win their tickets in a card game and joyfully wend their way through the crowded, third-class hallway that leads to their cramped room. Jack and Fabrizio joke about the top bunk, completely unconcerned about sharing their space with the two strangers they meet on the spot. There is no privacy in third class, but Jack and Fabrizio don’t require it because, a few scenes later, they are seen laughing and crowing on the bow of the ship, their arms stretched wide in the open air. They are on the ship, but they are not contained by it. These scenes are contrasted with Rose’s unhappy captivity in heavily decorated, luxurious accommodations, a spacious deck, and abundant

privacy. Rose never smiles in these spaces. She is only seen inside rooms with other adults or hired servants around her. The *Titanic* looks large with extreme long shot pans outside the moving boat during Jack's scenes, but feels very small inside Rose's luxury suites with tight close-ups on her unhappy face. Cameron juxtaposes confinement with the first-class and freedom with the third-class through setting to evoke emotion usually assigned to the opposite associations. The destruction of the ship leads to her emancipation from everything that could have confined her—including Jack. *Titanic's* and Jack's end are necessary sacrifices for Rose's independence.

Protagonist: Rose DeWitt-Bukater/Rose Dawson Calvert (Kate Winslet)

"I'm tired of being polite!"

Rose translates a brand of anti-establishment aggression through anachronistic language, gestures, and violence in *Titanic*. Rose's rejection of the status quo is clear through her rejection of her family values, and her intellectual approach to critically thinking about her life makes her stand apart from her contemporary pre-brides. She is not motivated because she sees Jack staring at her from afar, struck by love at first sight. Her instinct to kill herself instead of living a life without choice--with all the worldly amenities money could buy through marriage—is a bold, counter-cultural argument for personal choice and freedom. Even before she meets Jack, Rose recognizes both her role as an object, surrounded by other fine objects (art, jewelry, clothing), and the loss of her authentic identity if she capitulates and marries Cal Hockley. Instead of sacrificing her life, she sacrifices

her material position within her family and society. Jack helps her find another perspective, but he is not the reason she denounces her role as a pre-bride.

Young Rose vacillates between child-like and adult-like behavior, depending on her company. Even 100-year-old Rose channels some of young Rose's teen "sass" when she jokes about what a "dish" she was, how her image in the recovered mirror has only changed "a bit" after eighty years, or by her charming impatience: "Do you want to hear this or not, Mr. Lovett?" The few scenes with 100-year-old Rose reassure the viewer that she did not follow the ideology imposed upon the person she was when she boarded *Titanic*, surrounded by antagonists. Her voiceover describes her seventeen-year-old self as a "well-bred girl" as the audience watches the impressively dressed version of herself boarding the *Titanic* in 1912, but young Rose's behavior immediately raises questions concerning how "well-born" is defined because she is aggressive, disagreeable, and even hostile toward her fiancé and mother. In the company of her mother and Cal Hockley, her performance of adult behavior is corseted, calloused, and shut-off from joy. She is not impressed with the size of *Titanic* nor with the lavish accommodations in her first-class rooms aboard it. All the adults around her treat her like a child, and in return, she seems stubborn and rude. Rose's mother frequently appears with friends, but Rose is deprived of her having peers. When she is with Jack, she is allowed to act more like a seventeen-year-old. She is curious, open-minded, eager to laugh, empathetic, and treated as a whole person.

Cameron defines Rose's relationship with Cal through distance and hostility—not like that of a young betrothed couple about to be married, but like that of a bitter old couple about to be divorced. They take turns insulting each other while not speaking directly to one another. When Hockley complains about the works of Picasso and Degas as “finger-paintings,” he appears to be talking to Lovejoy, who is paid to be there. She answers back by saying, “The difference between our taste in art is that I have some,” but it is unclear who she is addressing. His unfazed reaction shot is evidence of his position of power. In this plot line, she has no authority, and Hockley consistently infantilizes her no matter how sophisticated she may seem. For example, after Hockley takes a cigarette out of her mouth and orders food for Rose, furious and powerless against him, she turns to insult Mr. Ismay by asking him if he's ever read Freud since he seems “preoccupied with size.” Molly Brown gently chides Hockley about being able to “handle her,” and Hockley responds by saying that maybe he'll have to start “watching what she's reading too.” Besides being most likely anachronistic, the insult can be interpreted in at least two ways: 1) the complexity of understanding unconscious drives in Freud's emerging brand of psychology would be very unusual/precocious reading for a privileged seventeen-year-old; or 2) perhaps Rose was an early test subject of the science, so she was introduced to the topic unwillingly because someone in her family forced her to participate in it. She does, after all, attempt suicide. Since Cameron is worried less about historical accuracy than emotional appeal, the reference to “Freud” and “size” is most likely a lazy reduction that audiences in 1997

would read as evidence of her sophistication. With Jack, Rose learns to laugh by acting more like a Riot Grrrl: she laughs when Lovejoy chases after her, she gives him “the finger,” she “spits like a man,” and she participates in a contest of “who can feel more pain” by demonstrating how to go en pointe without toe shoes to impress the third-class party below deck. When she finally breaks from Hockley, she hides under a plaid blanket to do so. The narrative division between the authentic feeling of self-discovery and the forced performance of the marriage plot clearly champions the independent heroine Rose becomes.

Secondary Characters

Jack Dawson (Leonardo DiCaprio): The Real Gentleman

What Jack Dawson lacks in an undersized masculine body and missing bank account, he makes up for in appealing optimism, devotion, and restraint. Jack is an ideal character in the same way that Cher is in *Clueless*; his sunny attitude toward every situation is pervasive and unswerving, even when it leads to his own death. Instead of being regarded as adorably naïve, as Cher is, he is seen as having *promise*, buoyed by the kind of American confidence that builds capitalist empires. He is not held back by his age, gender, race, religion, lack of money, family status, the “right” clothes, or formal occupation; he charms the upper class with platitudes to live in the present and “make every day count.” Linda Koldau sees Jack as the living embodiment of the American Dream because his “general mobility” serves as a “model to Rose, who will later emulate his mobility and thus turn into the female

version of the same dream" (188). Jack doesn't quite fit the archaic model of patriarchal masculinity either, with his boyish body and "pretty" facial features.

More importantly, Jack sees Rose as a person instead of as an object, and she appreciates his vision as an artist. In another role switch, Jack comes across like a gentleman with his easy restraint, while Cal Hockley's crass demeanor lacks refinement. Specifically, Jack's interest in Rose without touching her in a highly sexual situation is an appealing contrast to the material power play of jewels-for-sex Hockley imposes on her. Jack understands her vulnerability, just as Cal does, but he does not exploit this from a position of power. He exercises the kind of self-control in front of a naked woman that Americans seem to believe young men do not possess. When Jack's finger blends the shading under her breast on the sketch, it is not lecherous or indecent. He is not the wolf hiding in her Grandma's bed, trying to trick her. She is in control of the transaction, and it is also important that she gives the beautiful drawing away. Her "gift" to Hockley is a feminist response that reflects his view of her as valuable property next to the diamond: "Now you can keep us both locked up in your safe." Susan Sydney-Smith offers an insightful contrast between the two men:

Whereas Hockley seeks to bribe his way to safety when class barriers break down...acquiring a child in order to gain a place on a life-boat—Jack honors the unwritten gentlemanly edict that allows women and children to go first. Such heroic qualities accord with the codes both of the 'parfit gentil knight' whose latter-day status as heartthrob teen idol runs congruent to his earlier incarnation. (191)

In contrast, the pressure Cal Hockley applies to gain Rose's sexual response reads like modern-day "casting-couch" sexism: "I will not deny you anything, Rose, if you will not deny me."

Fiancé Cal Hockley (Billy Zane): Violent and Rich

Cal Hockley is unquestionably depicted as the story's villain. He is supposed to be a gentleman but uses violence and other crude means in order to get what he wants. As Susan Sydney-Smith astutely sums him up, "Hockley lacks both intellectual substance (despite the art collection) and emotional intelligence (real 'heart,' not diamonds)" (192). His shallow materialism is emphasized by his apparent suicide after the market crash during the depression. He is much older than his fiancé and exhibits behavior assigned more to a father than a potential spouse. It is no accident that Cal Hockley is the one who announces that "God himself could not sink this ship" in the beginning of the film. It's the kind of line that indicates he possesses the hubris central to Greek tragedies, which prefigures a character's fall. Hockley's one-dimensional depiction reflects Cameron's heavy-handed themes that rebuke royalty and European class distinctions, not only with Hockley but also with Inspector Lovejoy and Rose's mother, Ruth. The three collectively indict the culture they represent. Besides being violent and short-tempered, Hockley uses his financial means to bully everyone around him with the exception of Rose's mother, Ruth, who matches his tone in manner and ideology.

Rose's Mother, Ruth Dewitt-Bukater (Frances Fisher)

“Will We Be Seated According to Class?”

Ruth, a haughty widow without money, needs Rose to marry Cal Hockley in order to maintain their social and financial status. Ruth argues with Rose that the only things left to them of value are their “good name” and the indoctrinated European customs of the upper class, as communicated “by their formal gestures and facial expressions, courtly costumes, refined way of speaking, and social attitudes” (Ouellette 176). Like Hockley, Ruth is a one-dimensional antagonist who adopts the patriarchal view of her daughter as her commodity. Ruth gets to utter unpopular American sentiments like “Are we going to be seated according to class?” while waiting to board a lifeboat on a sinking ship short of lifeboats. Just like modern pundits who remind everyone that it somehow was all of the “white women” who voted for President Trump in 2016 that helped him win, Ruth benefits from a patriarchal structure that privileges women like her as long as they capitulate to positions without personal agency in their own lives and redefine this lack as a “choice.” Like Cher, Rose was raised as a pre-bride and indoctrinated with “good-breeding” that rewards youth, beauty, submissiveness, virginity, and unquestioned loyalty to the patriarch. Ruth doesn’t reward Rose so much as she jealously guards her like property. The corset scene, when Ruth laces Rose into her restrictive undergarment, illustrates the pain Ruth inflicts on Rose as she imposes social restrictions. Ruth must lock her daughter’s body down long enough to harness it for financial gain from Hockley, since Ruth lacks the youth to marry him

herself. She explains to her daughter that neither of them has choices because “[they] are women” and offers no other reason to consent to do what she is told without question.

Molly Brown (Kathy Bates): American Nouveau Riche

The “unsinkable” Molly Brown, a minor character who supports both Jack and Rose, represents additional independent traits portrayed by a mature woman. Part of what antagonist Ruth deems vulgar about Molly Brown’s “new money” designation is associated with her American-ness. Brown displays a larger body, a louder laugh, a southern accent, and travels without male companionship. She shows physical and mental strength that sets her apart from her elite cohorts. She carries her own luggage and talks back to men. She uses humor to mildly critique the customs of the upper-class women who actively try to avoid her. She is also met with more verbal aggression than any other woman in the film. When she tries to rouse her fellow-passengers in the lifeboat to go look for survivors, the sailor guiding their boat threatens to throw her overboard if she doesn’t “shut the hole in her face.” As a model for a woman who is not well-born but who achieves an upper-class life, Molly Brown’s censure still demonstrates the hostility toward women like her who gain some agency.

The Cinematic Style of *Titanic*: Deliberate Destruction

Cameron wanted to put viewers “on *Titanic*” by using visual effects that enhanced authenticity and believability. He wanted Rose and Jack’s story to be the “emotional lighting rod” to connect viewers to history (Cameron 77). While much of the last hour is dedicated to the destruction of the reconstructed ship (with some help from computer generated images), the visual details that show Rose’s transformation from traditional femininity to independent heroine are largely done through mise-en-scene and editing, along with one of the most popular original movie soundtracks of all time.

***Titanic*’s Mise-en-Scene: Class and Water Levels Rise and Fall**

Titanic is defined by dynamic contrasts, including life and death. In addition to aiding the emotional register, the elements of each scene help shape Rose’s sense of confinement, freedom, prosperity, or depravity. The ship’s ascending floors order levels of social status, from poorest to wealthiest, from the cargo hold and soot-covered men shoveling coal at the very bottom in the engine room to the spacious upper decks where Cal Hockley and Rose’s mother sojourn well above water. As Lori Leggit writes, “With each successive descent to the lower levels of *Titanic*, Rose increasingly questions her own identity;...her body is the valued currency, and marriage is the vehicle that will ensure the maintenance of her mother’s lifestyle” (Leggit 194).

Rose's Sets: The Boudoir, The Fireplace, The Car

The sets help Rose demonstrate her position as an agent instead of an object. Two interior sets help illustrate her emancipation: her private quarters on *Titanic* and the stationary car several decks below. Specifically, the ornate fireplace in Rose's boudoir is a key part of her setting in the story, and its repeated appearance in markedly different states connects the audience to her transitioning role. Leggit considers the boudoir an example of "traditional feminine domesticity aboard the ship...intended to be a replication of the home in which women are hidden from society" (194). The fireplace works metaphorically as Rose's intimate space: not necessarily public but indicative of her formal relationship with her family. The underwater cameras of Lovett's expedition find it at the bottom of the ocean first, before we meet Rose, but the algae-covered scallop at the center is intact, maybe an allusion to the birth of Venus, who was born from sea foam, too. The aged hearth is a symbol of the buried experience of her identity as Rose Dewitt-Bukater, someone who was supposed to have died at sea. The fireplace next appears when she and Cal board the ship, where it is restored to its full ornate beauty, just as young Rose is resurrected from her memory of it. The hearth is the focal point in the brightly lit room, the camera using the grand mirror above the fireplace to reflect Cal and Rose's low-level hostilities toward one another as they settle into their quarters. Every detail of the fireplace is seen in harsh lighting—the cold brass and polished wood shine brightly, but without fire they lack warmth. Its next appearance is with Jack, who touches it directly, marveling at its craftsmanship while making an ironic

joke about the “horrible conditions,” but the fire is lit within it, reflecting warmly on the intimate scene that follows where he draws her. In the last appearance of the fireplace, after Hockley has accused Jack of stealing the diamond, the lighting is back to high key. Hockley first reduces Rose’s identity to the pronoun “it,” saying, “Oh, it is a little slut, isn’t it?” and then slaps her across the face. Violence, at the domestic and catastrophic level, erases any sentiment attached to the beautiful things lost on *Titanic*, including the fireplace and her miserable relationship attached to it.

Rose invites Jack’s gaze by asking him to draw her naked portrait in front of her hearth, and she also initiates sexual contact by inviting him into the back seat of a car. Between the last two appearances of the hearth, Rose and Jack steal down to the lowest level, the cargo hold, which has enough space to hold passengers’ belongings, including large trunks and multiple cars. Like Sam’s shop-car scene with The Geek in *Sixteen Candles*, the car Jack and Rose occupy is immobile, but it still provides an intimate place in a liminal space. Unlike Sam, Rose is not demure or unaware of her own sexual agency. She physically hoists Jack into the backseat with her and says, “Put your hands on me, Jack.” This is not a young woman being coerced into sexual congress; she is the active pursuivant of experience here. Rose is not ashamed, nervous, or scared of social consequences because her value is not tied to her virginity. Further, neither owns the borrowed car, allowing for an egalitarian exchange. The stationary car on a moving ship isn’t exactly mobile, but it helps mark her emancipation from childhood, her fiancé, her family, and her social standing in a class she no longer wants to belong to. The class that owns that car has lost value;

the couple hasn't. Minutes after they leave the cargo hold, the ship scrapes against the iceberg and the ocean breaks through, instantly flooding the cars and goods alike. It's another way the film emphasizes the ephemeral value of material things.

Rose's Costume Progression from Corsets to Grunge

Rose's costumes, hair, and makeup document her struggles with the pre-bride paradigm, and it is really the *undressing* of Rose that helps define her progression from containment to independence. When introduced, young Rose first appears in a crisply tailored, white, floor-length dress that resembles more of a masculine suit than a gown. Her hands are hidden under white gloves, as are her ankles under opaque, white stockings. In Figure 12, besides her wide-brimmed, purple hat, she dons a slender purple necktie, tied exactly like Hockley's. Though her innocent, yet masculinized appearance conjures more of a first-wave feminist, American suffragette look than an Edwardian one, the narrative quickly undercuts the notion that the clothes mean she is an equal partner with her betrothed. Through voiceover, the elder Rose explains that *Titanic* felt like a "slave ship" to her seventeen-year-old self, and the film quickly cycles through several costume changes and elaborate up-dos that highlight Rose's contrarian demeanor. During the scene where she and Hockley unpack their things and trade insults, she does so in her tie. Even though the tie signals her desire to be regarded as Cal regards himself, on equal footing, it proves to be merely a stylish veneer covering a complete lack of agency. She has no autonomy, as the next several costume changes show Rose's descent into impending powerlessness, no matter how stylish or colorful her gowns

(see Figure 14). Her complaint is that she is not seen, and like the corset her mother tightens, she feels suffocated by a life in which she is given little autonomy.

Rose's costume evolution from pre-bride to independence is markedly different after she meets Jack. For the first day and a half, Rose's hair remains pinned up, her dresses go all the way to the floor, and her bare arms are covered by lace (Figure 15). Just before she meets Jack, she runs by him crying, and her hair is partially down for the first time, marking her first attempt to leave first class, even if it is done via suicide. After Jack convinces her to stay, she appears less decorated; she takes off her shoes while dancing. Leggit points to the moment Rose balances her entire weight on the tips of her toes in third class with Jack as the significant moment of transformation:

Contrary to the limitations that are placed on her by being a woman in a patriarchal society—limitations symbolized by a tightly corseted body constricted in movement, shape, and level of exertion—Rose has begun to defy her confinement. (194)

After that scene she wears her hair all the way down. She strips naked for Jack as an act of defiance toward her fiancé, but her exhibition is also a moment of agency. Her tryst with Jack in the car, unlike the drawing scene, is not an exhibition; her sexual activity is not shown to the audience. She puts her gauzy nightdress back on, but she no longer dons a corset. When Hockley hits her after she and Jack are discovered, she is markedly different. She doesn't crumple to the ground like she had in the morning when he flipped over a table.

Cameron also makes use of 1990s grunge plaid to underscore Rose's independence. Figure 16 is taken from the "steerage deck" on the *Carpathia* rescue

ship, where Rose covers her head with a plaid blanket to hide from her fiancé and her life tied to that marriage plot. While plaid is a traditional pattern for European woolen blankets, Rose's dressed down appearance also conjures a Riot Grrrl aesthetic—and one that safely disguises her from a destructive male gaze. By the time she docks in New York, she is still wearing Hockley's overcoat, large and masculine, covering the dingy remains of her once-pink nightdress. The shift operates as a kind of make-under. She looks up again, like she did in her tie when she first saw *Titanic*, but instead of a ship, she sees the Statue of Liberty—a not so subtle indication of her newfound freedom from an oppressive femininity and a new sense of security as she discovers the necklace in the pocket of the coat.

Perhaps the most important costumes that help support the argument that Rose is an independent heroine are found in the row of pictures featured in the very last minutes of the film. They depict a young woman who lived a full life with agency and activity. She is smiling in her pictures; she poses like Hemingway next to a big-game fish; she's wearing pants; she rides a horse like a man and in Figure 17 we see a roller coaster in the background. She fulfilled the promise she made to Jack, of course, but she didn't live her life in order to win his approval.

Props of a Well-Bred Girl

Several props illustrate Rose's shifting positions between dependence and independence, class constraints, and personal agency. The items associated with pre-bride femininity align her with property, like her butterfly hair comb and jewelry, along with "The Heart of the Ocean," which is tied to her identity from the

beginning. Ostensibly, the main reason Brock Lovett has to hear Rose's story is that he wants to possess the diamond. It's very powerful for Rose to know what he wants and to understand what it feels like to be the objectified treasure. The jewel, unknowingly transferred from Cal Hockley to Rose Dawson, represents a dynamic shift in agency on a global and local scale. As Sandler and Studlar argue, "What was once a symbol of monarchy, possession, and subjugation turns into an object of personal empowerment, liberty, and rebellion" (10). Rose never has to use the diamond in order to survive on her own either. Apparently, Cameron considered other endings that involved giving the diamond to Brock Lovett, but they failed with test audiences. The dismay at throwing such a valuable piece of property away, as Rose finally does, aligns best with the political message against a patriarchal structure that would only seek its recovery and discard her story.

Another way Cameron promotes class dissolution is by showing how young Rose holds many priceless objects like paintings by Degas or Picasso and exquisite jewelry, but she is not allowed the agency to hold or use common things like cigarettes. The cigarette crosses class and gender lines, and for Jack and Rose, it illustrates agency. When she runs to the back of the ship, considering suicide, Jack is shown lying on his back, leisurely smoking a cigarette while staring at the stars. When Rose tries to smoke at lunch, her fiancé takes it out of her mouth after her mother scolds her like a child.

Props like the ax allow Rose to become an action star heroine who goes through extreme conditions, exerting super-human strength, physically cutting

through oppressive bonds. By the time Rose must wield an ax to save Jack, she has gained strength in several ways. When she is no longer bound by the social rules dictated by her class, she discovers she has enough strength to leave an abusive fiancé and the temerity to save the life of another person. Jack and Rose talk about trust and inspiration, and they are both given opportunities to circumvent traditional roles that reinforce inequality instead of personal growth. Jack's life work is art until he dies, and Rose finds personal agency as an artist instead of living as a pre-bride who merely collects art in the marriage plot.

Editing & Cinematography: The Eye and Agency

Young Rose starts out as a promised bride-to-be, and before she speaks, the editing emphasizes her innocence through its focus on whiteness. Under the "White Star Line" sign, she emerges from a white car and extends a white-gloved hand to the driver. The very first shot of Rose from a bird's eye view does not include her face, which is hidden under a large hat, emphasizing her position as a child. At the same time, this point of view encourages the conspicuous consumption of her body, which is completely covered in white fabric, including her ankles. Finally, when the audience sees her face, the camera captures just her head and shoulders from a low angle in a medium close-up frame as she looks up at the *Titanic* for the first time. The shot is used again at the end to show her transformation. Figure 18 shows her in this frame when she is expertly made-up and tailored, with her elaborately bound hair contained in a wide brim hat. Figure 19 deliberately calls back to it through its frame and angle when she docks in New York and while she is looking up at the

Statue of Liberty. Instead of the sunshine and opulence of Figure 18, Figure 19's nighttime shot reveals Rose's less controlled facial features as she is laid bare with no makeup, in a man's jacket, and flattened hair being pounded by rain. The second close-up emphasizes her transformation not by a glamorous makeover but by a stripping down of artifice that will lead her to a more authentic life.

The intensity of loss is communicated using the slow dissolve-editing device, as live images of young Rose's eyes merge with her older ones, and the decrepit hearth at the bottom of sea dissolves into the fully restored one on the day the ship first sailed. These transitions are long enough for audiences to absorb vast changes in time and experience from Rose's point of view. Krämer argues that the dissolve is particularly important to a narrative that needs to merge emotional states between the past and present in a single character and thus acts as an "intimate link between the events of history and the audience of today" (166). Koldau contends that continuity employed between old Rose and young Rose "enhance[s] the poignancy of loss" and marks the turning point and intensification of the frame of the main tragedy to the frame of the subplot of Rose's emancipation (90). The famous "bow scene," where young Rose and Jack kiss for the first time, dissolves into a match cut of the image of the modern-day version of the same bow, now submerged in its 1997 ghostly seabed. The dissolve swings the audience from the beginning to the end of *Romeo and Juliet* in an instant, keeping the tension of loss at the fore. There is a little comfort, of course, because they are at least assured that Rose will survive, since it is her story. Shortly after the kiss, Jack and Rose embark on the nude

drawing scene, which is her turning point into gaining agency. She invites Jack to study her naked body without being ashamed. In Figure 20, she's looking directly at her own body through Jack's eyes with pleasure and confidence. The director pulls the audience back from the erotic boudoir scene through the iris of young Rose's eye to old Rose's eye, giving the audience time to process that the nude drawing the audience saw earlier actually belongs to her. Since the narrative is Rose's, the audience is privy to the steps that led her away from her privileged life and into one in which she is determined to fight for a life on her own terms. Love is the link, but it is not the singular love of one man that physically enabled her to achieve her full life (as evidenced by the many pictures she brings with her); she, herself, gets credit.

Music: The Song Will Go On (and On)

Thanks to composer James Horner's musical arrangement of Celtic strings, synthesized bagpipes, and several lyric-less "Oh's" sung by a female voice over key moments of reflection and loss,⁸² "My Heart Will Go On (Love Theme from *Titanic*)"⁸³ is really the only song that needs to be discussed with regard to Rose's narrative.⁸⁴ The instrumental variations of the song are pervasive throughout the film, a melodic leitmotif that conjures Rose's joy and loss simultaneously. A variation

⁸² Cameron was totally against the inclusion of a pop song in his epic, but Horner also wrote the music for "My Heart Will Go On" and asked Céline Dion to sing it as a demo without Cameron's consent, eventually winning him over (Rapkin).

⁸³ Lyrics by Will Jennings, vocals by Céline Dion, produced by James Horner, Walter Afanasieff, and Simon Franglen.)

⁸⁴ In an interview, lyricist Will Jennings also mentions artist Beatrice Wood, the 105-year-old Dadaist artist who inspired Cameron's construction of Rose, as his inspiration for the lyrics to the song (Jennings).

of it plays over the first three minutes of the film, which tells the entire story of the ship and the love affair: “the three-act historical trajectory of the ship is delineated: it was launched, it was lost at sea, it was found” (Lubin 17). Effectively, the music bridges both narrative periods as the opening combines the 1912 launch and the underwater lights of 1997 submersibles finding the ship while the echoes of a Gaelic lament accompany the transition. The music makes Rose’s story bigger and essential, even before her character is introduced.

The song’s dynamism comes, in part, from French-Canadian singer Céline Dion’s powerful mezzo-soprano voice, one that is praised for its profound emotional delivery and often maligned for its sentimentality. The song is memorable, and though Dion does not sing all of the female “oh’s” on the soundtrack, the overall effect of the melody creates continuity and builds anticipation for the end, when Dion’s “My Heart Will Go On” finally opens up with lyrics as the credits roll. Peter Krämer argues that the order indicates Rose’s true ownership of the story because although the song comes after the credits, thus acknowledging James Cameron’s “male authorship and authority,” Dion’s voice reminds the audience that they are still “within the subjective experience of a woman” (164). For the much-touted repeated viewings of the film, the emotional effect of the leitmotif is amplified during the opening sequence in subsequent viewings, even without Dion’s vocals, because the audience has been conditioned to reconnect with Rose’s unique melody that conjures love and sorrow.

Repeated viewings also produced another economic boon for the film in the music industry realm. In addition to spending sixteen weeks on *Billboard's* top pop music charts, Dion's "My Heart Will Go On" sold eighteen million copies worldwide and won top prizes for music and film, including an Oscar, a Grammy, and a Golden Globe (Rapkin). The success of the song amplified the saturation of the entire *Titanic* experience by the late spring of 1998, leading to numerous parodies and caricatures of teenage romance, pan-pipes, and outstretched arms on the bows of ships that continue to be produced even twenty years later. The overexposed musical anthem, narrowly defined by the experience of the film itself, contributed to *Titanic's* reduction in artistic value, the flattening of its characters, plot, and any emotion the song may have genuinely evoked when it was first shown. Still, the repetitive, clichéd lyrics communicate the most important message from Rose's emancipation from pre-bride to independence: none of her losses—including her virginity, social status, economic standing, her "good name," nor even her lost "true love"—negatively affected the choices she made to "go on" to live a life with agency.

Chapter Two Conclusion

Like *Fast Times* and *Sixteen Candles*, *Clueless* and *Titanic* continue to be in demand, proving that their longevity is fueled not only through nostalgic reconnections but also by connecting with generations beyond their contexts. And, like certain celebrated films, they have become intergenerational texts that are replicated, reproduced, and referenced frequently enough to still be relevant to American culture. Twenty-four-year-old rap-artist Iggy Azalea recreated numerous scenes from *Clueless* for her music video featuring her hit “Fancy” in 2014, in which she wore a version of the yellow Gautier plaid outfit. In a recent appearance on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, Kate Winslet was asked to discuss the “on-going” debate about whether or not Jack could have fit onto her makeshift raft from *Titanic*.⁸⁵ While both films have had an impact on popular culture, *Titanic* really broadened the film industry’s creative consideration of female teen protagonists in big budget productions, as the next chapter will discuss, wherein both character types starred in commercially successful blockbuster franchises in the new millennium.

⁸⁵ She appeared on the show on December 1, 2017, and they reenacted the “floating scene” on Colbert’s desk because Colbert wanted to prove that Jack “could have fit and lived.”

CHAPTER THREE: 21ST CENTURY PRE-BRIDES & HEROINES

This chapter explores how the two character prototypes—the pre-bride and the independent heroine—have been translated at the dawn of the twenty-first century and new millennium. I chose two standout characters from two enormously successful franchises with female teen heroines: Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart), the new pre-bride from *Twilight* (2008), and Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), the independent heroine from *The Hunger Games* (2012). In many ways the global success of the *Harry Potter* books and films⁸⁶ recalibrated how big studios consider the entire “young adult” genre, and all three franchises experienced an increasing public enthusiasm for the films as social events. Midnight first showings drew huge crowds from the first *Harry Potter* film in 2001 to the last *Hunger Games* film in 2015. Time will tell if these shared texts were a unique anomaly or the beginning of a cultural tradition linking literature, tweens and teens, and film adaptation premieres. As of 2018, there does not seem to be a distinct literature-to-film adaptation franchise taking its place, though the superhero films, including *Wonder Woman* (2017), attract huge youth audiences. The characters I chose for this chapter were based on young adult book franchises that followed the *Harry Potter*

⁸⁶ The *Harry Potter* book series consists of seven books by J.K. Rowling published between 1997 and 2007. According to Scholastic, the titles have sold over 400 million copies globally in sixty-eight languages. The film series started with *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001) and continued with seven additional films (splitting the last book into two films) in 2011. “The eight films grossed more than \$7.7 billion worldwide” (Rapp and Thakker).

generation into their teen years, and that featured young female protagonists at the fore.

Historical Context—Vampires and The Dystopian Future

America's transition into the twenty-first century has been shaped by threatened security, both real and imagined. The shift from the twentieth century to the twenty-first was christened by an imagined threat in what was known as the "Y2K Bug." The "bug" was the belief that software and hardware designed to be supported by the "two-digit" year system would fail on January 1, 2000, at 12:00 a.m., causing massive failures in everything from the pace-makers in people's chests to air traffic control, and potentially paralyzing businesses worldwide. Conspiracy theories, apocalyptic theories, and programmers selling "fixes" flourished. In November of 1999, the U.S. Commerce Department reported that more than \$100 billion was being spent by businesses and government agencies to stave off anticipated catastrophic disasters due to Y2K, with little lasting economic benefit (Chandrasekaran). The millennium began, however, with no significant issues or massive failures as predicted, as all the machines kept running. While some businesses clearly made money from selling back-up generators and software, insecurities about technology failure continue to shape the information era

emotionally and financially. These insecurities resonate through many American-made films in the first dozen years of the new millennium.⁸⁷

Following the Y2K bug “attack,” the United States experienced its first terrorist attack by a foreign entity on the contiguous United States on September 1, 2001. In office for less than a year, Republican President George W. Bush, who won the electoral but not the popular vote, briefly united a bitterly divided electorate after the attack by Osama Bin Laden and Al-Kaeda on the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, and the failed attempt on the White House.⁸⁸ The attacks were timed to maximize prime broadcasting hours, around the start of the workday at 9:00 a.m. EST. For days citizens watched their television screens, reviewing images of the burning towers and the massive loss of life. *The Hunger Games* reflects the reality-style obsessive viewing of tragedy and the grim relationship between communications, government, and citizens that do not trust one another.

In addition to cultural attention to fears about technology failure/dependence and foreign terrorism, the twenty-first century has been shaped

⁸⁷ James Cameron’s *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003), Steven Spielberg’s *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), Roland Emmerich’s *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), and Pixar’s animated film *Wall-E* (2008) are just a few of the big studio productions of tech-fail/post-apocalypse themed films produced during this time period.

⁸⁸ The hijackers weaponized four domestic, commercial airline flights by flying them into the buildings via suicide missions. The two that did the most damage were the planes that hit the World Trade Center buildings in New York City. The buildings, also referred to as the “twin towers,” were paragons of capitalism and global commerce. The final plane missed its last target (the White House) because the American passengers aboard the flight voted to fight back. The film *United 93* (2006) portrays how the passengers learned about the other simultaneous attacks and attempted to wrest control from the hijackers. They ultimately crashed in a field in Pennsylvania.

by a homegrown threat to American K-12 students, especially in high schools. The generation of students born at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the first to have their school experience shaped by the threat of mass-shootings. In April of 1999, two white male students carried out “one of the worst mass-shootings in U.S. history as well as one of the deadliest episodes of school violence,” resulting in the murder-suicide of fifteen classmates and teachers at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado (CNN Library). The incident spawned many copycat attacks and plots throughout the twenty-first century, and the threat has changed the way youth, teachers, parents, communities, and educators regard one another and create policies. The debate over gun-control has changed little in the way we govern gun accessibility, but metal detectors, random searches, police presence, and encouragement to report one another’s erratic behavior are now part of the prevention culture repertoire in American schools. Since both of the films I’ve selected for the final section depend on teenagers needing to kill others in order to survive, the Columbine legacy is an inescapably important part of the context.

The historic 2008 election of our first African American president, Barack Obama, ushered in many firsts, including The Affordable Care Act and the legalization of all gay marriages, but it also heightened factionalism into troubling divisions that look both regressive and transgressive in 2018. Meyer’s *Twilight* saga can be translated as a prescient backlash of the coming conservative assault on progressive policies that fundamentally change the “one man and one woman” concept of marriage. Lev Grossman and Bryan Alexander pointedly compare

Twilight fans, called “Twi-hards,” to the Beatlemania craze that drew legions of screaming, female teen fans to The Beatles just before the civil rights’ era, and argue that the *Twilight* craze looks like a photographic negative of that original picture fifty years later:

Beatlemania was a reaction to the buttoned-down, sexually repressed pop culture of the 1950s. *Twilight* is a reaction to the reaction--it’s a retreat from the hedonistic hookup culture that the sexual revolution begot. Nobody hooks up in *Twilight*. Meyer put sex back underground, transmuted it back into yearning, where it became, paradoxically, exponentially more powerful. (Grossman and Alexander)

Twilight’s iteration of defining the feminine for youth culture, then, turns away from the sexually exploitive marketing of 1990s pop stars like Britney Spears in short skirts and knee socks imitating Cher and her friends from *Clueless*. In its place, we find guarded virginity with a seductive benefit for those who choose to abstain: absolute loyalty and “safe” erotic foreplay. Sometimes dubbed “abstinence porn,” or to use *Time Magazine*’s more “PG” euphemism “the erotics of abstinence,” the books and film showcase pre-sexual romantic relationships until the final book (and film) and after the couple marries (Billson). *The Hunger Games* similarly features as yet unconsummated relationships between teens, though the protagonist’s desirability and desire are not what drive that narrative. In *Twilight*, the vampire moral center comes from a centuries’ old, preternaturally white patriarchal value system. Whereas *The Hunger Games* features a female protagonist as an agent of choice and action in her narrative, I agree with Kathleen Karlyn who posits that “*Twilight* teaches girls to live with unfulfilled desire” (125). As with all the pre-brides and independent heroines analyzed in previous decades in this dissertation, the

millennial version of the independent heroine gets to explore what she desires, while the pre-bride only shows how she is desired.

Twilight Plot & Production

Plot

Twilight disguises its marriage-plot paradigm by establishing protagonist Isabella “Bella” Swan (Kristen Stewart) as a character who is not motivated by attaining romantic love to begin her story. In the beginning, Bella knows how to drive, work, and make empathetic, mature decisions about her life. She decides to leave her mother Renée (Sarah Clarke) in Phoenix, Arizona, and move in with her father, Charlie Swan (Billy Burke), in Forks, Washington. Her decision to move is a willful sacrifice for the sake of her mother’s happiness because Renée wants to travel alongside her new husband, a minor league baseball player. Bella’s shift from urban desert to rural rain forest is one of several dramatic changes in her life. She has never spent more than a summer or a few weeks at a time with her father, who also happens to be the Chief of Police in Forks. She is a pretty young woman, but performing beauty through body display (clothes, makeup) is not part of her identity when she enters Forks’ High School. Though she gives advice to other friends to be independent after she arrives, Bella’s move also, ironically, shifts her role from independent to pre-bride when she enters her father’s realm, though it is unlike previous iterations in the past.

Instead of being relatively unnoticed in an enormous urban high school as she was in Phoenix, in the small town of Forks she is treated as if she is famous

when she arrives, ostensibly because they get so few new residents. Eric (Justin Chon), Mike (Michael Welch), Angela (Christian Serratos), and Jessica (Anna Kendrick) immediately welcome her at Forks High School, though she does not reciprocate their enthusiasm. Instead, she is intrigued by a boy named Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson), whom she first sees sitting with a group of “foster kids” that turn out to be the Cullen family of vampires. Besides Edward, the vampire “children” are Rosalie (Nikki Reed), Emmett (Kellan Lutz), Jasper (Jackson Rathbone), and Alice (Ashley Greene). They live on a unique vampire diet of animal (instead of human) blood with their vampire “parents,” Dr. Carlisle Cullen (Peter Facinelli), who works in the local hospital, and his wife Esme (Elizabeth Reaser). Most are all paired off as couples: the parents, Alice and Jasper, and Rosalie and Emmett. Edward, therefore, is the only single vampire among them, and he is Bella’s reluctant romantic double throughout the film and series. He is frozen at seventeen year of age, even though he has been alive for 104 years.

The main conflict of the story is the strong attraction and repulsion between Edward and Bella. They are instantly obsessed with one another upon first sight, even though they do not make contact or speak for weeks. His vampire powers enable him to read everyone’s mind, though, inexplicably, he cannot read hers. So, like everyone else in Forks, he is first intrigued by Bella simply because he does not have access to all of her thoughts. However, when she sits next to him in biology class the first day, he recoils, as if she smells terrible, and is overtly rude. Though plenty of people are eager to be her friends, this one snub preoccupies her. He

leaves abruptly for a week, and when he returns, he is much friendlier toward her, but says contradictory things like he is dangerous and that they shouldn't be friends. Shortly thereafter, he saves her from being smashed by a car and then from being gang raped. He tells her his secret and introduces her to his family. Rosalie, Edward's "sister," is the most resistant to Bella's presence, but isn't a true antagonist. Instead, as the Cullens and Bella play a game of baseball, we meet the film's designated antagonists.

The antagonists are rogue vampires who pass through Forks—James (Cam Gignadet), Laurent (Edi Gathegi), and Victoria (Rachelle Lefevre), who show up to play a friendly game of baseball with the Cullens but quickly become distracted by the presence of Bella, the human companion. Since Edward can read minds, he sees that James is intent upon hunting and killing Bella. Once Bella learns this, she announces that she is leaving Forks for good in order to save Charlie from also being killed, and the rogue vampires chase Bella down to Arizona, where they pretend to kidnap her mother. James then gets Bella on her own by tricking her into thinking she is saving her mother. He breaks her leg and bites her, but Edward eventually saves her. Although she has made it known that she wants to become a vampire before she is bitten, Edward sucks out the venom in time to prevent her transformation. Edward declares his love for her but refuses to turn her into a vampire. Her virginity and her human soul remain intact at his insistence, not hers. The film ends just as he takes her to prom at Forks with her leg in a cast, refusing to transform her.

Jacob Black (Taylor Lautner), a sixteen-year-old Native American boy who lives on Quileute reservation near Forks, is also introduced in the film. Charlie has been a longtime friend of Jacob's dad, Billy Black (Gil Birmingham). Jacob's role is much less important in this film, but his family of shape-shifting wolves is prominent in subsequent films and provides tension as Jacob also tries to position himself as a potential suitor to Bella.

***Twilight* Production**

Like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Twilight* was a book first. Unlike the non-fictional *Fast Times*, *Twilight* is the first part of a best-selling vampire fantasy fiction young adult series.⁸⁹ The books were written by Stephenie Meyer at age twenty-nine, a first-time author, stay-at-home mother and wife. Meyer was inspired to write *Twilight* after having a vivid dream of the two main characters in 2003. Her original draft actually had Bella and Edward get married at the end, *à la* "happily ever after." An editor helped change her mind. Meyer, an English literature major who graduated from Brigham Young University, directly cited authors Jane Austen, Shakespeare, and Charlotte Bronte as direct influences on crafting her novels for the series.⁹⁰ Despite the acclaimed classical influences, critics almost universally panned

⁸⁹ Little, Brown and Company published Meyer's series in quick succession: *Twilight* (2005), *New Moon* (2006), *Eclipse* (2007), and *Breaking Dawn* (2008). As of 2009, "Meyer [had] sold 45 million books in the U.S. and 40 million more worldwide. Altogether her books have spent 235 weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list, 136 of them at No. 1" (Grossman).

⁹⁰ Little, Brown published short interviews on Youtube.com with Meyer in 2008, leading up to the publication of *Breaking Dawn*. In the interview Meyer says that *Pride and Prejudice* was an influence on *Twilight*, Mr. Darcy on Edward and Elizabeth Bennett in Bella. *New Moon* "was closely tied to *Romeo and Juliet*," and *Eclipse* was her *Wuthering Heights* homage. *Breaking Dawn* had two influences: *Mid-Summer Night's Dream* and undisclosed. Published on youtube.com by "Little, Brown

the popular novels and films. Instead of focusing on her literary inadequacies, it is more useful to look at the cultural zeitgeist she tapped into with her teen vampire romance in the early years of the new millennium and the conservative additions she has brought to a pre-*bride* for the new age.

Meyer's influence on the films is replete, as she is also credited as co-screenwriter on all five of the *Twilight Saga* films.⁹¹ Meyer's fourth and final book of the series, *Breaking Dawn*, was published just a few months before the *Twilight* movie was released, which helped the marketing blitz orchestrated for the film by Summit Entertainment on multiple media fronts. The movie, rated PG-13 by the MPAA, opened on November 21, 2008, to weak reviews and sold out theaters. The fans pushed the film into record-breaking history, as its \$69 million domestic box-office take became the biggest opening at the time for a film directed by a woman, Catherine Hardwicke.⁹²

The script for *Twilight* was housed at Paramount Pictures first, but they let go of it in 2006, believing it was a "dud," (Barnes) and "in April 2006, ex-Paramount Vice Chairman Rob Friedman and his Summit production chief Eric Feig scooped up the property when it was put into turnaround by MTV Films" (A. Thompson). In 2007, Hardwicke was approached by Summit to direct it, though she said the

Young Readers" on June 11, 2008. "Stephenie Meyer Talks About *Breaking Dawn*" Accessed 19 Nov 2017. 3:18 clip.

⁹¹ The films were released consecutively from 2008-2012. The fourth book, *Breaking Dawn*, was split into two films released in 2011 and 2012.

⁹² *Wonder Woman* (2017), directed by Patty Jenkins, broke that record last year.

Paramount script presented an almost unrecognizable *Twilight* where Bella was a track star, the FBI was heavily involved, and it culminated in a jet-ski race down in Mexico (Grossman and Alexander). She hired Melissa Rosenberg to write a new script closer to the source material and sought input from Meyer. . “Summit gave Hardwicke 48 days and \$37 million to make *Twilight*,” which indicated their low confidence in translating the fan base into ticket sales, comparing it to the successful teen-literature series *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2005) that made only \$30 million (Grossman and Alexander). In an effort to gain exposure, Summit executed a multi-faceted campaign using new media tactics like a MySpace “teaser trailer,” an official *Twilight* movie website, and Comic-Con appearances by the cast, in addition to traditional press tours (D’Alessandro). All of these efforts are used regularly now, though Facebook and Twitter have replaced MySpace as prominent social networks for film promotions.

The grassroots campaign by Meyer herself also created a broad and personal relationship with fans. Hardwicke and Rosenberg consulted with her frequently about the film, and she won a few battles about casting and tone. One of her credited changes was insisting that they “tone down the [only] kissing scene” in *Twilight* because there were three more books to go through before the characters consummated a full physical relationship (Valby). Ten days before its release, there were over 350 fan websites dedicated to *Twilight*, and the official site boasted “more than eight million hits” (A. Thompson). Summit Entertainment had only secured enough funding to position them as a “big” studio in 2006, and *Twilight* was their

first big production. When questioned by Barnes, writing for the business section of *The New York Times* a few weeks before the film's release, Friedman was quoted as saying he thought *Twilight* was going to help create a brand for Summit Entertainment. When pressed on "exactly what brand" it presented, Friedman responded: "commercial" (Barnes).

The commercial brand was new for Catherine Hardwicke, as her résumé before *Twilight* consisted of directing edgier independent films featuring outsider teens including *Thirteen* (2003), *Lords of Dogtown* (2005), and *The Nativity Story* (2006).⁹³ Melissa Rosenberg's experience was mostly based in writing for television, though the range included both teen drama and horror (Rafferty).⁹⁴ Meyer's guidance about certain plot requirements, like sexual abstinence, helped insure its lower MPAA rating. The collaboration proved to be financially lucrative, even if the finished product is a less polished production than some of the subsequent films in the series. Hardwicke's instinct to stay close to the source material was astute, and her strong casting choices pleased an involved fan-base. Summit marketing head Nancy Kilpatrick said they took an "action movie" approach to the book in order to attract a larger audience: "We've essentially taken the marketing tactics from a superhero film and applied it to a female property" (qtd in D'Alessandro). The final

⁹³ Hardwicke spent fifteen years as a production designer before directing her first film. She was a PD for *Tapeheads* (1998), *Tank Girl* (1995), *Vanilla Sky* (2001), and *Laurel Canyon* (2002) (among many others) (*IMDB.com*).

⁹⁴ She wrote for the teen-based drama *Party of Five* (1994) and *Dexter* (2006), which centers on a "good" serial killer who also had to learn to control his murderous urges.

production shows this effort, and the sequels prove to be even more successful at integrating it. Though Rosenberg and Meyer wrote all of the screenplays for subsequent films, they cycled through three more male directors for the remaining four films.

In an interview before the film was released, Hardwicke said she attended several book-signings with Stephenie Meyer and got to see what a great diversity of fans there were in terms of age, race, gender, mainstream, and subculture, every crowd reflecting the richness of a diverse culture of domestic and international fans. She said she cast the film to reflect this diversity of the fans who loved the books (“The Partnership”). Her casting choices to include Asian and African-American secondary characters like Eric, Tyler, and Angela were distinctly different from their representation in the books.

The popularity of *Twilight*, then, dominates the story of its production, a film whose presence saturated malls, radio stations, and Internet media months before its release. The production was nevertheless constantly dogged by doubts about its ability to crossover from best-selling novels to film with its audience, though the signs of its coming success were much easier to read than *Titanic*’s. In November and December of 2008 alone, the stars were committed to being in “more than 50 magazine features, including *Vanity Fair*,” and Summit enlisted *MTV.com* even earlier, blasting ads, art, trailers, and clips for months, and even crashed the site when they posted the “first-look” photos from the set (Billson). The cast did not boast any well-known stars, and they had little say in the marketing blitz they were

committed to before the film's debut. The film's overexposure is often compared to that of *Titanic*, as they attracted similar audiences, but the stars themselves were subjected to having their images as these vampire characters put on everything from *Twilight* Band-Aids and mugs to clothing and bedding. *Twilight* opened in ten worldwide markets on November 21, 2008, and broadened in subsequent months. According to *The-Numbers.com*, its domestic gross was just over \$192 million, and its international take was just over \$209 million. A largely female audience drove *Twilight's* popularity. Summit Entertainment has been a top twenty Hollywood Studio ever since, though they have had few hits since the fifth film, *Breaking Dawn Part 2* (2012).

Twilight Narrative

Since this dissertation analyzes only the first film in the series and the complexities it offered in its 2008 context, some of the overarching themes may look incomplete. Still, Bella Swan completes a cycle of traditional pre-bride conventions with modern amendments in the first film. All the *Twilight* films value traditional gender roles, which equate feminine "goodness" with youthful beauty, modesty, abstinence, and domesticity. Bella's transformation from independent heroine to dependent pre-bride depends upon securing Edward's attention, and he reifies patriarchal ideology present during the early twentieth century. Her clothing, personal skills, studies, and even physical grace transform to more traditional ideas of femininity by the end of the series and also by the end of the first film.

Supernatural Teen Places: School, Home, The Woods, and Prom

Thematically, the film makes an argument that essentializes gender, human or otherworldly, and idealizes traditional roles for men and women. Bella's settings are typical to the American teen landscape. She is seen at home, in cars, shopping, in high school, and even at a prom. One of the unusual amendments in this narrative, besides the fantastical nature of vampire lore, is how much the story demands an investigation of the natural or non-manmade world. Manmade settings like high schools and strip-malls look worn-out and unappealing; forests and meadows look rich while promising intrigue and excitement. Bella's move from the big city desert of Phoenix to the lush, rural forests of Forks is also a symbolic move from urban values to the conservative ideals of small town America.

Although Bella's bedroom in her mom's house is never shown, the room she occupies in her father's house is more like a shrine her father created to memorialize Bella as a child. It is not a place of personal sanctuary or safety. She is barely in it for a few weeks before Edward secretly starts sneaking in to "watch over her" as she sleeps before she demands that he stay with her all the time. Her room does not afford her privacy or stand as a place for her personal expression. In this sense, it is not unlike Stacy Hamilton's room in *Fast Times*, which Stacy's mom has decorated and Stacy is also seen sneaking out of it. The disassociated nature of her room in *Twilight* incorporates her broken family structure, and the path leading out of unhappiness is not through independence but stability through the old pre-bride paradigm that idealizes her adult identity as a dependent.

Unlike other female teen protagonists analyzed in this dissertation, Bella already knows how to drive when the narrative begins, but Bella's mobility decreases as the narrative progresses. Her ability to choose where to go on her own, even deciding to live with her dad, marks her with maturity in the beginning, and driving a vehicle promotes her independence. The film then argues against this promotion by emphasizing how unhappy and uncomfortable she is in (and beside) her truck. She is almost killed while standing beside it, but Edward saves her. After this, she is increasingly given fewer opportunities to drive. When she drives away from Charlie's house in order to save him from being killed by James, Edward appears outside the driver's side window of her moving car and physically displaces her from the driver's seat, insisting that he drive. Edward carries her and drives her for the rest of the film. She literally stands on his feet, at his insistence, at the prom in order to dance "with" him. Her lack of mobility by the narrative's end reinforces the cultural shift from rewarding self-reliance as an independent young woman to "safety" as a pre-bride.

Protagonist (Isabella) Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart): The Irresistible Object

Bella Swan, like Mrs. Vixen or Mrs. Coaxer from *The Beggar's Opera*, is a character name meant to leave little to the imagination about what trait will dominate her character. She is pre-determined to transform from an "ugly duckling" into a "beautiful swan." When viewed within this frame, the narrative reassigns the meaning of "ugliness" and "beauty" in her representation. It also shows her transition from an active agent to a passive object. That is, the narrative

characterizes Bella's independence as the "ugly" beginning and rewards her transformation into her passive role as the desired object in the pre-bride paradigm.

Ostensibly this is Bella's story because she is the protagonist in charge of the voiceover, but after she meets Edward, she does not have any more conflicts she can overcome herself. In the beginning she is active: she carries a cactus across the country, drives herself to school, wears her own backpack, cooks her own food, and encourages other young women to "take control" because they are "strong and independent."⁹⁵ However, once she finally connects with Edward, she stops being the generator of action. He drives her, he carries her on his back, and he asks her to remain perfectly still when he kisses her. The montage that communicates their falling in love is made up of images of Bella watching Edward do things (he plays the piano; he talks while she listens; she rides on his back). Further, by the last scenes, she is not doing things she wants anymore, though she is in the company of the person she wants attention from. She doesn't want to go to prom to dance; she wants to become a vampire. He insists that she go to prom and since she stands on his feet, he dances for both of them. He refuses to make her a vampire, so she is denied the possibility to be equal with him on a fundamental level.

Like pre-brides Sam and Cher, the beginning of Bella's narrative shows that she possesses a kind of wizened self-awareness that seems active and critical. Her

⁹⁵ Bella tells Angela she is "strong and independent" during their outing at the La Push reservation, when Angela is lamenting that Eric won't ask her to the dance. Bella encourages her to ask him with feminist confidence.

choice to move across the country to live with her father is not done under duress; her willingness to go implies that she is not dependent on her mother, peers, or a romantic partner in order to feel secure. Her move is couched as self-sacrifice, but it also demonstrates bravery. Though her father gives her Billy's old truck, she had been prepared to help pay for a car, indicating that she may have had a job when she lived with her mother. She expects to take on household chores when she arrives at her father's house, including meal planning and grocery shopping. Stacy, from *Fast Times*, shared many of these traits; however, since Bella's beginning is positioned as "ugly," these traits are discarded in favor of ones that cultivate "prettier" values steeped in traditional, passive femininity instead of active independence.

Bella, like many pre-brides, begins her story exhibiting edgy or surly confidence around her peers, and must show she is discriminating as well as an object of desire. Bella, Sam, and Cher demonstrate their objective desirability by rejecting the affections of boys and men who don't know them personally. Just like Sam harshly rejects The Geek's affections on the bus or Cher heroically throws a young man off her at school, Bella systematically rejects Mike Newton, Eric, and Tyler. She uses Jacob to get information about Edward but does not work to win his affection. In addition, Bella fends off attention from some of her father's friends,⁹⁶

⁹⁶ At her father's favorite diner, the waitress Cora (Ayanna Berkshire) remarks that Bella is grown-up and beautiful just as a man named Waylon (Ned Bellamy) walks up to their table and addresses Bella by name, asking her if she remembers him because he "played Santa one year." Charlie reminds him that she was only four, but Waylon, who is leering at Bella, says "yeah, but I bet I made an impression." The waitress physically pushes Waylon away with a mild joking manner, but this odd interaction is another example of how the narrative is trying to show how attractive Bella is, while also emphasizing how dangerous it is for her to be around men without a guardian or protector.

the would-be rapist gang, and eventually the villain, James, who wants literally to devour her.

Where Sam and Cher were overt and rude about rejecting admirers, Bella's amendment to the modern pre-bride paradigm brings back modesty and polite behavior but presents modesty as a feminist choice. The narrative positions Bella above her new female classmates who reveal their desire for the attention of the same young men she politely rejects. Bella has power because she is desired and *doesn't* need the attention. When her classmates shop for prom dresses, Bella comes but makes it clear that she is disinterested in such frivolities. While Jessica and Angela express delight while wearing revealing dresses in front of the mirror, Bella excuses herself to go find a bookstore instead. This moment is a good example of how "feminist" representations slip between arguments. If the film were interested in supporting Bella's intellectual development and is unconcerned with body presentation (à la *Clueless*), then this scene is evidence of growth, and her contrast to the two girls giggling in revealing dresses holds a higher moral position. However, the text undermines this reading because 1) This is part of Bella's set-up as an "ugly" independent heroine; 2) going to the bookstore *alone* is considered threatening as a gang of men plan to rape her before Edward comes to save her; and 3) as an aspiring pre-bride, her refusal to participate in prom is not translated as a feminist rejection of an exploitive culture but a conservative argument for traditional feminine modesty. Because the rest of the film series is hyper-focused on abstinence, and Edward's denial of her sexual interest for her own good, it changes the way Angela

and Jessica's access to their own desires are interpreted. *Twilight* transmutes how a feminist "choice" can reframe how an independent nature might just mean a stubborn one that lacks critical thinking. Even after she has been tortured and maimed in the course of trying to be with Edward, her unswerving loyalty and determination to stay on her chosen path is placed above everything else. Even though she says "it is [her] choice" when Edward asks her if "eternal damnation" is what she really wants, this claim is really a misnomer. Edward is the one who is conflicted, and he is the one who possesses the choice about her future.

The narrative also shows how unhappy Bella is as a child in a divorced family. She lacks meaningful relationships with other women, and (like Sam) pines for a young man she doesn't speak to. She lacks the charm and humor that softened some of Sam's arrogance, but *Twilight* focuses on her selflessness and/or self-deprecation as her appealing moral center, which is actually a refashioning of the values associated with young women ascribing to the cult of true womanhood. For example, instead of looking at her ability to cook as a badge of her independence, by the end of her transformation, it looks more like her desire to take up a nurturing role. Further, Edward insists that she remain a virgin, and since she has never dated, the narrative upholds her purity under the guidance of male keeper. The vegetarian vampirism connects to religious piety, and Bella's abandonment of her studies in favor of finding a place in Edward's life fulfills the turn away from intellectual pursuits that would enable her to professionalize. Finally, submissiveness underlies all of her motivations, as she effectively changes everything in her life in order to

become Edward's partner. She is obedient to self-sacrifice. She is willing to die in order to protect Edward's secret and her parents, whom she believes she has to protect because they failed her morally, and she accepts Edward's commandment about waiting until marriage to have sex, even though it is not what she wants.

Secondary Characters

Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson)

“What if I’m the bad guy?”

Edward's character is defined by more than one kind of abstinence, which is atypical for depictions of young American men in films featuring teens. Instead of pursuing pleasure, Edward, the 104-year-old vampire frozen at the age of seventeen, is a sullen, tortured lad who is preoccupied with morality that is empowered by denial. He hates what he is and feels conflicted about being attracted to Bella (in more than one way). His lines of dialogue often negate, deny, or contradict what Bella says and wants, usually from the perspective that whatever he declares is for her own good. Whether she remarks that his eye color changes or that he stopped a car from crushing her to death, he tells her that she is wrong or confused, and that no one will believe her. Instead of being the “strong, independent” woman she encouraged Angela to be, she doesn't fight for her perspective. Like a victim of domestic abuse, she reassures him that she won't tell anyone. When he tells her he can read everyone's mind but hers, she asks if there is something “wrong” with her mind. Edward finds this charming, but it does not resolve his goal to be free from desire. The obstacles to overcome are trials for

Edward, not Bella, and by the end of the first film, he has successfully stopped her from becoming his equal.

Since this film lacks the first-person perspective Bella has in the books, much of the couple's attraction is communicated through cinematic style instead. The appealing traits Edward possesses in the book come from a savvy sense of humor and artful flirtation rather than just the wooden chivalry of Edward's words in the film. Edward often vacillates between anger and depression, pointing out how dangerous he is and emphasizing his unhappy and awkward demeanor in manmade settings. His strangled lines and strange glances do communicate a disconnected, modern teen affect, even as he is supposed to be projecting the speech and gestures that belong to early 20th century American masculinity. When they finally speak in Biology class, one of the first things Edward says to Bella is "Ladies first"⁹⁷ (to use the microscope), which underscores his very old age and chivalrous ideology. He is in the powerful position that rewards gentlemanly waiting.

In place of intimacy, the film offers grand gestures of physical strength to demonstrate his masculine goodness. In this sense, he embodies the loner comic-book hero with a masked identity who lurks in the shadows until called into action. He can bat cars away like Superman, jump from tree to tree like Spiderman, and

⁹⁷ This phrase (and concept) is also used in *Titanic* (1997) and *The Hunger Games* (2012) in literal and ironic ways, but "ladies first" connotes a system of etiquette for a compensatory form of deference "accorded [to] women who were increasingly deprived of power in the political and economic realms" in nineteenth century America (Hemphill).

surprise predators in a dark alley by showing up to fight like Batman. For two reasons, though, the comic-book hero trope doesn't fit Edward. First, he is not interested in being a hero to a whole community but just one girl; and, second, his species survives on drinking human blood. He "saves" her, but also puts her in constant danger.

Edward's sexual abstinence looks much different than Jack Dawson's in *Titanic*. Where Jack luxuriates in Rose's beauty when she poses naked for him, Edward is tortured by his desire for Bella. The text goes out of its way to show how difficult all of this is for Edward. His objection to her advances is that he might accidentally kill her, which, ironically, puts Bella in the position of being the rejected sexual aggressor in the relationship. Instead of discovering her sexuality on her road to independence, she eventually learns only that Edward believes her soul will not remain whole if she has sex before marriage. As Manohla Darghis pointed out in her *NY Times* review, Stephenie Meyer suggests that sex is worse than death for teenagers, and when Bella tries to engage, "Edward recoils from her like a distraught Victorian" (Darghis). While the vampire metaphor is predicated on sexual desire, Meyer nevertheless gave the higher moral position and agency to the male vampire instead of her female protagonist.

Chief Charlie Swan (Billy Burke): The Lost Father

The film positions Bella's dad as a model for modern, broken, white masculinity. His life is defined by failures, and the narrative invites pity for him. He is denied the ability to truly play the role of Bella's father most of her life; she even

calls him “Charlie” instead of “Dad.” She does not seek his wisdom or counsel about her life. His symbol of strength as the chief of police is undercut by the fact that neither his guns nor his training can protect her or himself. His solitary life communicates his powerlessness and emasculation, as he lives in the unchanged house Renée left him in. In Charlie’s house, Bella’s domestic maturity translates the same way Cher’s does in *Clueless*: as wife-like domestic partner instead of as a daughter. Bella cooks for him and looks after him much more than he does for her, though her dedication to Edward quickly replaces her role as his daughter. Edward will change her at a molecular level and lead her to cultivate traditional femininity. Whereas Bella’s father can only provide her with an old, used, masculine pick-up truck, Edward literally carries her on his back and drives her around in luxury cars. Edward and her father both possess strength and sincerity, but Charlie garners more pity than adoration. Bella puts herself in harm’s way to protect her father and Edward’s family secret. The opening of the film selects the exact lines from Meyer’s prologue in *Twilight* that idealize self-sacrifice: “To die in the place of someone you love” is supposed to sound heroic, but that opportunity doesn’t exist for Charlie.

Vampire Family

Carlisle Cullen embodies a kind of idealized, white masculinity no longer available to his modern human counterparts, which guarantees his unquestioned position of head of the family from which he receives superior financial, social, and familial validation because of the traditional patriarchal order. His family reveres him like a God, and he, in turn, acts selflessly, tirelessly, and patiently to support

them. He is the “forever” father figure whose wife is completely devoted to him, and his “children” respect and accept his personal philosophy for living without resistance. Only Rosalie presents any opposition to Bella’s inclusion in the clan, but that conflict remains underdeveloped, so her aggression toward Bella looks more like an old pre-bride paradigm that defaults to reasons of “female” jealousy or competition for attention.

Even though Edward and the other “children” are about 100 years old, they do not seek independent lives, even as married couples, but choose to remain frozen in their roles as children. Carlisle’s preferred position as father/God is emphasized by the fact that he chooses to make Edward his “companion” first, even before he takes his wife Esme. Part of Carlisle’s strength and moral character spring from this choice, as a “vegetarian” vampire, to become a doctor for humans. His supernatural strength seems to be his complete lack of temptation to drink human blood, which is fundamental to vampires. Bella’s attraction to Edward includes a desire for total immersion into his family at a molecular level. She wants to transform into what Edward is, but what he is comes from is directed by his supernatural father. In the books Carlisle is depicted as living perfection, whereas Edward is crippled by his own perceived weaknesses. Bella’s human life includes a mother who acts like a teenager and a broken father she mostly mothers. The film’s romantic appeal for vampirism isn’t based solely on Edward; it includes a patriarchal structure whose access to power and resources far surpass the human ones.

Antagonists: The Undead, The Bitchy, and The Abstinent

Three sources of conflict obstruct Bella in the film: the vampire who vows to kill her, the “mean girl” at school, and Edward’s moral code. The nomadic vampire called James is ostensibly the main antagonist, along with his “gang” of human blood drinkers Victoria and Laurent. Short scenes allude to the gruesome murders James, Victoria, and Laurent commit near Forks in the first half of the film, but their relationships as antagonists aren’t well developed. James embodies the older filmic model of violent American masculinity, where a man “is he who acts—and kills—without a moment’s thought” (Mellen 9). Similarly, James and his gang kill without conscience (they have red eyes, whereas the Cullens have “yellow” eyes because of their animal blood diet), and they are forced to move continuously because they prey on human beings. The nomadic vampires function similar to what Mellen calls the “marauding savage”⁹⁸ villain stereotype in Westerns. They provide a foil for the Cullens, who use justified violence, drawing on a higher moral code. Like the heroes of many Westerns, the Cullens are what Mellen calls “virtuous victims acting in self-defense” (Mellen 11). After James meets Bella, he is determined to devour her, and his chase generates most of the action during the last third of the film. Ultimately, Bella is attacked by James, but Edward saves her. The Cullens violently destroy James to save Bella’s life.

⁹⁸ Mellen notes that “Indians” were often the stereotyped villain in Westerns: they were dehumanized and portrayed as vicious (11). Similarly, James and his gang drink human blood (they have red eyes, whereas Cullens have “yellow” eyes because of their animal blood diet), and they are forced to move continuously because they prey on human beings.

The pre-bride model is one that demonstrates competition for male attention, therefore inhibiting many female friendships as a result. Jessica is another kind of antagonist, the “friend” who is friendly to Bella as long as she doesn’t feel threatened by competition for attention. She is nicer, happier, and less aggressive than Rosalie, but her relationship with Bella is nevertheless tenuous. Jessica is more overt about wanting attention from young men, similar to Amber from *Clueless*. She is jealous when she sees Bella resisting attention and provides the contrast to reinforce Bella’s modesty as the good virtue. When they sit down for lunch, Eric, Mike, and Tyler all try to talk to Bella; Tyler kisses her on the cheek; Eric pats her; Mike calls her “Baby”; and Eric protects Bella when Angela tries to photograph her. Jessica speaks with jealousy, then, when she looks at Bella and says, “It’s like first grade all over again. You’re the shiny new toy.” In place of friendship and empathy, Jessica treats Bella as a competitor and dehumanizes her.

The film’s main conflict, however, lies primarily within Edward. Bella never wavers in loyalty or dedication to Edward from the start, so she has no conflict to overcome. He is attracted to Bella in more than one way, and he tries to resist being around her for “her own good,” but ultimately fails to stay away. He wins part of the conflict by resisting her sexual interest. Since Edward has decades of experience as a repressed virgin, the anger he feels about attraction to this one human being is big. He is attracted to her scent of her blood, but the erotic translation is hard to miss.

Though Jacob is positioned as a possible love interest of Bella’s, there is little evidence to show she sees him as anything more than the son of her father’s friend.

The Quileute tribe storyline is not really developed in this film, but it is established that the Native American tribe and the Cullens are “natural enemies.” Jacob looms as a potential threat to Edward, not Bella. The fans made much ado about “Team Edward” and “Team Jacob” before the films and after them, but the narrative rarely swerves away from Bella’s desire to be completely consumed by Edward from the moment she meets him.

Cinematic Style: Blue Filters, Yellow Eyes, and Swirling Pan Shots

In addition to operating on a (relatively) low budget for a high fantasy commercial film, *Twilight*’s transfer to the screen had to contend with intense attention to character loyalty from the books by including Meyer as a consultant. Unlike James Cameron’s historic budget that helped him sink a *Titanic* replica to create the illusion of disaster, Hardwicke struggled with minor things like having enough money to create the illusion of ice for the near-miss car crash or producing believable special effects such as depicting a vampire with “diamond” skin (*Twilight* DVD Commentary). As a result, the style sometimes looks uneven and occasionally disrupts narrative elements by drawing attention to awkward elements of mise-en-scene, breaking the illusion. Despite the weaknesses, the style still helped communicate the appeal of convincing a modern young woman to abandon her pursuit of independent self-discovery in exchange for the regressive role of pre-bride.

The film is charged with making Edward’s supernatural family look more appealing than Bella’s human one, and *Twilight* relies heavily on style to do this. The

Cullens fundamentally lack warmth but are surrounded by luxury in the natural and material world. The Cullens are often featured in lush, exclusive landscapes that are quite impossible for humans to reach, such as the scene in which Edward and Bella chat casually in treetops on a mountain cliff. They possess expensive cars and clothing and live in a custom-built luxury home “where they don’t have to hide” because they have enough wealth to possess an enormous swath of land around it. These elements of style must combat the inhuman look of their over-whitened skin makeup and yellow colored contacts, which make them appear a bit alien on screen. Many scenes were shot with a blue filter, like the interior shot in Figure 21 and the exterior shot in Figure 22, which works against the dynamism generated by contrasts. In effect, a kind of bland homogeneity makes Edward’s family look bizarrely similar, as they are often dressed in white and light blue. Their white skin isn’t much different from the overcast sky, the grey buildings, or streets. Charlie’s and Jacob’s ruddy warmth look much more appealing than Carlisle or Edward’s bleached appearance and demeanor, even though the story conveys the opposite.

Mise-en-Scene: Appealing Undead

Twilight’s cinematic style had to make a supernatural family look more appealing than a human one with a visually flat color palette set by Stephenie Meyer in the books. It’s hard to make the argument that no one but Bella would recognize how different the Cullens look next to regular human beings as the film presented them. Unlike the night-dwelling, dark attire of traditional vampires created by John Polidori, Bram Stoker, and Anne Rice, Meyer’s vampires wear white pants, hats, and

light blue outerwear during the day. In an interview on the bonus material DVD distributed by Summit, Meyer said she fought to “protect” certain elements of the book and having the vampires wear “light colors” was a sticking point for her (“The Partnership”). Between the covers of a book, the bright new vampire illusion was compelling to millions of readers, and Meyer said Hardwicke “had her back” by sharing her wardrobe vision for the vampires as “ice” too (“A Conversation with Stephenie Meyer”). On screen, the visual effect of extra white skin and yellow eyes accompanied by light blue and white clothes made the vampires look washed out or sickly as opposed to “dazzling.” Instead of blending in as human in Figure 23, Rosalie and Emmett look conspicuous amongst their high school peers in the lunchroom. Hardwicke had better success communicating a romantic view of vampires in outside landscape settings. This romantic view also includes the more problematic reading that equates essential nature with traditional gender roles, which is part of the older vampire and/or werewolf paradigm as well.

Props

When Bella first appears on screen in Figure 24, she is holding a small, potted cactus close to her chest with her eyes closed. The cactus is the transition prop she carries from her mom’s house in the Arizona desert to her father’s house in the rainy northwest of Washington State. It is not an object of tenderness or love, but a reminder of a living organism that can survive on limited nourishment. Edward and Bella are both defined by their restricted nourishment as well. The cactus emphasizes Bella’s position as a child of divorce and neglect, and her need to keep

people at a distance. Edward tells Bella that he and his family have trained themselves to resist their dominant thirst for human blood by drinking from animals instead. He tells her that her blood is particularly appealing, so the challenge to stop himself from killing her is more challenging than normal. The *Twilight* books, jokingly referred to as “abstinence porn,” are known for their denial of sexual gratification, and the cactus, with its defensive needles protecting its precious life-force within it, helps visualize Bella’s eventual dedication to restraint at Edward’s behest.

Additional props that act as protective “needles” to guard her personal space are white iPod headphones she wears as a social barrier. When Tyler throws something at her to get her attention while she is wearing the headphones, she lifts the book in her hands and shrugs at him. The earbuds and the book are both props used to deflect unwanted attention from everyone. She’s even wearing them when Tyler’s van is about to crush her. She takes them out only after Edward saves her, and they do not then reappear for the rest of the film.

The vampires stand out from the rest of the students because they wear so much white and their hair is highly stylized, but they also seem out of place among the other students because they don’t carry backpacks or school supplies, as almost all the student extras milling around them do. Rosalie and Alice both have purses in school at different points, but never books or pencils. Their lack of school props contradicts the notion that the vampires are trying to blend in so their family can

stay in the area longer, in addition to making them seem and look older and/or out of place.

Costumes and Makeup: Remaking Ugly and Beautiful

Bella's costumes, more than other aspects of mise-en-scene, document her transformation from ugly duckling to swan, showing her transformation from less gender-defined clothing to traditionally feminine clothing alongside her devolution from independence to dependence. She begins school at Forks wearing a unisex sandstone-colored Carhartt⁹⁹ jacket, which is one of several "protective" layers she dons in school, frequently in muted greens, greys, and browns. She, her father, Billy, and Jacob all wear flannels, a traditional pattern of the American Northwest working class, as well as a nod to grunge culture. Men and women both wear them. The plaid shirt and ponytail she wears in Figure 25 factor into her uglier, independent representation ahead of her transformation into more traditional femininity by the end of the film.

In addition to wearing only pants or jeans, Bella frequently wears a long-sleeve shirt underneath short-sleeve shirts that are partially or completely buttoned, like the masculine green bowling shirt she wears over a long-sleeve grey shirt on the first day of school. Her layered style most resembles Stacy Hamilton's in *Fast Times*, whose costumes also de-emphasized gender difference through multiple

⁹⁹ An American brand of jacket created in the 19th Century for working-class men in factory/industry jobs. The sandstone color and boxy style that Bella wears is the classic style they still sell today. The brand is associated with "toughness" because of their durable canvas materials and the difficult manual labor jobs of the men who wear them. Carhartt carries a women's line, but it is fair to say the brand is still heavily associated with a working-class man's "style."

layers and bulky apparel. In contrast, her classmate Jessica wears a bright pink tank-top to school that shows off her cleavage, and when Jessica and Angela invite Bella to try on dresses in Port Angeles, the girls show off their bodies in the store window, getting attention from boys passing on the street. In Figure 26, the girls contrast to Bella, still in her multiple layers and jeans, who looks down instead of at them. Even being all covered up, Bella is still chosen as the would-be victim of a gang rape, but Edward saves her. Bella doesn't wear any bright colors or anything feminine until Edward insists on it, when he makes her attend prom at the end of the film.

The film ends at the prom, where Bella's transformation from independent heroine to pre-bride mirrors the endings of both *Sixteen Candles* and *Clueless*. Though Sam and Cher are actually bridesmaids, Bella's prom outfit performs the same social function as bride practice.¹⁰⁰ Bella's sapphire blue prom dress, seen in Figure 27, is a dress she said she borrowed from Edward's sister Alice, who is helping Edward teach Bella practice traditional femininity.¹⁰¹ The plunging neckline is fastened by a halter-top tie at the back of her neck, leaving half of her back uncovered. This is Bella Swan transformed. When Charlie tells her she looks

¹⁰⁰ The portmanteau "promposal" comes from the current trend among U.S. teens and elaborate prom proposals. The term entered the media lexicon around 2001, and was practiced long before Facebook allowed high school students on the platform (2006) or Twitter was invented (2007), as evidenced by thousands of uploaded "promposal" videos to *YouTube.com* before then (Dewey). The promposal phenomenon fits in well with the progression of pre-bride regression: reinforced gender roles (the boys ask (active); the girls wait to be selected (passive)). It mimics the emotional weight of a proposal for marriage (not just a dance, but a permanent connection). The spectacle (Dewey cites rose petals, rings, songs, cakes, confetti) makes the proposal a public affair, enlisting positive reinforcement from the community.

¹⁰¹ In the book, Alice also lends Bella a stiletto heel for her uninjured leg, which Edward remarks that he needs to "thank" Alice for later. The film gives Bella back a little bit of her grungy style by giving her a tennis shoe to wear instead.

beautiful, she pats him and says, “See ya,” but isn’t looking for his approval anymore. Charlie is not the one who insists that she “cover up,” like Cher’s dad did when she was wearing a skimpy dress: Edward is. When they get to the dance, her shoulders are still uncovered when she exits the car and sits on a bench while Edward parks. Jacob pops out from behind some trees and politely asks her to leave Edward, at his father’s request. It is only after she has the conversation with Jacob that Edward covers Bella’s shoulders with the matronly, ivory cardigan. Bella doesn’t take the heavy sweater off for the rest of the prom, even when they are inside at the dance. The bright sweater, seen in Figure 28, looks conspicuous on Bella inside the dimly lit dance, where every other teenage girl around her is showing her bare arms, shoulder, and back. Instead of reinforcing empowerment like she did for Angela when she encouraged her “to take charge” in the beginning of the film, Bella now stands in for piety and submission. We see her communicate non-verbally with Jessica, specifically pointing to her cleavage, and miming that it is too revealing. Jessica joyfully mouths the words, “I know, right?” while embracing the display of her body in her hot pink dress. Bella turns away shaking her head in disapproval, providing a little more insight into her transformation that applauds modesty and accepts chastity as a moral imperative. The film ends with a kiss and an embrace in Figure 29, exactly like pre-brides Sam and Cher ended their narratives decades before.

Cinematography & Editing: Still Characters and Moving Cameras

In his review of *Twilight* in 2008, Roger Ebert summarized that *Twilight* “is really about a teenage boy trying to practice abstinence, and how, in the heat of the moment, it’s really really hard [to do]” (“Review of *Twilight*”). He pinpoints the problem underlying the entire story: Bella isn’t a complex subject; she’s an irresistible object. She may have started with subjectivity, but it dissolves once she sees Edward. Her path of unswerving devotion seems almost religious, like that of a devoted follower to a charismatic guru. She is never in conflict about her desire, even when it leads to her own harm. This actually makes Edward the dynamic actor in her story, while she becomes the passive object. The narrative follows logically from an object’s narrowly defined point of view, which doesn’t always make sense. Bella never questions or doubts what she wants once she merely sees Edward, even when he is inexplicably rude and angry when they meet. The object’s perspective is rather empty and distant because it has only one dimension. Hardwicke tries to manufacture the emotional connection between Bella and Edward through camera movement, editing, and framing because verbal so intimacy is lacking in *Twilight*.

Even though Bella declares through voiceover that she is “unconditionally and irrevocably in love” with Edward Cullen, there is very little intimate communication between them before then, so attraction must be communicated primarily through camerawork. For instance, Hardwicke uses subjective POV shots with close-up framing on Edward and Bella’s heads to signify attraction between them during science class and at the restaurant. Figure 30 and Figure 31 are frame

captures taken from the first scene where Bella and Edward speak in science class. The shot/reverse shot editing brings the audience in closer to experience a more intimate space between the two characters, while the tight framing heightens the emotion, regardless of the dialogue (they are talking about the weather during these shots).

Hardwicke also creates energy through continuous camera movement in several montage sequences, even though the two characters are often posed in stiff positions or dangerous locations. Instead of watching the couple kiss at one point, Hardwicke employs a montage that begins by tilting the camera up past their heads and into the trees. Edward and Bella lie next to each other on the forest floor, completely still and saying nothing while they stare at one another. The camera performs acrobatics around the unmoving couple. A series of shots as shown in Figures 32, 33, and 34 consists of dolly movement toward them on the ground or 360 degree swooping crane shots around them, and ends with a bird's eye view that moves away from them to an extreme long shot from the tree tops. They do not appear to talk or move.

The montages also emphasize Bella's shift into passivity. Edward specifically tells Bella not to trust him; he admits that he has killed people as a vampire and that he wanted to kill her. He runs around her while she stands still and throws a tree by her. Hardwicke employs either aerial or large crane shots to film how Edward generates action outside, like hauling Bella on his back up an enormous conifer tree or talking while Bella listens in a precarious treetop, as shown in Figure 35.

Hardwicke repeats the technique in interior shots as well, including canted angle tracking shots around Edward as he plays the piano. The montage shows Bella lying on the couch while he plays or sitting still next to him on the piano bench. The montages span two days and one night, just before Bella has to flee to Arizona. Though many of these scenes feature stillness for both characters at times, if there is action, it is Edward who is moving. The overall effect underscores Bella's position as a passive object.

Music

The official soundtrack for *Twilight* was released on November 3, 2008, and when the film debuted three weeks later, the album was number one on the *Billboard* music chart before fans had even entered the theatre.¹⁰² Alexandra Patsavas, music supervisor for the film, selected a group of songs mostly deemed “alternative rock” by the industry, the genre of music that replaced grunge rock and became mainstream during the 1990s (even though it is called “alternative”). “Alternative Rock” carries with it the air of edginess that “regular” pop music supposedly lacks, but the lines demarcating the two are indeterminate. Patsavas has gone on to supervise numerous teen-oriented soundtracks for both film and television,¹⁰³ though she herself is not a musician or film director. Instead, she cites

¹⁰² According to *Billboard Magazine*, the album sold 165,000 copies during its first week of release (Hasty).

¹⁰³ Before she supervised *Twilight*, she gained acclaim for her music choices on *The O.C.* (2005-2007) (about wealthy teens in Orange County, California), and supervised the rest of the *Twilight Saga* film series with great success. *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (2013), and *Riverdale* (2017) are some of her other teen-oriented projects.

John Hughes specifically as her inspiration and influence on choosing songs for filmic images (landoli). Bearing in mind that Hughes' brand of 1980s nostalgia also contains residual ideals for regressive pre-brides in marriage plot narratives, it is possible to see these connections in the music chosen for the *Twilight* soundtrack in songs like Paramore's "Decode" that influenced fans before the film debuted, as well as "Flightless Bird, American Mouth" by Iron & Wine that closes the film.

Paramore's song "Decode" stands out from the album as the most successful single¹⁰⁴ and significantly contributed to the film's initial success because their video, which was released on MTV and Stephenie Meyer's personal website a day before the soundtrack was in stores, featured several clips from the film. The video features the young band, all wearing black, playing their instruments and singing in dark, "Twilight" woods. Lead singer and co-songwriter Hayley Williams' powerhouse vocals combined with prominent electric guitars, a slower tempo, and a B-minor key signature evokes a dark or heavy rock sound. The song is not featured during the film itself (it is the third song over the end credits), but the four-minute music video¹⁰⁵ undoubtedly had an effect on fans' expectations for mood and emotion before going into the theatre. In some ways, the video does a better job of establishing the dramatic tension of the opposing sides—the bad vampires versus

¹⁰⁴ The song charted for two years, peaking at number five in January of 2009, and eventually sold over one million copies in 2010 (according to Paramore's "Chart History" listed on *Billboard.com*). "Decode" was also nominated for Best Song Written for a Motion Picture, Television or Other Visual Media at the 52nd Annual Grammy Awards in 2010, though it did not win.

¹⁰⁵ As of January 21, 2018, the video's "official" *Youtube.com* listing has been viewed over 217 million times.

the young lovers—than the film does. The video introduces James and Victoria almost immediately, menacing and violent, and contrasts them with the (unrelated) scene where the heroic Edward saves Bella from being crushed by Tyler’s van. In an instant, the sides are established, and, as Williams’ voice is singing about “taking sides,” and the threat is clearly not Edward. The end of the video skips to the end of the film at Prom, when Edward dips Bella’s head back, mimicking the classic, erotic vampire tactic of exposing the neck of his victim before biting her as Williams sings, “There is something I see in you/It might kill me/But I want it to be true” (H. Williams, et. al.). This conveys the excitement and danger Bella is in, as opposed to the film’s version, which features the song Stewart chose, Iron & Wine’s “Flightless Bird, American Mouth” instead.

The seventeen-year-old Kristen Stewart is credited with bringing “Flightless Bird” to the soundtrack. The indie song on its own could be interpreted as the loss of the American Dream, perhaps, or of boyhood innocence. Unlike “Decode,” the Iron & Wine song is wispy, drowsy, and unplugged. The lyrics are hard to decipher, but the ones that come through in the slow dance scene complement Bella’s helplessness and dependence. For example, as singer and songwriter Samuel Ervin Beam’s falsetto croons “I cut my long baby hair,” Edward is lifting Bella onto his feet like a child, so he can make her dance with him, dependent on his feet alone to make them mobile. She has lost her agency. They talk over the next verse, but the lyrics are centered again as Beam’s voice sings “Have I found you, flightless bird?” and it reinforces a sense of loss related to injury or potential. Finally, the scene that was

dramatic and erotic in the “Decode” video has a much different tone in the film. Bella declares that she wants to be with Edward forever and complains that every minute he doesn’t make her a vampire is another minute she is dying. This angers him, and as he touches her face again, the lyric “flightless bird” comes through before he dips her back to the words “grounded, bleeding/or lost you,” and as Beam sings “American mouth,” Edward kisses her neck but stops as he asks, “Isn’t it enough to have a long, happy life with me?” Bella demonstrates the friction between ideologies here, between the song, the dress, her desires, and her dancing partner: he claims that becoming “like him” is monstrous, but she says it is her “choice” to dream about being with him forever. In order to be powerful, she must be found as a flightless bird who needs to be transformed by a man more powerful than her own father. Edward has the confidence and power to reinforce her need for modesty, duty, and family unity.

Bella is a contemporary pre-bride remixed to match the era’s social context that demands a declaration for gender equality in portraits of women in our stories, though the culture does not support equality for real women economically or in leadership and familial positions. In other words, journalists, pundits, politicians, and Hollywood executives understand what words they need to use in order to telegraph equality, but white, patriarchal hegemonies are still the norm.¹⁰⁶ The

¹⁰⁶ In 2017, the 115th U.S. congress is comprised of 81% men, while the U.S. population is slightly more than 50% female (Levy 4). In 2012, *The L.A. Times* reported these member statistics on The

women who created, wrote, acted, and directed Bella's character address the paradox I characterized in this chapter. The three-disc, deluxe edition of the *Twilight* DVD published by Summit in 2009 features interviews conducted before *Twilight* was released in 2008 with the writers, the director, and the actress who plays Bella, and they all describe her in a way that suggests she is a strong and positive character. Author Stephenie Meyer describes Bella as a "brave and strong" character, while screenwriter Melissa Rosenberg submits that Bella's courage and strength come through in ways that "are not written" ("Becoming Bella"). Director Hardwicke describes Bella as "already self-sufficient," and actress Kristen Stewart says the character she plays starts off as a "bored, directionless....damsel in distress" ("Becoming Bella"). The director and actress interpret Bella's entry so differently: is Bella a distressed damsel, or is she "already self-sufficient?" Hardwicke is right that Bella starts off "self-sufficient," but she does not add that she doesn't end that way; Stewart's insight is more accurate. The pre-bride character is bored and lost until she finds a purpose, and, to that end, she is rescued from her "boring" self-sufficiency. Dominant culture knows that contemporary audiences don't want to see bored damsels who need to be rescued but strong, brave, self-sufficient, courageous heroines who achieve growth through positive choices. The pre-bride paradigm

Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences: 94% Caucasian, 77% male, and 86% over the age of 50 (Horn et. al.). The disgraced movie mogul Harvey Weinstein, now synonymous with spurring a national movement for women to speak out about sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse, has caused the downfall of multiple men abusing their positions of power toward underrepresented women in every industry across the country (large and small).

borrowed what it needs from feminism long enough to create a shell that looks progressive before it undercuts it with the same old stereotypes that just positively reinforce her position as a dependent in a patriarchal hegemony. None of the women who helped create the image of Bella in *Twilight* thinks of her as a passive object who abandons her individual sense of self in order to become the pre-bride of Edward's eye, but that is indeed what happens.¹⁰⁷

Section II: Katniss Everdeen: Heroic Sixteen in *The Hunger Games*

The last film in this analysis is the one that inspired my investigation of female teen characters over the past thirty years in commercial films. By all accounts, *The Hunger Games* (2012) and its subsequent sequels were enormous financial and critical successes. The fact that the franchise features a female heroine, flawed but strong, arrogant but likable, skilled but not supernatural, and valued by her friends, family, and larger community for her courage is most revolutionary. *The Hunger Games* provides strong evidence of the cultural demand and acceptance of a teen female protagonist in a new paradigm.

¹⁰⁷ In the final film, Bella refuses to give up a child that will literally rip her body apart as she gives birth to it, a kind of pro-life horror ad for the next generation, as contemporary legislative bodies chip away at reproductive rights, including the fight over phrases like "to save the life of the mother" as not being a legitimate reason to legally obtain an abortion.

The Hunger Games Plot and Production: “Panem et Circenses”¹⁰⁸

Plot

The Hunger Games is a dystopian, gladiatorial tale influenced by the classical Greek Theseus myth of youth sacrifice.¹⁰⁹ The plot’s dystopian elements make good use of contraries to create a nightmare setting: “President” Snow (Donald Sutherland) is actually a dictator who maintains totalitarian governmental control over citizens. “Citizens” are more like prisoners separated from nature and autonomy through the use of electric fences and military forces. “Science” and technology are used to enslave its citizens instead of improving living conditions. “Leisure” pastimes like watching programs via screens are mandatory and distressing. The Hunger “Games” are not a voluntary sport but a bloody competition between district children who are forced to participate in them. They are not “playing” they are killing.

Set in a future nation of what is left of North America called “Panem,” the civilization is divided into twelve numbered districts of “regular” citizens plus the “Capitol” District inhabited by President Snow and a small, elite class of wealthy citizens. Each year all twelve districts must hold a public lottery (“the reaping”) to

¹⁰⁸ The phrase is a figure of speech, “bread and circuses,” which comes from Roman poet Juvenal’s *Satire X*, circa 100 AD. As a metonym, it refers to “generating public approval, not by excellence in public service or public policy, but by diversion, distraction or by satisfying the most immediate or base needs of a populace” (wiki). There is no evidence that Collins was making a direct reference to Juvenal’s work, but she has spoken about her passion for Greek and Roman mythology, including the story of Theseus and the Minotaur, specifically, in relation to creating *The Hunger Games* (Egan 9).

¹⁰⁹ The legend says that King Minos of Athens required the sacrifice of seven young men and seven young women to become prey of the Minotaur in its labyrinth (Sakoulas).

draft two “tributes” (one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen), who are compelled to compete in the annual “Hunger Games.” The games serve as entertainment and retribution against a past rebellion (“the uprising”), and citizens are required to watch as twenty-four child/teen competitors kill one another until only one tribute remains. The final tribute becomes the “victor” and is given an income for life, a special place to live in his or her own district and owes lifelong service to the Capitol as a public relations representative for the games. Haymitch Abernathy (Woody Harrelson), the only living victor from District 12, serves each year as a mentor to tributes from his district.

The sixteen-year-old protagonist Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence) lives in District 12 with her mother (Paula Malcomson) and her twelve-year-old sister Primrose “Prim” Everdeen (Willow Shields) on their own since the death of Katniss’ father (Phillip Troy Linger) several years before in a mining accident. The film features competing tributes from only four other districts besides District 12, including Glimmer (Leven Rambin) and Marvel (Jack Quaid) from District 1, Clove (Isabelle Fuhrman) and Cato (Alexander Ludwig) from District 2, Fox Face (Jacqueline Emerson) from District 5, and Thresh (Dayo Okeniyi) and Rue (Amandla Stenberg) from District 11. The numbered districts, from highest to lowest, also indicate their ranked economic class status. Districts 11 and 12 are the poorest in Panem; they export wheat and coal, respectively, to the Capitol District. Unlike other districts, 1 and 2 offer “volunteer” tributes like Glimmer and Marvel, who have trained for the games most of their lives.

Katniss' life at home is harder than most because her father died in a mining accident a few years prior, and her grief-stricken mother could not take care of Katniss or her sister. Without her father's income, the family was in dire straits, but he had taught Katniss how to hunt with a bow and arrow before he died, enabling her to help her family overcome the deficit. She hunts with her friend Gale (Liam Hemsworth), a young man about her age, by escaping through a faulty part of the electrified fence around her district.

On the day of the reaping, when Effie Trinket (Elizabeth Banks) comes from The Capitol to choose the names, Prim is chosen first, and Katniss volunteers to go in her place. Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson) is chosen as the male tribute. His parents are bakers, and he has suffered fewer hardships than Katniss. The film includes a flashback where Peeta throws some burnt bread on the ground in front of Katniss when she is clearly in need. The flashback also shows him throwing more of these loaves to pigs. Katniss is harder and leaner than Peeta in physicality and character.

Haymitch and Effie accompany Katniss and Peeta aboard a luxury bullet train to the Capitol District, a place defined by decadence enjoyed by an out-of-touch elite class. Tributes are assigned to stylists who prepare them for their parade before Capitol spectators and Reality-TV style interviews with Caesar Flickman (Stanley Tucci). The Tributes spend time training in the Capitol until they are ranked for sponsors. Katniss' stylist, Cinna (Lenny Kravitz), helps her create a "Girl on Fire" personae through her outfits, which helps glamorize her fierce nature. Katniss wins

the highest score—an eleven—at the end of the demonstration trials for her archery skills and daring execution. The night before they depart, Peeta tells Caesar that he has always had a crush on Katniss, and he is upset he will not be able to win the games and be with her. Katniss does not find this endearing and indicates the feeling is not reciprocal (she slams him against the wall and accuses him of trying to make her look “weak” with this admission of love.) Haymitch explains that this event is a television show and a performance as much as it is a fight to the death, and likability is of utmost importance to her survival.

Everything about the games is constructed and controlled by the Capitol, and the film expands the role of the game master, Seneca Crane (Wes Bentley), as a way to show how the games are run. The novel is written from Katniss’ perspective, so the Capitol game room was invented for the film, along with scenes between Crane and Snow in the rose garden. As we learn, contestants cannot hide from hidden cameras placed everywhere in the arena, and because viewing the games has been compulsory since they were born, contestants are aware of performance. The tributes form thin alliances, as Katniss does at first with the youngest tribute, Rue, a twelve-year-old girl from District 11, until she dies. Earlier, Haymitch told Katniss and Peeta that a love story is something he could “sell” to sponsors, so Katniss joins Peeta near the end, when the game master announces they have suspended the rules so that two members from the same district can win together. They are then double-crossed by the game master when they are the only two that remain. Katniss and Peeta decide to both commit suicide by eating poisonous berries instead of

trying to kill one another. The Capitol stops them before they eat and declares them both winners. President Snow then kills the game master.

***Hunger Games* Production: District 12, The Capitol, and The Games**

Suzanne Collins, an author well versed in war history, drama, and children's programming, says she was inspired to write *The Hunger Games* novel after flipping back and forth between a *Survivor*-style¹¹⁰ reality show and news coverage of the Iraq War on T.V. late one night (Egan 7). Both texts show youth being tested, and both claim to be non-fiction, but "Reality T.V." exploits the risks or vulnerability of challenges as they are constructed for entertainment, while military service involves young people facing challenges with grave risks and potentially deadly consequences. The creative spark for Collins was: "What if a group of kids was required to fight—and risk their lives—as entertainment?" (Egan 7). *The Hunger Games* was conceived during the cultural upheaval that followed the 9/11 attacks during George W. Bush's conservative presidency, when the economic gap between the rich and poor widened, and the threat of war and terrorism was ever-present. Scholastic published *The Hunger Games* in 2008, and the subsequent books in the series, *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*, in 2009 and 2010, respectively. As of 2012,

¹¹⁰ *Survivor* (2000-) is a CBS/Paramount Television production that films a group of non-celebrity "contestants" who compete in an outdoor environment together for a certain period of time "armed" with just the clothes they are wearing. The sole "survivor" wins \$1 million. It is not the first "reality" show, but it is emblematic of the genre.

more than fifty million copies of the book series had been sold worldwide, with almost half of the sales owed to *The Hunger Games* book alone (*Scholastic*).¹¹¹

Many studios were interested in producing the film, but producer Nina Jacobson, who started her own production company, Color Force, in 2007, had “doggedly pursued” Collins to produce the film because she personally loved the books, and eventually won Collins over. Color Force partnered with Lionsgate to meet the \$80 million budget for production (Fernandez).¹¹² Billy Ray wrote the original adaptation of the screenplay, though Collins and director Gary Ross changed it significantly.¹¹³ The film, rated PG-13 by the MPAA, made its domestic debut on March 23, 2012, and grossed \$408 million in the U.S., where it still ranks as the twenty-fifth highest grossing film of all time (*The-Numbers.com*). Suzanne Collins was still writing *Mockingjay* when the first film was in development in 2009, and much like *Twilight*, the film premiere and the book release amplified fan enthusiasm with an extensive media presence.

Suzanne Collins had plenty of experience writing for media aimed at children, as well as a personal history of education in drama, dramatic writing,

¹¹¹ The books were all bestsellers, and *The Hunger Games* received over fifty awards for children’s literature, according to *Scholastic.com*.

¹¹² Jacobson had been the President of the Buena Vista Motion Group (a subsidiary of Disney) since 1999 and was fired from her executive position while giving birth to her third child in the hospital in 2006 (Fernandez). *The Hunger Games* was the first production she pursued on her own. I can see how/why this particular series appealed to her as a first project.

¹¹³ The first film is the only one Collins gets a screenplay credit for. Director Francis Lawrence directed the next three films, and four additional writers were credited for subsequent screenplays for the series.

telecommunications, and military life.¹¹⁴ Collins' father, Lt. Col. Michael John Collins, was a historian with a doctorate in political science who had a lifelong career as a military specialist in the Air Force (Egan 9). He took his children to visit numerous battlefields because he believed children should be educated about war: "Collins' father challenged his kids to ask questions. What, if anything, made these bloody battles worth their cost?" (Egan 9).¹¹⁵ Before she wrote *The Hunger Games* series, Collins spent much of her career as a writer for young children's television shows until she started publishing books of her own (Egan 8).¹¹⁶ Between 2003 and 2007, she published the critically acclaimed *Underland Chronicles*,¹¹⁷ a series of fantasy books for middle-school age readers featuring anthropomorphic characters exploring themes related to war and children.

Director Gary Ross was drawn to the project because he felt the story used "violence as a critique of violence" ("A Conversation with Gary Ross"). Ross'

¹¹⁴ According to a newspaper at her undergraduate alma mater, Indiana University, Collins graduated from IU in 1985 with a double major in telecommunications and in drama/theatre, and where she appeared in an unpublished play by graduate student Steve Timm called *The Forest Game* (IU archives). The play is described as a "'thriller set deep within the woods' that examines the 'violent, natural justice of the forest versus the violent, unnatural injustice of the world'" (IU News Room). Collins also earned a Master's Degree from NYU in dramatic writing (biography.com).

¹¹⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien, who claimed he wrote *The Hobbit* as a "*Beowulf* for children," was also a war veteran (and orphan). He delivered a lecture called "On Fairy Stories" in 1939 that discussed the literary form of "children's fantasy" (the lecture was later published as a book of the same name in 1947). He argued that children's stories shouldn't pander to sweet or ridiculous content because children, like adults, can understand and deal with death and darkness, and that literature is a great place to experience such things. I think Collins and her father adhere to this same philosophy.

¹¹⁶ She wrote shows for PBS and Nickelodeon, including *Clarissa Explains it All* (1993), *The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo* (1997-1998), *Oswald* (2001-2003), *Clifford's Puppy Days* (2003-2005), as well as the literary animated series for Maurice Sendak's *Little Bear* (1998-2003). Several of her shows were nominated for Emmy Awards (Egan 8).

¹¹⁷ The *NY Times* bestselling series includes five books: *Gregor the Overlander*, *The Prophecy of Bane*, *The Curse of the Warmbloods*, *The Marks of Secret*, and *The Code of Claw*.

screenwriting credits include *Big* (1988), *Dave* (1993), *Pleasantville* (1998), *Sea Biscuit* (2003), and *The Tale of Despereaux* (2008), all films that offer critiques of the worlds they present through youthful (or child-like) protagonists. As interviewer Elvis Mitchell pointed out, Ross is not a cynical filmmaker, but he seems to be interested in how characters are used cynically by society (“A Conversation with Gary Ross”). The dystopian genre, and the depiction of Capitol society, is supremely cynical. For Ross, the exhilarating development in the story is not about transforming society but about Katniss finding herself “as an individual within that society” (“A Conversation with Gary Ross”).

The Hunger Games was filmed on location in several areas of North Carolina between May and September of 2011, including Henry River, Shelby, Charlotte, and Asheville (“On Location in Panem”). Most of the CGI budget was spent on Capitol sets, as most of the fire effects in the woods were done through stunt work. All of the teens trained with a stunt professional company for the fight scenes, which included weapons’ training, climbing, and fight choreography (“Arena Ready”). Jennifer Lawrence personally trained with former Olympic archer Khatuna Lorig (Keller 27). Lawrence also climbed all the trees and executed a number of stunts herself in the film (“Arena Ready”). Though the goal of the production was to spend less money on special effects, the hands-on approach contributed to Katniss’ authenticity as an expert survivor on screen.

Hunger Games' Narrative: Teen Rebellion, Reality, and Performance

The rebellious teen that leads a flawed society, sometimes through violence, into transformation has been the bedrock of heroic narratives for young male protagonists for decades.¹¹⁸ Dystopian texts signify alienation as a social problem and usually include suicides, murder, loss of self, anxiety, despair, and what Jon Lewis calls “teen *anomie* as a politically conscious refusal, a deliberate attempt on the part of youth to oppose the basic values of the official culture” (emphasis mine) (10). Katniss Everdeen does not disrupt any of these conventions, save for the crucial fact that she is a young woman instead of a young man.

The Hunger Games is organized by extremes for survival in a technologically advanced age where everyone is monitored. The narrative eschews most of the mundane conflicts about school, love interests, and parents that are typical in stories featuring female teen protagonists, but *The Hunger Games* depends on the classic tenet of teens breaking rules. Because the stakes are high, Katniss Everdeen's offenses are not concerned with mundane “teen” rule breaking (drugs, sex, parents); she breaks rules the adults won't even break to survive. She sneaks under electric fences, uses weapons, and sells her wares on the black market, but her furtive and

¹¹⁸ The “good” young rebel isn't limited to epic or action genres either. *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Star Wars* (1977), *War Games* (1983), *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), *Footloose* (1984), *The Karate Kid* (1984), *The Goonies* (1985), *Ferris Bueller* (1986), any *Spider-Man* film (2002-2017), or *Harry Potter* film (2001-2011) all feature young men who stand up to authority figures and illuminate flaws in the societies they inhabit. Heroes like Indiana Jones and Batman are both figures whose pasts also show how they overcome a morally flawed element in their early lives that leads to their adult heroism as well.

violent tactics are excused and rewarded because so many people benefit from her actions.

Secrecy and masked emotion are central to her individuality and survival at the beginning of the film; however, like other epic narratives, she experiences transformation and redemption. She begins the story concerned only about her family but eventually broadens her empathy to extend to the rest of the districts in Panem. When she volunteers to go into the games in place of her sister, her identity changes course. She wins the games because she was already a practiced hunter, but her transformation happens through her choice to honor Rue and save Peeta's life. Her transformation means something bigger to the world she is now participating in, but the cost requires her to relinquish the private identity she had successfully cultivated.

The "reality show" component of the narrative indicts the pre-bride paradigm through the depiction of the Capitol audience who enthusiastically watch it. Unlike Katniss, Capitol audience members are obsessed with their own reflections, exemplified by Caesar Flickman in Figure 36, who is surrounded by multiple images of himself. His bright white teeth, polished skin, blue hair, and sparkling suit are constructed for maximum attention. The elaborate appearances of Capitol citizens mark them as elite, and the effect is a kind of armor between themselves and the people of other districts. The time, technology, and money required to cultivate the elaborate hair, makeup, and tailored outfits in Figures 37 are staged for a crowd who wants to be seen. A close-up on an unnamed Capitol

resident in Figure 38 shows how the amount of work on just her eyelashes alone would be impossible to maintain except at the highest economic level of society. The Capitol audience demonstrates an elitist consumer class, for whom conspicuous consumption extends to their regard of human beings who exist outside their class. The interface between the audience and the games themselves—a kind of horror show Kentucky Derby—wherein the audience gets dressed up to place bets on “lower” children’s lives—indicates an alarming imbalance of power between classes.

The fact that the “love story” is presented as a commodity that Haymitch says he can “sell” to sponsors is also a critique of the pre-bride paradigm. In order for Katniss to be seen as the love interest of Peeta, she must behave like an object of desire, which positions her as a pre-bride stereotype. She is less threatening if she is deemed desirable to someone. The “love story” reduces her subjectivity into a consumable object that frees the audience from the burden of conscience. Her performance of being desired dehumanizes her in the reality show story space, satisfying an elite audience who crave stereotypes and believe they are the only ones with access to unique subjectivity.

Protagonist Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence): A Woman of Action

“I’m not good at saying something.”

Katniss’ individualism is not defined by goals related to how creatively she can become the right partner to a hero but for acts of bravery that define heroes. Her self-sacrifice saves her sister, her empathy memorializes Rue, and her courage to put her life behind a higher moral “right” saves Peeta and herself. Like Stacy from

Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Katniss Everdeen's narrative is concerned with what she wants instead of showing how she is wanted. Katniss shares the character traits of a male hero: she is the breadwinner for her family, a savior, a protector, and a champion for her community. She is not centralized as the love interest; she *has* love interests. Her physical beauty is not the focus of the narrative, though her participation as a tribute teaches her about beauty as a performance. Her heroic position marks a cultural shift toward accepting a young female protagonist who is celebrated for her courage, strength, power, intellect, and beauty as many young male heroes have historically been represented in popular films.

Katniss is also a product of her dystopian landscape and contrary forces shape her path. Katniss is a killer, but she is introduced as a nurturer first. She is a daughter who performs jobs assigned to sons, as Peeta alludes to during the games when she says they need to hunt for food. He says, "I'll take the bow. Just kidding. I'll go pick some stuff." She tells Cinna that she is only herself "when she is not trying" to be herself. Katniss' social maturation emphasizes building community, while minimizing the social isolation she experienced as a girl in District 12, and she ultimately becomes likable through action instead of dialogue. As (fatigued) Jennifer Lawrence remarked, "Katniss never walks; she runs everywhere" (*Hunger Games* DVD Commentary).

The narrative emphasizes her skills as a hunter, which requires making keen observations through listening, seeing, hiding, and remaining very quiet. She is more comfortable with action than dialogue. To get out of her awkward interview with

Caesar, she stands up and twirls around to ignite the flames at the bottom of her dress to impress him and the crowd. The camera draws attention away from her face to her feet in Figure 39, which supports a narrative motif focused on her active subjectivity. She climbs several trees for shelter or safety during the games, in contrast to Bella in *Twilight*, who is carried into trees by Edward. After surviving the initial slaughter at the opening cornucopia, the montage splices together images of Katniss hunting, trapping, cooking, drinking, and running without any dialogue, establishing her ability to survive alone, but the narrative requires more of her than just independence. Eventually, she comes to understand how Haymitch, Cinna, Rue, and Peeta help her find genuine connections outside the self and one's own family. The subsequent books and films expand this even more.

Secondary Characters

The Everdeen Family

Katniss' relationship to her parents reflects second wave feminist ideals, and the depiction of how she relates to her mother and father is distinctly different from the pre-bride paradigm. Like a pre-bride, Katniss maintains great respect for her father, and his positive influence on her prevails long after his death. Unlike a pre-bride's relationship to a father who reinforces marriage plot dependence on men, Katniss' father empowered his daughter by teaching her to be independent by learning valuable skills. By sharing his own knowledge of weapon making and hunting, he taught her, like a son, that breaking certain rules is justified for survival. The success of the books and the films reflects a cultural acceptance of roles for

young women outside of the marriage plot. Katniss is a second wave feminist ideal because gender does not interfere with her heroic role.

The scenes with Katniss' mother communicate an inverted power dynamic between parent and child, not unlike the relationship depicted between Bella and her mother in *Twilight*. Neither mother behaves like a person who is in charge of the lives of her own children. Bella's mother acts more like a besotted teenager, while Katniss' mother endangers her daughters' lives due to extreme grief over the loss of love. Both women perform a role that prioritizes romantic love over familial love, and neither is rewarded favorably by the story. Katniss' mother acts like a defeated or dominated person: submissive, silent, and passive. Katniss is depicted as stronger than her mother physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Where Katniss is dark haired, muscular, and tall, her mother is blonde, thin, and meek. Prim's role as a daughter has shifted allegiance to Katniss instead of to their mother. Katniss comforts and sings to Prim when she has a nightmare. When Prim is looking for approval in her reaping day dress, she asks, "Mom?" but it is Katniss who answers her. Katniss walks in front of her mother, eager to answer Prim by embracing her and crooning, "Oh, look at you!" Katniss' mother doesn't respond to Prim's query at all, as Katniss' action stops her altogether; she stays still and silent with her eyes downcast. She smiles in the mirror at Katniss' reflection and says, "Now you look beautiful, too." Katniss does not smile at this compliment; she is suspicious of its value. To Katniss, her mother's model of beauty and love lead to helplessness and dependence.

Katniss' mother accepts having to speak to Katniss' back in all of their scenes together except one, when Katniss scolds her before leaving for the games: "You can't tune out again!" When Katniss' mother responds by whispering, "I won't," Katniss indicts her mother's emotion: "No matter what you *feel*, you have to be there, do you understand?" Katniss' mother tearfully nods while Katniss orders her not to cry. Part of Katniss' transformation in the series develops a more mature understanding of love as a rich part of relationships instead of the capitulation to weakness that she viewed in her mother.

Romantic Suitors and Masculinity: Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson) and Gale Hawthorne (Liam Hemsworth)

Gale, played by the Australian twenty-two-year-old hunk Liam Hemsworth, is introduced as Katniss' hunting partner and friend in the very beginning of the film. At 6'3", he looks and sounds like a fully-grown man, though he is ostensibly a teenager like Katniss (Lawrence was also twenty-two during filming). It is obvious that they care for one another, but there is no physical romance between them. The film's marketing strategy copied a *Twilight* approach to promotion by inflating a disingenuous "love triangle" tension between Gale, Peeta, and Katniss before the film was released. James Keller pointed out that "in promotional shots, the three principals—Lawrence, Hutcherson, and Hemsworth—are frequently photographed in close proximity, often arm-in-arm with Lawrence centered between the two men" (28). Gale's role is quite small, though, sharing little screen-time with Katniss. Their relationship goes undeveloped as her love-interest in the series.

Peeta Mellark, the other central male character in the film, is in turn, an unconventional male hero. When Joan Mellen examined the stereotypical male hero in classical Hollywood movies in the late 1970s, she proposed that “The hero drawn from pioneer legend is invariably undomesticated, enlisting his physical strength and skill in violence for the survival of a community of women, children, and weaker men” (Mellen 11-12).¹¹⁹ Though not fully developed in the first film, Peeta’s role is defined by his owning strengths outside projections of heroic masculinity. Peeta is aware how his lack of traditional masculine qualities devalues him when he tells Katniss: “My mother said District 12 might finally have a winner, but she wasn’t talking about me. She was talking about you.” Katniss teaches Peeta how to tap into masculine performance by throwing a big weight when competitors are watching, and he helps her tap into feminine performance by convincing her to hold his hand during the parade. Just as Katniss has honed skills in archery for years, Peeta’s emotional intelligence gives him a surprising edge, and his instinct to reveal his shortcomings builds trust with her. He understands how to manipulate actions to win public affection (holding hands, professing his affection for her to Caesar Flickman), which is equally important as possessing athletic ability or survival skills. Skill maturation happens for both characters over the course of the series, but this film clearly shows Katniss’ performance of feeling as acting and Peeta’s as real.

¹¹⁹ In the studio era, these male characters were often cops, private eyes, cowboys, or gangsters.

In the book Peeta's appearance is said to have been pudgy or doughy, and though that was not a concern for the filmmakers, the actor Josh Hutcherson did have some physical attributes that undermine the image of masculine strength or dominance next to Jennifer Lawrence: he was thinner, younger, and shorter than her.¹²⁰ Like the leavened bread of his homonym, "pita," Peeta is meant to be associated with sustenance; a baker's son, he threw a burned loaf to Katniss when she was starving in the past. In this sense, Collins places influence on the "leavened" part of the pita: he is an agent of transformation. When standing next to Lawrence and Hemsworth in Figure 40, the contrast between them suggests that Peeta's character broadens consideration of masculinity outside expected stereotypes.

Rue

"And most hauntingly, a twelve-year-old girl from District 11. She has dark brown skin and eyes, but other than that, she's very like Prim in size and demeanor" (Collins 45).

Like Primrose, Rue is also named after a night-blooming flower, and she is also a twelve-year-old girl who has been forced to participate in the games from District 11, the second poorest to District 12. Rue is meant to be a stand-in for Prim, the younger sister Katniss was trying to protect. Rue softens Katniss' persona by causing her to emote in ways she doesn't with anyone else. She smiles at Rue, she sings to Rue when she is dying, she cries over her body when she dies, and she

¹²⁰ Jennifer Lawrence is two years older and two inches taller than Hutcherson according to their listed stats on *IMDB.com*.

arranges flowers around her before she leaves her. In essence, Rue allows Katniss to be both the strong hero and the strong heroine, as she is someone Katniss protects, nurtures, and mourns, while stoically moving on. Katniss' tenderness is not a performance, but she is aware that adorning Rue's body with flowers creates a lasting image for the cameras. Katniss' feeling expressed as action through mourning Rue ignites a rebellion in District 11, though no one knows this except the Capitol. Rue's death, and Katniss' instinct to honor her incites the bigger rebellion explored in the next two books.

Effie Trinket

"Happy Hunger Games!" –Effie Trinket brightly greets the crowd on reaping day.

Effie Trinket is supposed to serve as a bridge between District 12 and the Capitol, though her garish appearance and 1930's style Mid-Atlantic English¹²¹ accent do not communicate much besides the Capitol elitism and heartlessness. The evolution of her constructed femininity stems from Cher's in *Clueless* in its conspicuousness and man-made manipulations to the point of invoking the concept of simulacrum. Effie's entire appearance takes hours of maintenance and planning—her hair color and hues of her makeup change with each elaborate outfit. She can

¹²¹ The Mid-Atlantic English accent was invented and employed by the Hollywood studio system during the 1930s and 1940s at the dawn of the "talkies." It was not quite British, not quite American and 100% fake: "Learned in aristocratic finishing schools or taught for use in theater to the Bergmans and Hepburns who were carefully groomed in the studio system, it was class for the masses, doled out through motion pictures" (Taylor). The accent "defined an era on screen by lending films an escapist, more-refined-than-reality allure" (Taylor).

barely walk in her too-tight skirts and her (foot-binding like) shoes. Her most consistent signature is the porcelain-white makeup that covers all her exposed skin, a crude appropriation of Japanese Geisha style meant to signify professional dedication to etiquette, music, art, song, and hospitality. Instead of depth or empathy, she demonstrates her dedication to the manners and material concerns of the Capitol class. We assume she smiles at the reaping ceremony because she knows she is being broadcast on television, but the misappropriation of excitement extends to her off-screen persona, too: she tells Katniss and Peeta that “real treats” await them like “crystal chandeliers [and] platinum doorknobs” while the teens cry on their way to the train. She plays an important role in understanding how elite Capitol culture dehumanizes people who do not belong to their class, like the people of District 12.

Effie is a symbol of grotesque femininity in its extreme manifestation. She employs the same line used in the name of chivalry aboard the sinking *Titanic*, “Ladies First,”¹²² when she chooses the female tributes first, as if she were granting them a privilege. Instead of getting into a lifeboat, of course, they are the first to learn their lives will be sacrificed as entertainment for the dominant minority class. When Haymitch tells Effie to “loosen her corset,” it reminds us of the painful garment worn during *Titanic*’s same era of physical and social restrictions on women. Trinket’s role evolves over the course of the series, but for the purpose of

¹²² And Edward Cullen also uses it in *Twilight*.

analysis of just this film, her exaggerated appearance, saccharine kindness, etiquette priorities, empty admonishments and blandishments, and largely self-conscious demeanor demonstrate how warped the Capitol aesthetic is in terms of the reality of the games, and how their understanding of lives outside the Capitol environment is completely dehumanizing.

Haymitch Abernathy

“Being in love with that boy might just get you sponsors”

Haymitch, like few characters, resides somewhere between Capitol disassociation and reality in *The Hunger Games*. He is presented both as a drunk and as a victor, a habit and an occupation that set him apart from his native District 12 and the Capitol as well. Haymitch had to kill people to get his victory, and, like a war veteran, he did it in service to his community and country. But because he is required to mentor tributes, he is continually forced to relive his own traumatic memories of the games by forming relationships with young people who are slaughtered yearly. Even though he is sloppy, his affected appearance (styled hair and three-piece suits) shows the influence the Capitol has had on him, and, in the end, this alliance helps Katniss and Peeta. His tone and manner are coarse, especially in relation to Effie Trinket’s affected advice and observations, though useful. He addresses Katniss as “Sweetheart” repeatedly but with acid and sarcasm. He tells her she is undesirable, unlikable, and arrogant. From his mean perspective, one that is born from being forced to understand dehumanized Capitol preferences, he communicates important feedback to Katniss about what a “likable” young

woman is supposed to be. A likable female tribute is still supposed to represent herself as a desirable object if she wants to win an audience or gain sponsors (for example, Glimmer from District 1 in her short, pink baby-doll dress during her interview). What will save her is being the object of a love story, like a pre-bride. After Peeta tells Caesar of his crush on Katniss, she slams Peeta against the wall and accuses him of making her look weak; Haymitch corrects her: "He made you look desirable, which in your case can't hurt, Sweetheart." Later, Haymitch convinces the Seneca to promote the "star-crossed lovers" theme, and he thus helps give Katniss and Peeta the opportunity to stay alive. Katniss' success, in turn, brings about change in Haymitch in the way it inspires the districts to rise up in rebellion against Snow and the Capitol by introducing the hope not just to survive but to live differently.

President Snow: Roses, Eyes, Silence, and Power

President Snow is the villain to everyone in Panem except the Capitol residents, though he becomes a personal villain to Katniss because she wins the games by breaking his rules. Ross wrote the "rose garden" scenes between Snow and Crane because the film lacked the interior awareness Katniss had of him in the book. For Ross, the rose garden was a place to demonstrate Snow's "sensual passion" in the film because the setting conveys elegance, denial, and cruelty (DVD Commentary). His white hair and beard here look unusually bright, in the same way his white roses contrast brilliantly against dark leaves. President Snow has enough power to impose atrocities without fear of retaliation and controls everything in

Panem. He is like Katniss in that he is highly skilled, silent, and powerful on his own, but he is unlike her in that he cannot connect meaningfully with other people. He, like a hunter, remains still in several shots; where everyone else is anxious, he seems ruthlessly contained. There aren't many scenes with Snow in this film, though he is the clear central antagonist for the entire series.

Cinematic Style: Long Lenses and Hand-held Cameras

Ubiquitous cameras and mandatory audiences ensure that tributes will no longer have private spaces. Ross said he did not want to make the film look like a "Capitol" production, so he borrowed a *cinéma vérité* style to undercut a slick transmission of images, mostly through using long lenses and hand-held cameras (*The Hunger Games* DVD Commentary). The *cinéma vérité* style is linked with Katniss' point of view, which is sometimes blurry, unfocused, and chaotic, especially during moments of anxiety or life-threatening danger. But Katniss' perspective is not the only one he had to show. The look of *The Hunger Games* had to convey great contrasts between wealth and poverty and freedom and oppression from many points of view. The film had to show the high technological advances of a dystopian future alongside its depravity.

Mise-en-Scene

The film focuses on three separate spaces: District 12, The Capitol, and the area of the contest. Though they were all filmed at various locations in North Carolina, the production design team skirted stereotypes of "future" looks by drawing on historical references to architecture, fashion designers, and even

expressionist paintings from the early twentieth century, concentrating on styles that emerged during the 1930s and 1940s for both ends of the privileged and impoverished spectrum. District 12 conjures the look of the Great Depression era through the on-location set of an old company mill town complex in Henry River Mill Village, North Carolina. The property had housing for several hundred workers but was probably only used for about twenty years before it was abandoned in the 1940's ("Design"). The costumes, hair, and washed-out color palette add to the retrospective aesthetic. The look resists being a "period" set because elements of the Capitol are peppered in, often in menacing ways. The blood sample the children are forced to give as they enter the reaping day square, for example, is registered and digitized. The bright green letters on the digital display that say "Everdeen, Primrose" undercut the Depression-era aesthetic.

For the Capitol, production designer Philip Messina said he looked to Brutalism for style, as Ross said he did not want it to look like the clichéd "future" often depicted in science fiction ("Design"). The design team looked at structures from communist Russia, Tiananmen Square, Red Square—not spires and towers but imposing concrete and horizontal lines that hold authority and power by controlling focal points over open space ("Design"). The contrast between the Capitol crowd shown earlier in Figure 37 and the District 12 crowd in Figure 41 as spectators emphasizes the Capitol's power and authority via personal expression: bold colors versus indistinguishable neutrals.

The games were filmed in the Appalachians in Western North Carolina, and many elements of style are infused with Appalachian elements, including the music, the variety of hardwood trees, and the small-town coalmining aesthetic. Poking through the natural elements are sharp contrasts from the Capitol that are noticeable because of their saturated colors. In District 12, the Capitol soldiers in Figure 41 look bright white against the over-washed, antiqued clothing worn by people in the district. The weapons placed inside the steel “cornucopia” are tools for destruction instead of food. The trees inside the games look real, but sometimes the electric sound of tiny cameras refocusing from a “knot” remind us that they, too, are constructions. The “gifts” from sponsors that float in on parachutes contain salves that erase Katniss’ burn and suture Peeta’s gash almost on contact. While we may marvel at how advanced and incredible the resources are from the Capitol, any amazement is tempered by the cruel knowledge that these expensive resources are not being used to save lives but to keep the “entertainment” going a little longer. Capitol culture dehumanizes nature—from human lives to venomous bees. The mockingjay pin (and symbol) was picked for its transformative and resistant nature in the series, though the pin is the only part used in this particular film.

Props

Katniss’ props first consist of weaponry and food: bows, arrows, knives, squirrels, fish, and bread. The director focused on her hands frequently, and it is apparent that she is most in control when she has tools for survival in them. After her makeover, she must gain sponsors: access to a stronger Capitol bow enables her

to demonstrate her value. She misses at first and loses her audience's attention but gains it back by shooting an arrow at the apple in the hog's mouth in the middle of the sponsors' dining table. Had this move been done by a male tribute, like Cato, it may not have translated as interesting or bold or gutsy—but simply dangerous. Katniss, however, curtsies and thanks them for “their consideration.” While Haymitch loves it, Effie reprimands her for being rude, and this moment gives Katniss' some insight into how she should perform in the public sphere. She can break rules if she attends to gender expectations, like the “manners!” Effie huffs about. She might not be likable, but she can channel her anger well with the right tools. Her growth as an independent heroine shows in how she uses her tools to protect and nurture others by the end of the games. She begins as a fierce independent heroine and ends as a fierce and generous one.

Costumes

Clothing is political, and those who cannot afford to be conspicuous do not represent power in Panem. Capitol people, obsessed with their reflections, wear projections of power—a kind of otherworldly armor that camouflages their true identities. In contrast, the costumes of District 12 lack color because they are either darkened with coal dust or faded to pastels due to frequent washes. Their reflections on Panem screens hide nothing about them. In an interview, Jennifer Lawrence characterized the difference between the Capitol and Katniss through clothing: “Katniss kills birds and squirrels to survive and Effie wears them in her hair” (“Design”). Appearances matter in a world where people are constantly

monitored, and class correlation is easy to distinguish through clothing, hairstyles, and makeup. The most ostentatious, constructed appearances communicate wealth and power because they require hours of attention to create and maintain, like Effie Trinket's ensemble in Figure 42. Makeup artist Ve Neill said they wanted the Capitol fashions to resemble "something you'd see in magazines, but nothing anyone would ever really wear" ("Design").¹²³ These bright, low-functioning, surrealist clothes mark the leisure class of Capitol culture, a group defined by conspicuous consumption. While most of Panem starves, they luxuriate in disposing of culled resources from other districts, including the tributes who die for their entertainment. Clothes, hair, and makeup saturated with color are not associated with work but with display. Katniss' personal and political transformation through the games is tracked through her clothing as well.

At home in District 12, Katniss is used to portraying different identities through clothing. She must look like a girl from her district at the reaping in a faded blue dress, but she prefers the person she is in the woods. Without voiceover or dialogue, we watch Katniss run out of her house and sneak under an electric fence to get to her bow and arrow set hidden in the woods outside her district. Her appearance in Figure 43 signifies utility, protection, and a style that sets her apart from her district: green and brown tones for camouflage; tough leather and canvas

¹²³ In an interview before the premiere, costume designer Judianna Makovsky cited surrealist Italian designer Elsa Schiaparelli as her inspiration for Capitol fashions ("Capitol Couture"). Schiaparelli was known for introducing the world to the color "shocking pink" in 1936 (Blanco).

fabrics to protect her skin from thorns and brush; her single braid out of the way of her bow and arrows. The clothes she wears in the woods do not market her body for consumption. They are also not the faded linens most of the other women wear in the district. She is attractive, of course, because she is played by twenty-two-year-old actress Jennifer Lawrence, but her value as a hunter is not tied to her presentation. External approval is part of her challenge throughout the series but not a key plot point in the film. Katniss is forced to manage her likability as it relates to her appearance, and the process of transformation critiques the use of the makeover itself.

Katniss' "reaping day" ensemble, as seen in Figure 44, reflects how the Capitol sees the children of District 12, emphasizing modesty and conformity through its simplicity in decoration and fabric. Her signature side braid has been tucked into a bun to give her less distinction among her peers. She wears no makeup, no stockings or socks, and her plain brown Mary Jane shoes underscore her identity as a girl. The faded blue jean material of her dress accentuates her "blue collar" working-class association, as does the jeans' historic association with American manual labor work, especially mining, which was a staple occupation in Southern Appalachia in the late 19th and much of the 20th centuries. The dress belonged to Katniss' mother, who approves when she sees her in it. Katniss looks uncomfortable and ill-suited in the dress compared to her woods' attire. The contrast next to Effie in Figure 44 amplifies how diminished she looks while surrounded by Capitol concrete.

In the span of a few days, Katniss' Capitol makeover redresses her childhood identity and repurposes her garments to maximize her media image as a mature sexual object. The makeover process is dehumanizing and antiseptic. The way the aestheticians wax the hair off her body looks violent, painful, and intimate. She's laid out like a cadaver on a steel, industrial table, where they threaten to "hose her down" like an animal. The Capitol parades the tributes in a "Miss America" style televised contest that delights in reducing identities of entire districts to sexy costumes symbolizing a product or resource produced there. Katniss and Peeta appear in shiny, reflective suits that are meant to symbolize coal, especially because Cinna adds the "fire" special effect, but her second skin catsuit marks a dramatic shift from the reaping: she is no longer viewed as a child or afforded modesty. Katniss' interview preparation is a critique on pageant culture, a tradition that supports the competition or comparison of people as objects for display.

Katniss admits to Cinna that she doesn't understand what it means to be "likable" in Figure 45, and her chopped-up reflection in the mirror behind her reflects this confusion. She does have makeup on her face, but her scared expression in Figure 46 hasn't changed from the first time she was broadcast on Capitol cameras from the day of the reaping. Her hair is still tucked back, and her makeup is understated. It is really the dress that is transformative: like Red Riding Hood, she can definitely be spotted in the woods by predators now in this glamorous, shiny red dress. Her arms, shoulders and back are all bare, at once playing up her sexual maturity and her vulnerability. There are many metaphorical ways the dress

sexualizes her: she's "on fire" or "hot" or "red-hot" and displayed as a playful, non-threatening, sexy woman when she twirls around. Her nude Capitol shoes in Figure 39 could not be worn in the woods nor on the feet of a schoolgirl. Katniss does not know how to perform like a woman at first, but she learns about media manipulation through Cinna, Peeta, and Haymitch. Peeta capitalizes on pointing out that she is, indeed, a desirable woman just after she is on stage. Her violent response to his admiration underscores her emotional immaturity and her naivete about her object performance as the girl on fire. Not only does her new posture as an object announce her sexuality, but it leaves her in the vulnerable, unfamiliar position of having to manipulate her image to maximize the kind of traditional femininity she has thus far failed to develop.

Even though the games provide more practical clothing¹²⁴ for her in the arena than the red dress, the gaming woods test her ability to adapt her appearance in the face of a one-way mirror. There is nowhere for her to hide, as cameras film every move. The makeover doesn't seem to have wrought any permanent changes, and she ultimately survives during the games because she is an observant hunter and not a passive object of beauty. After winning the games, however, she is required to continue the "star-crossed lovers" ruse. She returns to the Capitol where she must don a pastel dress and promote a love affair she does not feel in order to

¹²⁴ All the tributes are issued the same gear: dark canvas pants, sturdy boots, black t-shirts, and hooded hiking jackets to protect them from the elements. Because the clothes are Capitol made, we assume they are made with high quality materials and advanced technology.

keep herself and Peeta alive. She cannot return to her identity in the woods away from the cameras; she must learn to adopt a persona that incorporates more traditional femininity into her public representation without surrendering the non-traditional values that helped her win.

The Photographic Eye/I in Framing, Editing, and Movement

The camera eye is an integral part of many dystopian narratives, as the machine's presence creates a self-conscious performance from citizens under its gaze. Katniss' development as a character includes the incorporation of the camera as a perspective she needs to manipulate in order to tell her story. As a girl in District 12, she slipped under the fence and developed a sense of self outside of being constantly monitored, but in the games she is barred from that path. Katniss' heroism is demonstrated through action instead of dialogue, before she is in the presence of Capitol cameras as well as during the games. Ross made good use of building audience identification with her character by alternating between her subjective point-of-view shots and reaction shots of her face. In one sense, she needs to reconcile with the old paradigm of objectification in order to have power over it. Though Ross uses plenty of hand-held, shaky images to signify her point of view, he also uses jump cuts to convey her physiological responses to adrenaline, anxiety, and trauma in the moment. There are plenty of close-up reaction shots of Katniss' face to convey emotional tone, but more than that, he seems to spend a lot of time focused on Katniss' hands and feet, which generate so much of the action. The focus

on her hands and feet resists readings of her as a passive object and invites new interpretations of her struggle and growth throughout the film.

When Katniss enters the games' woods, we see her hands and feet among rocks and moss on the ground as they are in Figure 47 from a high angle medium shot. She crunches the leaves up in her hand, a repeated action from the first scenes of her in District 12's woods, and we see how this skill helps her find her way to water. These shots of hands convey Katniss' confidence and control using an angle that is not coming from her perspective but one that is invested in showing her actions as a subject. Ostensibly, the lens the audience is looking through could be the one the Capitol is projecting, but she has found a way to harness it for something less dehumanizing when she starts taking care of the people around her. Figures 48, 49, and 50 also show that her hands signpost security (she won't fall out of the tree), danger (Tracker Jacker venom), and sadness (Rue's hands and Katniss' hands after she created the memorial). Her hands reveal worsening states of health, but as the film progresses, they are increasingly shown with other sets of hands. After Rue dies, her politicized, silent gesture in Figure 51 starts a revolution. In the beginning, she flinched when Peeta reached for her hand during the pageant, but her eventual clasp marked her understanding of performance in this new public arena. The very last scene in the film repeats this gesture with Peeta in Figure 52, which acknowledges her awareness that she has done the right thing morally, even if she cannot access the romantic feeling that is supposed to drive the relationship.

Sound Perspective: Hunters Listen

The music industry has probably seen the most radical economic changes in its industry in the new millennium, but movie soundtracks were still a huge boon for production companies back in 2012 and a good indication of fan popularity.¹²⁵ The pop music “companion” soundtrack produced by T-Bone Burnett and James Newton Howard, *The Hunger Games: Songs from District 12 and Beyond*, was still measured in terms of “sales” per unit back in 2012, and by all accounts it topped the charts.¹²⁶ The release of the Taylor Swift and The Civil Wars’ collaborative folk/acoustic single “Safe & Sound” in December of 2011 helped promote the mood and tone that Gary Ross wanted as an extension of Katniss’ identification with the coal mining/Appalachian community. Because Ross only used it as the second song over the end credits, the music behaves more like a separate tool for promotion. The video for the song, featuring Swift and The Civil Wars, was released a month before the film and was a huge hit with fans. The video, not unlike Paramore’s video for *Twilight*, was set in the woods, and the only reference image to the film is the Mockingjay pin. Swift, lean and blonde and waif-like, resembles more of a grown-up

¹²⁵ To give you some perspective about how different “buying” music is now compared to 2011, according to stastica.com only 9% of music revenue came from streaming services back then (where users pay a monthly subscription around \$10 for unlimited access to all music), and in 2017 65% of Americans are monthly subscribers (Richter). In effect, where fans used to pay anywhere from \$12-\$20 for one album (like *The Hunger Games* Soundtrack, for example), they now pay less than that per month to listen to as many albums as they want. Really big stars like Swift have a little more power to negotiate with streaming services like Apple Music, Spotify, or Tidal, but most artists receive a fraction of a percent per “stream” of their song. Back in 2011, fans could pay 99 cents to download the single from the album. This is no longer feasible. The charts are measured in terms of “streams” instead, but the revenue capture has never recovered from the days of physical copies being sold.

¹²⁶ According to *Billboard.com*, the album debuted at number one when it was released, selling 175,000 copies in its first week (Caulfield).

Prim than Katniss as she walks with bare feet through a barren winter woods in (what appears to be) a landscape not unlike the one conjured for Katniss in the film. *The Hunger Games* styled itself more like *Titanic* in terms of the soundtrack because only the film's score is featured in the film itself.

Instead of music, it is worth looking at how the sound perspective of the film refines Katniss' subjectivity, specifically by how it creates first person intimacy without using voiceover. Silence is used on both sides of the predator and prey equation: silence is employed as a response to threat, and it is necessary to use for a stealthy attack. As a hunter, listening is one of Katniss' most defining skills, which is difficult to simply show in a visually dominant medium: how to show one "listening" without the help of dialogue or voiceover, and how to translate what she hears. A hunter has to hide, wait, observe, and not give away her position. The ambient sounds of the woods help her locate water, danger, and predators. The hand-held camera style helps convey Katniss' POV that intimates some of her movements, sight, and states of mind, but the sound editing in *The Hunger Games* interprets moments for Katniss without relying on explanatory dialogue or voiceover.

Sound also confines the audience to Katniss' singular experience in times of stress. There is no voiceover used in *The Hunger Games*, yet the lack of explanation does not distract viewers from understanding the story as the subject is experiencing it. When Katniss is on the train to the Capitol, the handheld camera conveys her POV by showing her reflection in the dining car window as she looks in to see Haymitch and Peeta talking. The only sound heard is the ambient noise of the

fast-moving train, even as the editing cuts between two shot/reverse shots of Katniss' point of view and the third person perspective that is looking at her. She can see Effie applying makeup, and as the camera pans to the right, we can see Peeta talking, but only the ambient train sounds are heard. The camera then pans left to Haymitch clearly speaking back to Peeta, but he is also muted. The threat and frustration Katniss experiences extend to the audience, who experience sensory denial in the exact same way Katniss does.

The external diegetic subjective sound creates an intimate understanding of Katniss' psychological states and even connects how similar physical and emotional traumas affect her on a sensory level during the games. Her first interview with Caesar Flickman in the Capitol, for example, is as overwhelming to her as witnessing violence is (later) as it is experienced through subjective sound. Before Flickman announces her name, the crowd's cheering and Flickman's voice are at full volume; as he beckons her forward with his hand, the sound of clapping is turned down to the level of a babbling brook. Flickman's voice is reduced to a vibrating bass note, muffling any comprehensible word, even though she is sitting right next to him. A series of six handheld shots convey her anxiety as she walks toward him on the stage through jump cuts from behind Katniss' back to quick tilting and lateral pans of the crowd while the volume is tuning out. The external diegetic sound of the crowd snaps back to full volume after she asks "What?" and Flickman's voice is clear as he chides her for being nervous.

Subjective sound is used again to demonstrate her anxiety when she is put in the tube to go into the games and during the first few moments after the explosion near the cornucopia. After she is blown back, her point of view is visually fragmented through hand-held POV shots and jump cut editing, but the subjective sound remains muted, loyal to her perspective that is impaired and unable to process sensory input, just as she was before Flickman's interview. Even when the camera is pointed at Katniss' face, showing her shock and bewilderment after she watches Cato break the neck of a tribute, the lack of sound, save for a high-pitched ring and heavily muffled voices, is not the unrestricted, objective narration of monitoring Capitol cameras.

Silence does not just signify stress for Katniss, though, because she uses it skillfully as a hunter, and during the games she learns to use it in front of the Capitol cameras as well. When Rue calls out to Katniss in the forest because she is trapped under a net, Katniss does not answer back to reassure her that she has been heard. Her urgency is communicated through her running through brush, hearing her own name as it is called in desperation, but Katniss possesses a kind of heroic strength that keeps her mind on the larger problem: she is also being hunted and does not want to give away her position by comforting Rue with her voice. When Katniss finds Rue and cuts her out, she gets to hug her for one second before Marvel throws a spear toward Katniss' back. She draws an arrow and shoots him down, but he has already struck Rue. Katniss cries and tries to comfort Rue with her scabbed hands and repeats, "It's ok," but Rue wants a song. The camera, then, lets us look from

Rue's perspective. The treetops go in and out of focus as Katniss sings her "Meadow" song, and we see just her cheek and her eye, and then Katniss' voice fades as the screen fades to white, indicating Rue's death. She cries over Rue in earnest, as non-diegetic violins play, but when Katniss screams and throws the spear in grief/anger, the volume of her voice is absent once again.

Katniss' emotional development is still incomplete by the end of the film because she hasn't found a way to cope with emotional stress. She consistently quiets people she is trying to comfort: when Prim has a nightmare, as Rue is dying, and when Peeta expresses his regret over throwing bread out to her in the rain, she holds all of them in her hands and says, "Shhhhh." She kisses Peeta in the cave instead of giving him an answer as to "why" she is helping him. The truth is that this "love" is a performance for a Capitol audience, not for herself, and silence allows her to avoid experiencing feelings with other people. What Katniss might not see is the parallel to the adults in her society who silently allow the continuation of The Hunger Games to take place. Katniss' mother doesn't scream or cry when her daughters are chosen either.

Katniss Everdeen's triumph at the box office through 2015 is a cultural endorsement for young female characters who operate outside the pre-bride stereotype that dominated narratives produced by big studios for a century. She generates action by overcoming conflicts in a corrupt society through her brave choices, perseverance, intelligence, and genuine skill. While she started the

narrative as a vibrant part of her family and local community, her victory at the games broadened her contribution to the world at large. Her story is not hindered by outmoded paradigms that neglect to recognize young women as heroines. Like many young male heroes who came before her, she develops a love interest before the end of the series, but it is not and never was the primary reason her plot moved forward.

CONCLUSION: PROGRESS, REVISION, THE FUTURE

In 2014, the *NY Times* film critics A.O. Scott and Manohla Darghis cited Katniss Everdeen, specifically, as evidence that characters like hers are “changing girlhood and challenging tired stereotypes by not waiting for some guy to save the day: they’re saving themselves and their worlds too” (Scott and Darghis). My findings support this assertion and their notion that “the picture of girlhood at the movies has become an increasingly diverse, sometimes contradictory array of identities, including bold revisions of age-old archetypes and brave new heroines” (Scott and Darghis). They list the increased range of roles for young women,¹²⁷ while also addressing some of the disheartening statistics about gender inequity in Hollywood filmmaking that undercut the impact of these gains. It would be great if this dissertation clearly showed how big studio productions had finally stopped featuring pre-bride protagonists in favor of independent heroines, but such is not the case. The many productions still showcasing pre-brides disprove this assertion.¹²⁸ Following the fall of Hollywood executive producer Harvey Weinstein

¹²⁷ The article is broken into six sections. The first three consist of more independent heroine-type protagonists they list as “The Warriors,” “The New Searchers,” and “Scream Teens” followed by modified stereotypes they call “Girls Gone Wild,” “Once Upon a Time Right Now,” and “Love and Death.”

¹²⁸ The number of women with speaking parts in G, PG, and PG-13 rated films is still much lower than speaking parts performed by men, and those women’s roles tend to be “exasperatedly monochromatic”¹²⁸ (Scott and Darghis).

in the fall of 2017¹²⁹ due to multiple allegations of sexual harassment, abuse, and abuse of power, actress Molly Ringwald wrote in *The New Yorker*, “Women are shamed, told they are uptight, nasty, bitter, can’t take a joke, are too sensitive. And the men? Well, if they’re lucky, they might get elected President” (Ringwald). Ringwald’s career peaked as a teenager while she was John Hughes’ muse. She never found success outside the fictional pre-bride role, and her perspective embodies its real-life professional limitations. It’s no surprise that an industry run by influential executives like Weinstein will tend to promote worn-out stereotypes that place women in subordinate roles. Despite this, progressive roles for young women have been greatly expanded in recent successful American films—evidence of the broader ideological shifts in our culture.

My term pre-bride acknowledges the paradox of an industry that continues to promote traditional gender roles in film productions that specifically benefit patriarchy during a time of cultural change that simultaneously seeks to dismantle rigid patriarchal divisions of power based on gender. Bordwell and Thompson’s neoformalist method of analysis applied to *Sixteen Candles*, *Clueless*, and *Twilight* helped me explore the ways in which young women in pre-bride protagonist positions continue to be represented in mainstream productions of Hollywood films from the 1980s to the 2010s. At the same time, the method also helped illuminate

¹²⁹ Popularly referred to as the “#MeToo” social media movement, women have been inspired to come forward to publicly announce allegations of sexual misconduct/abuse/harassment against men in positions of power. The larger movement has forced a reevaluation of the professional (and personal) conduct of men who have abused their power over women beyond Hollywood.

the growth of independent heroines in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Titanic*, and *The Hunger Games*. This study demonstrates how competing ideologies, as Raymond Williams theorized, are also mapped onto representations of character types.

To what extent are these two character prototypes present in current popular American cinema? Recently, several studio films achieved financial success with independent teen heroines in non-marriage plot narratives: *True Grit* (2010), *Perfect Pitch* (2012), and *Divergent* (2014).¹³⁰ Several comic-book blockbuster franchises are also capitalizing on independent heroine popularity, including the DC Comics' first-ever female-led origin film, *Wonder Woman* (2017). In addition, in the next year, the X-Men Marvel Comics' franchise will have their first female-led origin film, *X-Men: Dark Phoenix* (2019), featuring a teen heroine. The successful reboot of the Star Wars franchise three years ago also capitalized on the independent heroine paradigm by featuring Rey (Daisy Ridley), a young woman in the Jedi role in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015). The recent record-breaking successes of franchises like *Wonder Woman* (2017) and *The Black Panther* (2018),¹³¹ further broaden the possibilities for protagonists and supporting casts in future blockbusters. For example, Marvel Studios released the male/female heroic duo *Ant-Man and The Wasp* (2018) where the Wasp [Evangeline Lily] is not a sidekick but a

¹³⁰ *True Grit* (Paramount) had a budget of \$35 million and had a \$171 million domestic take; *Perfect Pitch* (Universal) had a budget of \$17 million and a \$65 domestic take; and *Divergent* (Lionsgate) had a budget of \$85 million and a \$150 million domestic take.

¹³¹ *The Black Panther* made \$700 million (domestic) and \$1.3 billion (worldwide); *Wonder Woman* made \$412 million (domestic) and \$800 million (worldwide), according to *The-Numbers.com*.

partner, and in *Deadpool II* (2018), two team cohorts from the X-Men franchise are Domino (Zazie Beetz), a young black woman, and Negasonic Teenage Warhead (Brianna Hildebrand), a young gay woman.

Interestingly, the frequency of big studio pre-bride films like *The Princess Diaries* (2001), *Blue Crush* (2002), *A Cinderella Story* (2004), *Enchanted* (2007), *The Last Song* (2010), and *Easy A* (2010) have diminished in number during the second decade of the new millennium. Besides *Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2* (2012), Disney is the only major studio capitalizing on pre-bride narratives with their “Princess” brand. Surprisingly, the productions relying heavily on marriage plots are not their successful animated features like *Brave* (2012) or *Frozen* (2013),¹³² which purposely turn away from “handsome prince” romantic endings, but instead are the updated “live-action” re-makes of *Cinderella* (2015) and *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). Furthermore, successful marriage-plot romantic comedies like *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001) and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002), successful in the early 2000s with their “hopelessly single” female protagonists, did poorly with their franchise sequels *Bridget Jones’s Baby* (2016) or *My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2* (2016), which investigate their lives after marriage. Their failure at the box office suggests

¹³² *Brave* features Princess Merida, a female teen protagonist who resists her parents’ plans for her marriage plot. In the end, she is not positioned to get married but continue her development as a leader before she pursues a partnership. The movie grossed \$232 million domestically. *Frozen*, a tale focused on a protagonist named Elsa and the relationship with her sister, also focuses on Elsa’s ability to overcome adversity through personal development. She is not destined to be married by the end of the film. *Frozen* grossed \$400 million domestically and over \$1 billion internationally.

Disney knows quite well that marriage plots only work if the story ends at the “beginning” of the marriage.

The movie industry is changing rapidly. Domestic audiences continue to shrink, and big productions consider global markets that prioritize non-domestic audiences. Accordingly, future scholarship should continue to study female teen protagonists for signs of changing conventions in representations of the pre-bride and independent heroine. Current trends suggest that amendments for both types are continuing to broaden in multiple ways, including gender. New teen romance films have expanded beyond the female pre-bride to feature gay male teens, including the Oscar-winning independent American films *Moonlight* (2016) and *Call Me by Your Name* (2017), which may have helped pave the way for the bigger production and moderate success of Twentieth Century Fox’s *Love, Simon* (2018), a romantic comedy featuring a gay male teen as the protagonist. These films present evidence that the “teen” film is evolving alongside an industry that is being forced to consider more than “one story” for teen protagonists. Greta Gerwig’s critically acclaimed *Lady Bird* (2017) also found success at the box office with its independent teen heroine in pursuit of becoming an artist.¹³³ Like Stacy from *Fast Times*, Gerwig’s protagonist makes mistakes and explores her passions, but the narrative

¹³³ The Oscar-nominated *Lady Bird* (\$10 million budget) took \$48 million at the box office. Its popularity is substantial when compared to the Oscar-nominated independent film *Winter’s Bone* (2010) (an excellent film directed and co-written by Debra Granik), which also starred Jennifer Lawrence in a teen independent heroine role, but it only took in \$6 million (\$2 million budget) during its box office run.

champions her complexity by considering the value of her potential as an artist instead of focusing on her lackluster sexual pursuits.

Besides paying attention to contemporary American movies, scholars may also find it useful to explore programming in new venues like Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, and other streaming services. It will be interesting to examine how this programming contributes to the evolving representations of young teenage heroines as people deeply engaged with a broader spectrum of life's possibilities.

American film productions reflect cultural conflicts in new ways each decade. Although the pre-brides in this study (Sam, Cher and Bella) all start off asserting their autonomy through language, clothes, and access to freedom to match their post-civil rights' pop-culture contexts, their story arcs all end as marriage plots. Conversely, independent heroines Stacy, Rose, and Katniss are defined by their choices. These often involve unflattering mistakes or "unladylike" behaviors,¹³⁴ but ultimately broaden the variety of paths these young women take to authentic self-discovery. Sometimes these paths include partnership and love, but their overall value in their societies or communities is not centrally defined by gaining male attention.

¹³⁴ The range that comprises "unladylike" here is quite large, but classic examples include initiating sexual interest in the opposite sex, spitting, wielding weapons like axes or bows and arrows, lying, and prioritizing her own happiness over her family's.

WORKS CITED

- "Arena Ready" (supplementary material on "3-Disc Deluxe Edition" DVD release of *The Hunger Games*). 2012. DVD. Lionsgate. 12 Aug. 2012.
- Allen, Michael. *Contemporary U.S. Cinema*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 2003.
- Bailey, Steve, and James Hay. "Cinema and the Premises of Youth: 'Teen Films and Their Sites in the 1980s and 1990s.'" *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, edited by Steve Neal, London: British Film Institute, 2002, pp. 218-235.
- Barnes, Brooks. "Studio rises on promise of 'Twilight'." *New York Times*, 20 Nov. 2008, p. B1(L). *Academic OneFile*. Accessed 21 Nov. 2017.
- Barrett, Michele. "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender." *Feminist Criticisms and Social Change*. Newton, Judith and Deborah Rosenfelt, Eds., 65-83. New York: Methuen & Co., 1985.
- Beam, Samuel Ervin. "Flightless Bird, American Mouth." *Twilight Motion Picture Soundtrack*, Iron & Wine perf., Atlantic Records, 2008.
- "Becoming Bella" (supplementary material on "Three Disc Deluxe Edition" DVD release of *Twilight*). 2008. DVD. Summit Entertainment, 2009.
- Benbow-Buitenhuis, Anoushka. "A Feminine Double-Bind? Towards Understanding the Commercialisation of Beauty through Examining Anti-Ageing Culture." *Social Alternatives*, vol. 33, no. 2, Apr. 2014, p. 43. EBSCOhost. Accessed 19 Mar. 18.

- Billson, Anne. "Vampire Weakened." *Guardian*: London, England, 6 Dec. 2008, p. 8. *Academic OneFile*. Accessed 17 Nov. 2017.
- Blank, Hanne. *Virgin: The Untouched History*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2007.
- Blanco F., José, et al. *Clothing and Fashion: American Fashion from Head to Toe [4 Volumes] : American Fashion from Head to Toe*. ABC-CLIO, 2016. Clothing and Fashion. EBSCOhost, Accessed 20 Apr 2018.
- Boles, Derek. "James Cameron's *Titanic*." *Deconstructing the Titanic: Teachable Moments*, 19 Nov. 2011: *Media Awareness Network*. media-awareness.ca:80/english/resources/educational/teachable_moments/deconstructing_titanic_6.cfm. Accessed 22 Feb. 2018.
- Bordwell, David, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. 10th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2013.
- Boyum, Joy Gould. "Film Review; 'Teen Films: Lurid and Lecherous New Twists'." Review of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, directed by Amy Heckerling. *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 Sept 1982. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Accessed 8 June 2017.
- Brown, Jackson. "Somebody's Baby." *Fast Times at Ridgemont High: Music from the Motion Picture*, Elektra Records, 1982.
- Cameron, James. Interview with Bill Moseley. 1998. Reprinted "James Cameron: Interviews" by Brent Dunham. Jackson, MS: *University of Mississippi Press*, 2011. 77-109. *Project Muse*. Accessed 7 Aug. 2017.

- "Capitol Couture: The Styles of Panem." Interviews with Judiana, Ve Neill, and Flowers. Produced by John Albarian for Lionsgate Films. 31 October 2017.
- "Dan Seekings" *youtube.com*. Accessed 2 Mar. 2018.
- Caulfield, Keith. "Hunger Games Soundtrack Debuts at No. 1 on Billboard 200." *Billboard*: 28 Mar 2012. www.billboard.com/articles/news/498744/hunger-games-soundtrack-debuts-at-no-1-on-billboard-200. Accessed 21 Apr. 2018.
- Chaney, Jen. *As If!: The Oral History of Clueless as Told by Amy Heckerling, the Cast, and the Crew*. New York, NY: Touchstone, 2015.
- Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. "Y2K Repair Bill: \$100 Billion: Commerce Estimate Lower Than Others." *The Washington Post*. 18 Nov. 1999. washingtonpost.com. Web. washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPcap/1999-11/18/077r-111899-idx. Accessed 18 Feb. 2018.
- Chapman, James. *Past and Present: National Identity and the British Historical Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2005.
- Clueless* (1995). Dir. Amy Heckerling. Perf. Alicia Silverstone. Paramount Pictures, 2006. "'Whatever!' Edition" DVD.
- CNN Library. "Columbine High School Shootings Fast Facts." *CNN.com*, 5 Apr. 2017, cnn.com/2013/09/18/us/columbine-high-school-shootings-fast-facts. Accessed 21 Feb. 2018.
- Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. 2008. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 2009.
- Considine, David M. *The Cinema of Adolescence*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1985.

"A Conversation with Gary Ross and Elvis Mitchell" (supplementary material on "3-Disc Deluxe Edition" DVD release of *The Hunger Games*). 2012. DVD.

Lionsgate. 12 Aug. 2012.

"A Conversation with Stephenie Meyer" (supplementary material on "Three Disc Deluxe Edition" DVD release of *Twilight*). 2008. DVD. Summit Entertainment, 2009.

Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York, NY: Basic, 1992.

---. *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families*. New York: Basic, 1997.

Crowe, Cameron. Interview by Greg Mariotti. "Who the Hell is Ricky Fedora: An Exclusive Interview with Cameron Crowe." *The Uncool*, 7 June 2002, theuncool.com/press/the-uncool-exclusive-interview. Accessed 29 July 2016.

D'Alessandro, Anthony. "Byronic Heroes and Endless Love." *Daily Variety*, 11 Nov. 2008, p. A2. *Academic OneFile*, doi: GALE|A189956995. Accessed 8 March 2018.

Darghis, Manohla. "The Love That Dare not Bare its Fangs." Review of *Twilight* directed by Catherine Hardwicke. *The New York Times*, 8 Nov 2008. nytimes.com. Accessed 22 Dec 2017.

"Design" (supplementary material on "3-Disc Deluxe Edition" DVD release of *The Hunger Games*). 2012. DVD. Lionsgate. 12 Aug. 2012.

- De Vaney, Ann. "Pretty in Pink? John Hughes Reinscribes Daddy's Girl in Homes and Schools." Gateward, Frances K., and Murray Pomerance, eds. *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2002.
- Dewey, Caitlin. "A Short History of the 'Promposal'." The Washington Post (.com). 14 Apr. 2014. Accessed 11 Apr. 18.
- Dixon, Luther and Allyson R. Khent. "16 Candles." *Sixteen Candles' Soundtrack*, Stray Cats perf., MCA Records, 1984.
- Doherty, Thomas. *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of the American Movies in the 1950s*. 1998. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002. Print.
- Driscoll, Catherine. *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Berg, 2011. Print.
- Dresner, Lisa. *Virgin Territory*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 27 July 2016.
- Ebert, Roger. "Review of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*." *Chicago Sun-Times*, 1 Jan 1982. *rogerebert.com*. Accessed 10 June 2016.
- . "Review of *Sixteen Candles*." *Chicago Sun-Times*, 4 May 1984. *rogerebert.com*. Accessed 10 Feb 2017.
- . "Review of *Twilight*" *Chicago Sun-Times*, 19 Nov. 2008. *rogerebert.com*. Accessed 10 Jan. 2018.
- Egan, Kate. *The Hunger Games: The Official Illustrated Movie Companion*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2012.
- Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1992.

- Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982). Dir. Amy Heckerling. Perf. Jennifer Jason Leigh, Phoebe Cates. Universal Pictures, 2004. "Totally Awesome Special Edition" DVD.
- "*Fast Times at Ridgemont High* – Catalog Detail." *AFI*, www.afi.com/members/catalog/detailview/movie56776. Accessed 15 Aug. 2016.
- Fernandez, Jay. "'Hunger Games' Producer Nina Jacobson on Movie Backstory; Firing from Disney (Q&A)." *The Hollywood Reporter*. March 23, 2012. Accessed 21 Mar 2018.
- Ferriss, Suzanne. "Emma Becomes Clueless" *Emma: A Norton Critical Edition*. 3rd edition. Eds. Stephen M. Parrish. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000. Print. 435-444.
- Ford, Elizabeth A. and Deborah C. Mitchell, Eds. *The Makeover in Movies: Before and After in Hollywood Films 1941-2002*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2004.
- Fox, Greer Litton. "'Nice Girl': Social Control of Women through a Value Construct." *Signs*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1977, pp. 805–817. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3173211. Web. Accessed 15 July 2017.
- Gehring, Wes D. *Parody as Film Genre*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999. Print.
- Gill, Rosalind and Christina Scharff, eds. *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011. Print.
- Gill, Rosalind. *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.

- Gora, Susanna. *You Couldn't Ignore me if you Tried: The Brat Pack, John Hughes, and Their Impact on a Generation*. New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 2010. Print.
- Grossman, Lev and Bryan Alexander. "It's *Twilight* in America." *Time*, vol. 174, no. 20, 23 Nov. 2009, pp. 52-55. EBSCOhost. Accessed 16 Nov. 2017.
- Harrington, Richard. "Film Review; 'Ridgemont' Flunks Out." Review of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. *The Washington Post*, 13, Aug 1982: D4. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed 11 June 2017.
- Harrison, Mary-Catherine. "Reading the Marriage Plot." *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2014, pp. 112-131.
- Hasty, Katie. "'Twilight' Bumps AC/DC Atop Billboard 200." *Billboard Magazine*, 11 November 2012. Web. *billboard.com*. Accessed 21 Jan 2018.
- Heckerling, Amy, dir. "Class of '95." *Clueless*. 1995. DVD. Paramount Pictures, 2005.
- Heckerling, Amy and Cameron Crowe. Audio commentary. *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982). Dir. Heckerling. Perf. Jennifer Jason Leigh, Phoebe Cates, Sean Penn, Brian Backer, and Robert Romanus. Universal Pictures, 2002, DVD.
- Hemphill, C. Dallett. "Manners." *Encyclopedia of the New American Nation*, edited by Paul Finkelman, vol. 2, Charles Scribner's Sons, 2006, pp. 327-329. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, Gale Document Number: GALE|CX3446700384. Accessed 16 Apr. 2018.
- Holmlund, Chris. "Postfeminism from A to G." *Cinema Journal* 44: 2 (2005): 116-121. *Project Muse*. Accessed 18 Mar 18.

- Horn, John, Doug Smith and Nicole Sperling. "Oscar Voters Overwhelmingly White, Male." *L.A. Times*. 19 Feb. 2012.
latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/Oscars/la-et-unmasking-oscar-academy-project-html-htmlstory.html. Accessed 31 May 2018.
- Horner, James. "My Heart Will Go On." *Titanic: Music From the Motion Picture*, Celine Dion perf., Sony, 1997.
- Hunger Games, The* (2012). Dir. Gary Ross. Perf. Jennifer Lawrence. Lionsgate Entertainment, 2012. DVD.
- Huq, Rupa. *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006.
- Hurley, John and Ronnie Wilkins. "Love of the Common People." *John Hurley Sings About People*, RCA Records, 1970, Paul Young Perf., *No Parlez*, CBS Records, 1982.
- Iandoli, Kathy. "Alexandra Patsavas Makes the Soundtrack to Your Life." *Vice News*, 6 Nov 2012. Web. vice.com. Accessed 21 Jan 2018.
- Jay, Timothy. *Cursing in America: A Psycholinguistic Study of Dirty Language in the Courts, in the Movies, in the Schoolyards and on the Streets*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1992. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Jennings, Will. Interview with Carl Wiser. *Songfacts.com*, 7 May 2006.
songfacts.com/blog/interviews/will_jennings. Accessed 21 Dec 2017.

- Kael, Pauline. "Film Review; 'The Current Cinema: Rice Krispies'." Review of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, directed by Amy Heckerling. *New Yorker*, 1 Nov 1982, 146. *archives.newyorker.com*. Accessed 1 July 2017.
- . "Film Review; 'The Current Cinema: The Candidate'." Review of *Sixteen Candles*, directed by John Hughes. 28 May 1984, 101-103. *archives.newyorker.com*. Accessed 3 Mar 2017.
- Karlyn, Kathleen R. *Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers: Redefining Feminism on Screen*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011.
- Kaveney, Roz. *Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television from Heathers to Veronica Mars*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Keller, James. "Meta-Cinema and Meta-Marketing: Gary Ross's 'The Hunger Games', an Allegory of Its Own Making." *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2013, pp. 23-42. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23416334. Accessed 16 May 2018.
- Kellner, Douglas. "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture." Rpt. in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*. 2nd ed. Eds. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003. 9-20.
- Kellner, Douglas, and Michael Ryan. *Camera Politica: The Politics And Ideology Of Contemporary Hollywood Film*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1988.
- Kempley, Rita. "Film Review; 'Low Blows at 'Ridgemont High'." Review of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, directed by Amy Heckerling. *The Washington Post*, 13 August, 1982: W13. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Accessed 8 June 2017.

- King, Susan. "Fast Times at 35: Cameron Crowe, Amy Heckerling on Courting David Lynch, Sean Penn's Method Acting, Genital Equality." *Variety*, 10 Aug. 2017. variety.com/2017/film/news/fast-times-at-ridgemont-high-cameron-crowe-sean-penn-anniversary-1202518218. Accessed 8 Aug. 2018.
- Koldau, Linda Maria. *The Titanic on Film: Myth versus Truth*, McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central, ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utk/detail.action?docID=1043397.
- Krämer, Peter. "Far Across The Distance...': Historical Films, Film History, and *Titanic*." *The Titanic in Myth and Memory: Representations in Visual and Literary Culture*. Tim Bergfelder and Sarah Street, Eds. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 163-172.
- Kroll, Justin. "Greta Gerwig Eyes 'Little Women' with Meryl Streep, Emma Stone, Saoirse Ronan, Timothee Chalamet Circling." *Variety*, 29 Jun, 2018. variety.com/2018/film/news/little-women-meryl-streep-emma-stone-saoirse-ronan-greta-gerwig-1202646423. Accessed 2 Jul. 2018.
- Lee, Christina. *Screening Generation X: The Politics and Popular Memory of Youth in Contemporary Cinema*. Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010.
- Levy, Gabrielle. "The 115th Congress by Party, Race, Gender and Religion." *U.S. News*. 17 Jan. 2017. Web. usnews.com/news/politics/slideshows/the-115th-congress-by-party-race-gender-and-religion?slide=4. Accessed 2 June 2018.
- Lewis, Jon. *The Road to Romance & Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

- Liggett, Lori. "From Edwardian Girl to Millennial Woman in *Titanic*." *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*. Edited by Frances K. Gateward and Murray Pomerance, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002, 183-199.
- Lubin, David M. *Titanic*. London: British Film Institute, 1999.
- McDonnell, Evelyn. "The Feminine Critique: The Secret History of Women and Rock Journalism." *Rock She Wrote*, edited by Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers, Dell Publishing Group, New York, NY, 1995, 5-23.
- Maslin, Janet. "Film Review; Ridgmont High." Review of *Fast Times at Ridgmont High*, directed by Amy Heckerling. *The New York Times*, 3 Sept 1982: C6. *nytimes.com*. Accessed 16 July 2016.
- . "Film Review; A Spectacle as Sweeping as the Sea." Review of *Titanic*, directed by James Cameron. *The New York Times*, 19 Dec 1997. *nytimes.com*. Accessed 27 April 2017.
- . "Film Review; A Teen-Ager Who's Clear on Her Priorities." Review of *Clueless*, directed by Amy Heckerling. *The New York Times*. 19 July 1995, *nytimes.com*. Accessed 16 May 2017.
- . "Film Review; 'Screen: '16 Candles,' a Teen-Age Comedy'." Review of *Sixteen Candles*, directed by John Hughes. *The New York Times*. 4 May 1984, *nytimes.com*. Accessed 18 Feb 2017.
- Mast, Gerald. *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1973. Print.

- McRobbie, Angela. *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2009.
- Mellen, Joan. *Big Bad Wolves: Masculinity in the American Film*. London: Elm Tree Books, 1978.
- Nash, Melanie and Martii Lahti. "Almost Ashamed to Say I am One of Those Girls: *Titanic*, Leonardo DiCaprio, and the Paradoxes of Girl Fandom." *Titanic: Anatomy of a Blockbuster*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999. 64-88.
- Nicholson, Amy. "Bikini Kill Story The Punk Singer Compels Us to Ask if Feminism is Dead." *The Village Voice*. 28 Nov. 2013, www.villagevoice.com/2013/11/28/bikini-kill-story-the-punk-singer-compels-us-to-ask-if-feminism-is-dead. Accessed 20 Feb. 2017.
- "On Location in Panem" (supplementary material on "3-Disc Deluxe Edition" DVD release of *The Hunger Games*). 2012. DVD. Lionsgate. 12 Aug. 2012.
- Ouellette, Laurie. "Ship of Dreams: Cross-Class Romance and the Cultural Fantasy of *Titanic*." *Titanic: Anatomy of a Blockbuster*. Sandler, Kevin and Gaylyn Studlar, Eds. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999. 169-188.
- "The Partnership: A Look at Pre-Production" (supplementary material on "Three Disc Deluxe Edition" DVD release of *Twilight*). 2008. DVD. Summit Entertainment, 2009.
- Petty, Tom. "American Girl." *Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers*, Shelter Records, 1977.

Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York, NY: Grosset/Putnam, 1994.

Pollock, Dale. "Film Review; 'Movies: The Life and Times of 'Fast Times'." Review of *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, directed by Amy Heckerling. *Los Angeles Times*, 15 August 1982: 120. *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Accessed 10 June 2017.

Powers, Ann. "Everything and the Girl." *Spin* 11 1997: 74,78, 80. *ProQuest*. 11 Dec. 2017.

Radner, Hilary. "Pretty is as Pretty Does: Free Enterprise and the Marriage Plot." *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*. Ed. Jim Collins, Ava Collins, and Hilary Radner. New York: Routledge, 1993. 56-76.

Rapkin, Mickey. "The Oral History of Céline Dion's 'My Heart Will Go On': Controversies, Doubts & 'Belly Pains' in the Studio." *Billboard Magazine*. 27 May 2017, billboard.com. Accessed 29 Sept. 2017.

Rapp, Nicholas and Krishna Thakkar. "Harry Potter at 20: Billions in Box Office Revenue, Millions of Books Sold." *Fortune*. 26 June 2017. *Time Inc.* fortune.com/2017/06/26/harry-potter-20th-anniversary/. Accessed 21 Jan. 2018.

Realf, Maria. "An audience with James Cameron. The filmmaker discusses his movies to date and reveals the motivations." *Eyeforfilm.co.uk*. 21 Jan. 2010. Accessed 12 Jan 2017.

- Richter, Felix. "Music Streaming Accounts for 65% of U.S. Music Revenues."
Statista.com: 29 Mar 2018. www.statista.com/chart/8836/streaming-proportion-of-us-music-revenue/. Accessed 21 Apr. 2018.
- Ringwald, Molly. "All the Other Harvey Weinsteins." 17 Oct. 2017, *The New Yorker*.
www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/all-the-other-harveys.
 Accessed 12 Jul. 2018.
- Ross, Marcia, casting dir. "Class of '95." *Clueless*. 1995. DVD. Paramount Pictures, 2005.
- Sandler, Kevin S. and Gaylyn Studlar. *Titanic: Anatomy of a Blockbuster*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- Sakoulas, Thomas. "Theseus and the Minotaur." *Ancient-Greece.org*. 5/2/2007
[.ancient-greece.org/culture/mythology/minotaur](http://ancient-greece.org/culture/mythology/minotaur). Accessed 18 May 2018.
- Schatz, Thomas. "The New Hollywood." *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*. Ed. Jim Collins, Ava Collins, and Hilary Radner. New York: Routledge, 1993. 8-36.
- Schwartz, Richard A. *The 1990s: Eyewitness History*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007.
- Scott, A.O. and Manohla Darghis. "Sugar, Spice and Guts: Representation of Female Characters in Movies Is Improving." *New York Times*. 3 Sept. 2014. Accessed 14 Jun. 2016.
- Seeger, Linda. *Women Call the Shots: The Developing Power and Influence of Women in Television and Film*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Co., 1996.

- Shary, Timothy. *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in American Cinema since 1980*. 2002. University of Texas Press, Austin, TX: 2014.
- . *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen*. Wallflower Press, London: 2005.
- Sixteen Candles* (1984). Dir. John Hughes. Perf. Molly Ringwald, Anthony Michael Hall, Michael Schoeffling. Universal Pictures, 2003. DVD.
- Sohn, Michael. "Liam Hemsworth, Jennifer Lawrence and Josh Hutcherson at 'The Hunger Games: Catching Fire' premiere in Berlin." AP. *New York Daily News*, 17 Nov. 2013. Photograph. nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/hemsworth-hutcherson-talk-battling-lawrence-catching-fire-article-1.1519664. Accessed 18 May 2018.
- Spector, Phil. "Today I Met the Boy I'm Gonna Marry." Darlene Love Perf., Philles Records, 1963.
- Strahan, Erin J., et al. "Victoria's Dirty Secret: How Sociocultural Norms Influence Adolescent Girls and Women." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 34, issue 2, 2007, pp. 288-301. *Sage Journals*, doi/10.1177/0146167207310457. Accessed 12 Dec. 2017.
- Sydney-Smith, Susan. "Romancing Disaster: *Titanic* and the Rites of Passage Film." *The Titanic in Myth and Memory: Representations in Visual and Literary Culture*. Tim Bergfelder and Sarah Street, Eds. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 185-196.

- Taylor, Trey. "The Rise and Fall of Katharine Hepburn's Fake Accent." *The Atlantic*. 8 Aug. 2013. theatlantic.com/archive/2013/08/the-rise-and-fall-of-katharine-hepburns-fake-accent/278505/. Accessed 06 Apr. 2018.
- Thompson, Anne. "Five reasons 'Twilight' could take big bite of B.O." *Variety*, 10 Nov. 2008, p. 6+. *Academic OneFile*. Accessed 17 Nov. 2017.
- Thompson, Kristin. *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Thompson Twins, The. "If You Were Here." *Sixteen Candles' Soundtrack*, MCA Records, 1984.
- Titanic* (1997). Dir. James Cameron. Perf. Kate Winslet, Leonardo DiCaprio. Twentieth Century Fox Pictures and Paramount Pictures, 2012. DVD.
- Turim, Maureen. "Women's Films: Comedy, Drama, Romance." Ferriss, Suzanne, and Mallory Young, Eds. *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies*. New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 26–40.
- Twilight* (2008). Dir. Catherine Hardwicke. Perf. Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattinson. Summit Entertainment, 2009. "Three Disc Deluxe Edition" DVD.
- Valby, Karen. "Stephenie Meyer Talks 'Twilight'." *Entertainment Weekly*, 6 Nov. 2008, ew.com/article/2008/11/06/stephenie-meyer-talks-twilight/. Accessed 21 Nov. 2017.
- Vered, Karen Orr and Christèle Maizonniaux. "Barbie and the straight-to-DVD movie: pink post-feminist pedagogy" *Feminist Media Studies*, 05 May 2016, p. 1-17, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2016.1178158>.

Wald, Gayle. "Clueless in the Neocolonial World." *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice:*

Cinemas of Girlhood. Edited by Frances K. Gateward and Murray Pomerance,

Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002, Pages.

Weinraub, Bernard. "Who's Lining Up At Box Office? Lots and Lots Of Girls; Studios

Aim at Teen-Agers, A Vast, Growing Audience." *The New York Times*, 23 Feb.

1998, nytimes.com. Accessed 16 May 2017.

White, Richard Grant. *The Galaxy, Volume 18: Library of American Civilization*. Ed.

William Conant Church. University Park, PA: W.C. and F.P. Church, 1874.

Digitized. August 9, 2013.

Williams, Hayley, Josh Farro, and Taylor York. "Decode." *Twilight Original Motion*

Picture Soundtrack, Atlantic Records, 2008.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.

Wood, Beatrice. "From Ingénue to Inspiration: Beatrice and the Cinema." *Beatrice*

Wood Center for the Arts, 2017, www.beatricewood.com/biography. Accessed

17 Dec 2017.

Wood, Robin. *Hollywood: From Vietnam to Reagan...and Beyond*. New York:

Columbia University Press, 1986. Print. (Revised and expanded edition

2003).

APPENDIX



Figure 2. Stacy's work uniform in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.



Figure 3. The unhappy, modern look of Sam (left) in *Sixteen Candles*.



Figure 4. Final shot in *Sixteen Candles*. Pre-Bride and older suitor.



Figure 5. Sam's full-length bridesmaid's dress.



Figure 6. Publicity photo for 1990's band, The Lunachicks.



Figure 7. Kathleen Hanna of riot grrrl band Bikini Kill, 1992 (Photo by Linda Rosier).



Figure 8. Screenshot from Britney Spears' "Hit Me Baby..." Music Video (1998).



Figure 9. Frame capture of one of Cher's "shirts" worn in *Clueless*.



Figure 10. Frame capture of Cher's short bridesmaid's dress in *Clueless*.



Figure 11. Publicity photo of Dionne, Cher, and Tai in *Clueless*.



Figure 12. Frame capture of final moment in *Clueless*.



Figure 13. Frame capture of Rose and Jonathon in matching ties in *Titanic*.



Figure 14. Frame capture of Rose's in styled makeup, hair, and jewels in *Titanic*.



Figure 15. Frame capture of Rose's Edwardian style in *Titanic*.



Figure 16. Frame capture of Rose hiding under a plaid blanket in *Titanic*.



Figure 17. Frame capture Rose on a horse in *Titanic*.



Figure 18. Frame capture of Rose looking at *Titanic* for the first time.



Figure 19. Frame capture of Rose looking at the Statue of Liberty for the first time in *Titanic*.



Figure 20. Frame capture of Rose and Jack looking directly at nude sketch in *Titanic*.



Figure 21. Frame capture of Bella and Edward inside with blue filter in *Twilight*.



Figure 22. Frame capture of blue filter exterior shot in *Twilight*.



Figure 23. Frame capture of conspicuous Rosalie and Emmet in *Twilight*.



Figure 24. Frame capture of Bella holding her cacti in Arizona in *Twilight*.



Figure 25. Frame capture of Bella in plaid in *Twilight*.



Figure 26. Frame capture of Bella (left), Angela (center), and Jessica (right) shopping for dresses in *Twilight*.



Figure 27. Frame capture of Bella's dress for the prom in *Twilight*.



Figure 28. Frame capture of Bella in her sweater at prom in *Twilight*.



Figure 29. Frame capture of final kiss in *Twilight* at prom.



Figure 30. Frame capture of close-up shot of Edward in *Twilight*.



Figure 31. Frame capture of Bella's close-up/reaction shot to Edward in Figure 30.



Figure 32. Frame capture of medium close-up shot/ forest montage in *Twilight*.



Figure 33. Frame capture of medium shot/forest montage in *Twilight*.



Figure 34. Frame capture of extreme long shot, bird's eye view angle from forest montage in *Twilight*.



Figure 35. Frame capture of Edward talking to Bella in treetop in *Twilight*.



Figure 36. Frame capture of Caesar Flickman's interview in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 37. Frame capture of the Capitol crowd parade in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 38. Frame capture of a close-up on a Capitol resident in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 39. Frame capture of Katniss' interview shoes with Caesar Flickman in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 40. Liam Hemsworth, Jennifer Lawrence, and Josh Hutcherson at the *Catching Fire* premiere in 2013 (AP Photo).



Figure 41. Frame capture of District 12's at the reaping in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 42. Frame capture of Effie Trinket at the reaping in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 43. Frame capture of Katniss hunting District 12 woods in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 44. Frame capture of Katniss in her blue dress at the reaping next to Trinket in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 45. Frame capture of Katniss and fractured mirror in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 46. Frame capture of Katniss during her interview in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 47. Frame capture of Katniss' hands woods in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 48. Frame capture of Katniss' hands in a tree in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 49. Frame capture of Katniss' hand with Tracker Jacker venom in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 50. Frame capture of Rue's corpse (left) and Katniss' hands (right) in *The Hunger Games*.

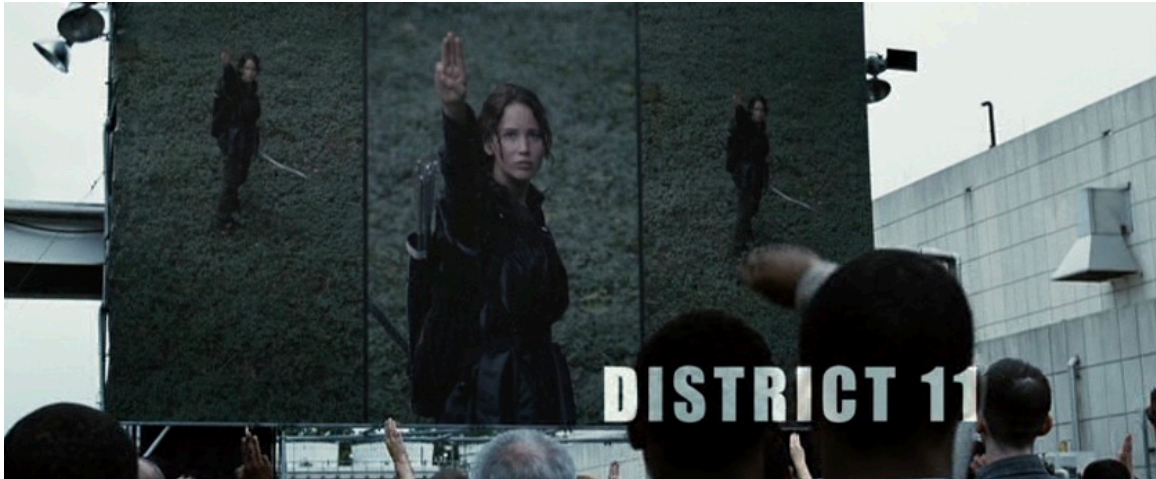


Figure 51. Frame capture of Katniss making a political sign with her hand to D-11 after Rue's death in *The Hunger Games*.



Figure 52. Frame capture of Peeta (left) and Katniss (right) clapping hands after their win in *The Hunger Games*.

VITA

Kierstyn Gay Lamour (née Ipson) was born and raised in East Lansing, Michigan. She graduated cum laude with a B.A. in English--Creative Writing from Michigan State University in 1997. She worked as a writer, communications director, and legislative aide in the Michigan State Senate from 1997-2002. She gave birth to three children between 2000-2006, and earned her M.A. in English, Creative Writing with her poetry collection entitled, "Appeasing the Animal," from the University of Tennessee in 2010. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee in 2018.

Lamour's research focuses on the evolution of female teen protagonists in popular American films over the past thirty-plus years.