Frontier Mythology in the American Teen Film

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis examines representations of youth in the American "teen film". As a critical category, the teen film is still developing, but it has been defined by a number of critics as being—ostensibly— *about* and *for* youth.[1] This thesis engages with teen film literature to test the meaning of these terms. As a genre that is precariously positioned between parent culture and youth audiences, teen film's narratives are always negotiated and the degree to which it is about and for youth is debatable. I argue that rather than being about and for youth in simple terms, the teen film deploys narratives about a certain idea of youth that is distinctly American and historically contingent; in other words, while certainly consumed by youth and depicting narratives that feature youthful characters and themes, the teen film genre contributes to discourses that are *about* and *for* the idea of America.

My argument contributes to the critical literature on teen film by exploring the ways the teen film functions as a representation of American ideology. It outlines how, in America, the category of "youth" has historically functioned as an important site of ideological inscription in which to construct an idealised future. In the early 20th century (via the discourse of adolescence), youth was specifically idealised as a frontier space, a site in which to symbolically reconcile troubling anxieties and contradictions left unresolved at the closure of the American frontier. Up to the end of World War II, Hollywood cinema functioned similarly, as a site in which the troubling contradiction between the national ideals of individualism and community might be mobilised and contained, via the "reconciliatory" narrative.[2] The teen film emerged in the period immediately after World War II, when Hollywood's efforts to resolve the tensions inherent in frontier mythology were foundering. The teen film might have represented a convergence of the potential reconciliatory powers of cinema *and* youth, but rather than assisting in the resolution of American ideological crises, the teen film problematised them. Screening youth as an inherently rebellious space, a "frontier" space, facilitated the breakdown of the reconciliatory pattern. In the teen films of the 1950s, the conflict between the ideals of individualism and community proved irreconcilable. Subsequent teen film cycles stage and re-stage the conflict between individual and community, offering repeated takes on what those fundamentally "American" ideals mean in each generation.

This thesis traces developments in the representation of the conflict between individual and community through four of the teen film's dominant cycles— delinquency films from the 1950s, slasher films and animal comedies from the 1970s-to-mid-1980s, and makeover films from the late-1990s-to-early-2000s. Proceeding from the initial deliberation over the terms *about* and *for* youth, I include discussions

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[1] This definition is supported by the work of Catherine Driscoll and Stephen Tropiano.
[2] This thesis works from Robert B. Ray's discussion of the "reconciliatory" narrative.

of films like *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *Porky's* (1982) while excluding films like *River's Edge* (1986) and *Kids* (1995), which certainly represent youth, but are typically not viewed by them.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Signed

Rowena Harper

18 December 2008

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Introduction

> In one way or another, most teen stories are about what cultural theorists call the liminal experience: that intense, suspended moment between yesterday and tomorrow, between childhood and adulthood, between being a nobody and a somebody, when everything is in question and anything is possible. When you're in the middle of a liminal experience, it doesn't feel like a passing phase; it's the most significant and complete moment of your life (Martin, *Phantasms* 68).

The American teen film is—notionally—a genre of film both *about* and *for* "youth". Yet the idea of youth is a slippery thing, as Adrian Martin demonstrates in the extract above. In his attempt to capture the essence of both the teen film narrative and the idea of youth at its core, Martin asserts nothing definitive about either. The main problem, it seems, is the elusiveness of the teen film's main subject: youth. As a liminal phase, youth is defined entirely by what it is not, existing only in that ambivalent space "between" opposing terms of dichotomies that classify age and identity. And as a state of "becoming", youth represents infinite potential: the potential to become anything at all. Martin's analysis, in examining the teen film according to the degree to which it captures or conceals "youth", inevitably depicts the teen film—and youth—as ethereal things.

In this thesis, I offer a reading of the American teen film that moves away from attempts to locate the essence of youth in teen film narratives. Rather, I proceed from an understanding of youth put forward by Lawrence Grossberg, that youth is a "signifier of change and transition", one that "cannot be represented, for it is an identity defined solely by and for the adults who, in a variety of ways, invest in it and

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use it to locate themselves" (176). In other words, I work from the presumption that representations of youth reveal more about the values and concerns of parent culture than they do about youth. In this thesis, I examine the ways in which youth is mobilised as a "signifier" in the American teen film. I argue that the idea of youth is deployed in the teen film to reinvigorate the symbolic powers once held by another "liminal" site: that of the American frontier. I argue that the teen film, which developed in the years shortly after WWII, emerged in a period of ideological crisis in American culture and the idea of youth was used on screen to examine the relationship between two opposing ideals that were once ostensibly reconciled by America's frontier: individualism and communitarian participation. I suggest that since then, the teen film has continued to use youth as a symbolic site in which to examine the evolving relationship between those two ideals and, in addition, to explore their shifting relationship with gender.

In order to stage my analysis of the teen film as a genre that uses youth to examine certain frontier tensions, I use Chapter One to argue that both the Hollywood cinema and discourse on youth took up particular symbolic functions of the frontier shortly after its official closure in 1890. I discuss the pre-WWII development of the Hollywood cinema and, using Robert B. Ray's discussion of the "reconciliatory pattern", suggest that the Hollywood cinema developed as a space in which to symbolically reconcile the contradiction between individualism and communitarian participation. I also discuss the pre-WWII development of discourse

on youth and discuss the ways in which it transposed onto youth the ambivalent future-oriented projections that were once characteristic of the American frontier. Although the teen film emerged over 60 years after the frontier's closure, I assert that the teen film, as a convergence of Hollywood cinematic narrative and discourse on youth, is fundamentally structured by these frontier tensions. In framing the teen film in this way, I argue that the teen film, rather than being only about and for youth, is also about and for the idea of "America".

In successive chapters, I then go on to examine four key cycles of teen films: delinquency films from the 1950s, slasher films and animal comedies from the 1970s-to-mid-1980s, and makeover films from the late-1990s-to-early-2000s.[1] I will examine how each cycle depicts ambivalence that is contemporary to that historical period about the individualism/community opposition. I will show that the way in which the teen film revisits and reworks the individualism/community opposition differs from cycle to cycle, reflecting the socio-political tensions of each historical moment. I will also show that the cycles vary, both in the explicitness with which they raise the opposition and in the narrative forms with which they address it.

In Chapter Two I address teen delinquency films and argue that they depict youth by recasting a particularly dominant figure from many Classical Hollywood

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[1] The teen film, though it is called a genre here, tends to develop in "cycles". In this thesis, a cycle is understood according to the definition discussed by Martin, which acknowledges both commercial and formal facets. He writes: "[i]n film industry parlance, the term cycle designates a blatantly commercial phenomenon: a quick rash of films that try to cash in on the fleeting popular taste for a particular 'trend'" ("Unlawful Entries" 66). Stylistically, though, "[c]ycles are simply genres sped up, small sub-genres that quickly permutate and exhaust themselves" (Martin, "Unlawful Entries" 66).

Narratives: the outlaw hero. I suggest that this figure and its mythology are revisited in the delinquency films in order to explicitly comment on the impossibility of reconciling the individualism/community opposition in the post-WWII period. The delinquency films represent the terms of that opposition according to the traditional gender paradigms of Hollywood; individualism is masculine, while community is feminine. I argue, however, that the delinquency films subtly express tensions about how these values are gendered on screen. These tensions are then both magnified and challenged in the cycles that follow according to the cultural energies circulating in each historical period.

The slasher films discussed in Chapter Three focus not simply on the individualism/community opposition but on a range of thematic oppositions traditionally associated with the frontier, including past/present and civilisation/statelessness. The slasher films do so in order to update the depiction of those oppositions, and politicise the relationship of gender to those oppositions, to account for feminist discourse, which was the focus of considerable attention in Hollywood during the 1970s-early-1980s. I argue that the slasher film's narrative form reworks early American captivity narratives, such as that of Mary Rowlandson, and suggest that as a result, the slasher film aligns individualism with femininity. In order to position my own analysis, this chapter first responds to the dominant theoretical approaches to this cycle, that is, feminist critiques based on a psychoanalytic framework.

The animal comedies discussed in Chapter Four emerged in the late-1970s and continued through to the mid-1980s, which was a period when the defence of masculinity had become a widely-adopted project in Hollywood. The structure of the animal comedy's narratives is derived from the WWII combat film (a point I take from William Paul, "Rise and Fall" 75) and the chief aim is to bolster masculinity by forming dominant male groups at the centre of the narratives. I argue that the animal comedies address the individualism/community opposition more obliquely than the first two cycles discussed here, as their main focus is to redress the destabilisation of masculinity brought about by the women's movement. I argue that the animal comedy's anxious attempts to strengthen masculine power come at the expense of reinforcing masculinity as individualist—a strategy problematic for the reconciliatory pattern.

The makeover films discussed in Chapter Five explore the nature of contemporary feminine identity by examining the effects of a "makeover" on a number of female characters. The films examine how girls self-consciously construct their own identities within and in relation to the dominant social group and trace the ideological and psychological tensions that arise when one attempts to change one's identity by manipulating one's image. The films depict two kinds of identity: one individual, which is inherent and stable, emerging from within, and one communitarian, which is superficial and constructed on the surface of the body using clothing, makeup and other socially-constructed markers of feminine beauty and

status. The films explore the capacity of the makeover to negotiate between the two and therefore consider quite explicitly the notional opposition between individualism and communitarian participation. Emerging in the mid- to late-1990s and continuing over the turn of the millennium, these films explore the profound uncertainty about individualist identity and how it might be constituted in the contemporary, consumer-oriented world.

In examining these four cycles of teen films, I use this thesis to contextualise cinematic depictions of youth within three different moments in American history and illustrate that the meaning of youth is not essential, but is perpetually changed and renewed according to ideological uncertainties of the age. By extension, I argue that the way in which the teen film utilises the idea of youth also facilitates the perpetual renewal of the fundamental American values of individualism and communitarian participation.

In this thesis, I read the teen film as a distinctly American genre. However, the idea of "youth" upon which it relies is universalised. The discourse of youth, encompassing discourses of adolescence and teen, constructs youth as a phase that is experienced similarly, in one way or another, across the globe. This taken-for-granted idea influences the ways in which American teen films are recreationally consumed and critically read. Indeed, the American teen film is an important part of the network of texts that positions contemporary global youth as discursive subjects. The complexity of the viewing process is captured by Jon Lewis: "teen films bring

global youth and its (American) mirror/screen image face to face. For teenagers all over the planet, the effect is at once complex and contradictory; a mixture of desire and dread, irony and self-loathing" (*Road to Romance* 2). By analysing the "American-ness" of the teen film, I do not seek to undermine the identification experienced by teen film audiences around the world. Nor do I suggest that depictions of youth in films produced outside America, such as those of Great Britain, align with the models I discuss here. Rather, I aim to circumvent the dominant mode of analysing teen film—demonstrated by Martin's example—which is to consider the degree to which the films capture or conceal a universalised idea of "youth". I challenge the notion that youth exists independently of discourses that seek to define and use it in contingent ways. I locate cinematic depictions of youth within a historical and cultural time and space and call for a re-thinking of teen film analysis that takes into account the constructed, contingent and transitory nature of "youth".

While Martin's definition of the teen film is seemingly formless, it nevertheless exposes what this thesis contends is the crucial symbolic function played by youth in the teen film and in American culture more broadly. Martin emphasises youth's all-encompassing nature, describing it as a period in which "*everything* is in question and *anything* is possible". In doing so, he strives to allude to youth with a definition that will not permanently pin it down. For me, this demonstrates the importance that youth remains perpetually indefinable. After all, the idea of youth has existed for hundreds (if not thousands) of years, yet, as David Sibley puts it: "youth—despite all

the attempts to define it—is ambiguously wedged between childhood and

adulthood" (qtd. in Valentine, Skelton and Chambers 4). For me, the failure to

establish a "transhistorical" definition of youth is not a product of discourse's

inability to capture youth's essence, as one might infer from Sibley. Rather, this thesis

suggests that the persistent failure to define youth is a cultural necessity, one that

allows youth to be utilised as a kind of "frontier" site upon which American parent

culture represents itself and the status of certain fundamental values in any historical

moment.

Chapter One
Establishing a Theoretical Framework

Frontier Mythology

In the days of the Pilgrim settlers, the American frontier was a geographical boundary. It was a line of division, of separation and enclosure, which marked off the nascent civilisation from the expanse of the continent's wilderness that lay to the west. For the hopeful Pilgrims, what lay beyond the frontier was a space in which their utopian dream—"The American Dream"—had the potential to be realised. At the same time, however, the American landscape was an unknown and often horrific place. The "New World" appeared "as both an abundant garden and a terrifyingly hostile wilderness" (Ray 358). The frontier was therefore approached by the Pilgrims with equal measures of optimism and foreboding. The frontier quickly gained significance as a conceptual boundary, rather than a geographical one: a conceptual boundary from which the nation's ambivalent founding mythology—frontier mythology—sprang.

The American frontier also gave rise to another form of ambivalence, not about what lay beyond the frontier but about the contradictory values notionally enclosed within it. This form of ambivalence was perhaps first made explicit by Frederick Jackson Turner, whose influential perspective on the frontier culminated in the

publication of *The Frontier in American History* in 1921.[2] Turner proclaimed that the

frontier had allowed for the establishment of two fundamental American ideals—

individual liberty and democracy —and also allowed these inherently contradictory

ideals to coexist. According to Turner, the social conditions of the frontier were

shaped by its geography and the abundance of potential that America's open lands

offered. The exceptional conditions of the frontier meant that "[w]henever social

conditions tended to crystallise in the East, whenever capital tended to press upon

labour or political restraints to impede the freedom of the mass, there was this gate of

escape to the free conditions of the frontier" (Turner 259). For Turner, individualism

and democratic participation in a community were sustained due to the capacity to

choose: between the laws and norms of a burgeoning American society and the

freedom of the American wilderness.[3] The idea of the frontier allowed the

contradiction between these fundamental values to be reconciled, or at least diffused,

along with the sense of ambivalence about that contradiction.

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[2] This text, though finally published in 1921, is a compilation of a series of speeches and publications by Turner that range in date from 1892 to 1918.

[3] This particular conception of frontier mythology, it should be acknowledged, disavows the colonialist violence on which the frontier's westward advance was based. This disavowal is important to understanding the mythology's power and endurance, which are due largely to its capacity to both romanticise the often-horrific experience of the pioneers and deny the thorny issue of pioneers' disregard for and brutality toward indigenous Americans.

The American frontier's closure was officially pronounced in the 1890 census.[4] It was in response to this that Turner's work developed. For Turner, the closure of the frontier meant that the abundance of free land so central to the development of national ideologies had finally been exhausted. The realisation reached when land literally ran out was that:

> [a] people composed of heterogeneous materials, with diverse and conflicting ideals and social interests, having passed from the task of filling up the vacant spaces of the continent, [was] now thrown back upon itself, and [was] seeking an equilibrium (Turner 221).

The halt of westward advance meant that there no longer existed an open space into which future-oriented aspirations, albeit ambivalent ones, might be projected. The closure of the frontier was also accompanied by anxiety about the troubling irreconcilability of the fundamentally "American" ideals of individualism and democratic participation. The use of a literal, geographic frontier—both as a driver of the nation's mythology and as a space in which to reconcile its contradicting values— was no longer possible. So although Turner's text was developed and published after the closure of the frontier, it helped to generate a retrospective investment in the frontier, both as a foundation for America's future-oriented mythology and as a reconciliatory device.

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[4] The significance of the census announcement has since been contested on a number of fronts. For example, Popper and Popper argue that the frontier did not 'close' but instead changed direction to move toward the East (10). Earle and Cao argue that the date of 1890 is inaccurate, and in fact, the frontier closed much earlier. Nevertheless, Turner's influential thesis held sway due to its timely response to the announcement of closure in the 1890 census.

Around the time of the frontier's official closure, a number of sites were emerging that were to become surrogates for the crucial symbolic functions once performed by the frontier. These were not geographic frontiers; rather, they were discursive ones. In them, frontier mythology could be reinscribed and individualism and democracy could be symbolically—rather than literally—reconciled. Two sites in particular took up frontier functions in this post-census period. Youth was one of these sites; the other was the Hollywood cinema.

Youth and the Frontier

The idea of youth has existed for centuries and certainly pre-exists the official closure of the American frontier. It has long been understood as an "in-between" period of maturation, an intangible, almost mythic phase between childhood and adulthood. It was discussed by Aristotle, for example, who attributed to it certain romanticised traits. He believed youth has a tendency to undertake things "vehemently and excessively", and argued they have "strong passions" that are "oriented particularly toward sex" (qtd. in Driscoll 28).

In addition to being characterised by traits such as these, youth in America has long been constructed similarly to the frontier; well before the census pronouncement, youth and the frontier were both constructed as symbolic spaces into which visions of the future—and ambivalent ones at that—were projected. As the next generation, youth are representative of "the future" and are, in fact, the

means by which it will be forged. As John R. Sutton observes in *Stubborn Children:*

Controlling Delinquency in the United States, 1640-1981, "[p]erhaps more than any other

people, and certainly earlier, Americans have treated children as a lens through

which to view the future and as a means by which to control it" (1). Like the

geographical frontier, youth were invested in as a means of realising the "American

Dream". Also like the geographical frontier, however, youth had the capacity to

shatter that dream. As Catherine Driscoll explains, "youth has been associated with

the possibility of more or less overtly resisting the needs and imperatives of the

society into which youth enters as a group of new social subjects" (205). The frontier

and youth, therefore, have long been constructed as potentially rebellious "future"

spaces in American culture. One geographical and one temporal, they are sites of

ideological projection and investment.

　　　After the frontier's official closure, youth—as the already-existing

embodiment of a temporal frontier—was positioned as an ideal surrogate for the

ambivalent, future-oriented mythology once located at the geographical frontier.

Indeed, in the 20 year period following the census pronouncement, there was an

intensification of discursive activity around youth as youth was increasingly

conceived as a space that might fulfil the frontier's imaginative role in American

culture. This intensification was marked by the emergence of a fresh discourse on

youth—adolescence—which was articulated most notably by G. Stanley Hall in

Adolescence: its Psychology and its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex,

Crime, Religion and Education, published in two large volumes in 1904. The discourse

of adolescence did not uncover and define an entirely "new" period of life. Rather, it

explained the historical, romantic discourse of youth through a framework of

biology. In other words, adolescence "rendered 'scientific' many of the

understandings of 'youth' that had emerged from the cultural enclaves of the middle

class of the previous century" (Austin and Willard 2). For example, G.S. Hall writes:

> [y]outh loves intense states of mind and is passionately fond of
> excitement. Tranquil, mild enjoyments are not its forte. The
> heart and arteries are, as we have seen, rapidly increasing in
> size, and perhaps heightened blood pressure is necessary to
> cause the expansion normal at this stage (2: 73).

In the 20th century discourse of adolescence, the "strong passions" once attributed to

youth by Aristotle came to be "explained" by the physical growth of the body and its

hormonal excesses.

Youth had long been constructed as a temporal frontier in American culture

and the discourse of adolescence fortified this thinking, imbuing youth with

characteristics of the American frontier even more explicitly. For example, G.S. Hall

writes:

> [f]or those prophetic souls interested in the future of our race
> and desirous of advancing it, the field of adolescence is the
> quarry in which they must seek to find both goal and means. If
> . . . a higher stage is ever added to our race, it will not be by
> increments at any later plateau of adult life, but it will come by
> increased development of the adolescent stage, which is the
> bud of promise for the race (1: 50).

As "the bud of promise", youth was constructed via the discourse of adolescence as holding the same kind of potential the American frontier once had. Importantly, the ambivalence usually associated with the concept of the frontier also deepened. G.S. Hall describes adolescence as "a stormy period of great agitation, when the very worst and best impulses in the human soul struggle against each other for its possession, and when there is a peculiar proneness to be either very good or very bad" (1: 407). The simultaneous potential for utopian and dystopian outcomes, though perhaps latent in constructions of youth, was articulated overtly in the discourse of adolescence.

The discourse of adolescence also worked to recoup some of the uncertainty about the future brought about by the closure of the frontier. After the census pronouncement, the geographical frontier could no longer be called upon as a space in which optimism about the future might be projected. The discourse of adolescence, however, defined and periodised youthful energy more rigidly than the romantic discourse of youth, thereby offering a more precise articulation about how an ideal future might be achieved through youth. While youth had long been a vague construct in terms of when it might begin and end, adolescence attributed biological markers to its onset: processes of puberty, driven by "raging hormones". Though adolescence is a period of physical, psychological and emotional flux, it is also a phase that can supposedly be traced and managed until it "ends" in stability. Adolescent discourse therefore promised a more concrete timeframe in which the

liminal phase of youth would supposedly be resolved. In delineating models for

various processes of maturation, adolescent discourse defined youth in a more

structured way than the discourse of youth, thereby creating a symbolic space in

which optimistic visions for the future could more confidently be projected.

Youth, the Frontier, and Hollywood's "Reconciliatory Pattern"

At the same time as the discourse of adolescence was taking shape American

cinema was developing its own narrative tropes. Over the 50 year period leading up

to WWII, American cinema, like youth, was embraced as a forum in which the

imaginative powers once held by the frontier might be enlivened. While youth was

constructed as a space in which ambivalence about the future might be contained and

resolved, cinema came to work as a space of reconciliation in which the

incompatibility between the ideals of individualism and democratic participation

might be settled. In *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, Ray argues

that in the years preceding WWII, Hollywood cinema was fundamentally structured

by a reconciliatory pattern, the terms of which are derived from frontier mythology.

Ray argues that in this era of Classical Hollywood Cinema, the frontier tension

between individualism and democratic—or "communitarian"—participation

manifests and is symbolically reconciled.[5] Examining the Classical Hollywood genre

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[5] Ray's argument extends beyond the specific genres in which the imagery and themes of the frontier
are immediately recognisable, like the Western and the road movie. Ray instead refers to Hollywood
cinema more broadly and its narrative structure.

movies produced before WWII, Ray argues that "[t]hese movies raised, and then appeared to solve, problems associated with the troubling incompatibility of traditional American myths" (57). The conflict between individualism and communitarian participation is exposed in the films and then ideally resolved by a figurative re-creation of the frontier. Often reconciliation occurs in a single character who embodies these seemingly incompatible myths (Ray 58). This figure is often the "outlaw hero", who will be discussed extensively in Chapter Two. Reconciliation can also occur by constructing groups of people made up of dissimilar types who work together for a single cause, "capable of accommodating individualism without devouring it" (Ray 114). This device is often used in the WWII combat film, which will be discussed in Chapter Four. In each case, the contradictions noted by Turner, which were left unresolved at the closure of the frontier, are transposed onto the symbolic medium of cinema and narratively and formally reconciled. In youth and in the Hollywood cinema, then, the frontier's mythological oppositions and ambivalences had found new homes.

Until the 1950s, the Hollywood cinema and youth, via the discourse of adolescence, reworked certain frontier uncertainties and reconciled key contradictions with relative success. In the wake of WWII, however, the capacity for youth to allay concerns about the future, and for the Hollywood cinema to neatly reconcile the tension between individualism and community, was met with considerable scepticism. Ray discusses the reason for this post-WWII uncertainty

with regard to the Hollywood cinema. He suggests it was WWII that finally confirmed the disintegration of conditions that had previously allowed for the persistence of reconciliatory mythology. Although land had been gradually running out since the country was settled by the pioneers, and depletion was officially announced in 1890, Ray asserts that America's forced entrance into international conflict required it to confront the fact that it might have communitarian obligations on a larger scale than just nationally. America's individualism (as a nation) was confirmed as impossible. Ray writes: "by fighting the war to preserve the American Dream, the United States had been forced to forsake permanently the splendid isolationism on which that dream rested. More than any other issue, it was this paradox that haunted Americans in the later forties and fifties, causing widespread disillusionment and anxiety" (133-134). In addition to external threats and obligations, internal divisiveness was rife, with fears regarding communism taking hold. Both of these problems might have been "solved" with the reconstruction of a unifying national mythology, but that was viewed as an increasingly difficult thing to achieve.

The anxiety in the 1950s regarding fundamental American values produced a response markedly similar to the anxiety of the late 1800s post-census period: there was a further intensification of the focus on youth. Examining this period, Grossberg observes:

> [i]f America had always defined itself by its open-ended future, by its ongoing effort to realise the American dream as a still undefined and certainly unrealised possibility, by the fact that it had not and could not grow up, it needed now to understand how that was still possible. Its response was to continue investing its identity in the future by finding a more definitive, already existing embodiment of that future. The baby boomers became the living promise of the possibility of actually achieving the American dream (173-4).

In the wake of the 1890 census pronouncement, the flurry of discursive activity around youth saw the development of a new discourse: adolescence. Given that youth was, in the 1950s, more important than ever before, it is unsurprising that youth became the focus of even greater discursive activity. The cultural crisis brought about by WWII and the increasing investment in youth saw the development of yet another discourse on youth: that of the "teenager".

If the discourse of youth romanticised youths, and the discourse of adolescence "biologised" them, the discourse of the teenager institutionalised them:

> [y]outh was a material problem; it was a body—the body of the adolescent and the social body of the baby boom—that had to be properly inserted into the dominant system of economic and social relationships. As a body, it had to be located in its own proper places and its movements had to be surveilled and constrained. And as a body, its gendered identity had to be neatly defined, its behaviour regulated and its sexuality policed (177).

The discourse of "teen" defined youth even more extensively than adolescence. The scientific models of adolescence were interwoven with ideological institutions (like the high school and the family) and with the consumer economy (largely via pop cultural industries) in such a way that the discourse of teen defined and explained

where youth went, what youth wore, what youth listened to and how youth talked. Thomas Doherty observes that "[i]n the marketplace and the media, at home and at school, the teenager was counted as a special creature requiring special handling" (Doherty 35). The response to youth everywhere was "collective and standardised" (Doherty 36). According to Doherty, 1950s teenagers had "a sense of group identity [that was] both peculiarly intense and historically new [because] their generational status, their social position *as teenagers*, was carefully nurtured and vigorously reinforced by the adult institutions around them" (35).

In the 1950s, youth was *the* hope for achieving the American Dream, a conception that then heightened America's ideological vulnerability in that its hopes and fears regarding the future were so heavily invested in the young. Any sign of youthful dissent appeared to signal a kind of apocalypse. Hence, there was an explosion in the concern over juvenile delinquency, one that often focussed on youth's increased participation in the consumer economy. The fear regarding teenagers' behaviour saw the formation of The 1953 Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency. Stephen Tropiano writes that this investigation eventually turned its attention to elements of teenage culture, such as comic books, as an explanation for youth's supposedly delinquent behaviour (47). Jon Savage claims the reason for this is that "[e]ncoded into the idea of youth-as-consumer were and are all manner of hopes and fears. Teenagers may well have been the key to this brave new post-war world, but they harboured potentially uncontrollable energies which

had to be policed" (19). As Savage's discussion reveals, the post-WWII discourse on

the teenager is characterised by the same ambivalence as the discourses on youth,

adolescence and the frontier.

In Hollywood, post-WWII anxiety was marked by a breakdown in cinema's

reconciliatory pattern in the late-1940s and 1950s. In the aftermath of the war, the

public had become increasingly sceptical about Hollywood cinema's simplistic

resolutions. Films of this period increasingly emphasised the contradiction between

individualism and community, undermining resolutions, which were often not

convincingly achieved. In the approximate twenty-year period following WWII, "[a]s

the contradictory nature of Classic Hollywood's thematic paradigm became

increasingly apparent . . . the formal paradigm also began to unravel" (Ray 176).

Discussing 1950s social problem films, Ray writes:

> [t]he more realistically the problem pictures portrayed postwar
> America's sociological crises, the more they enabled the
> audience to recognise the transparently mythological status of
> their reconciliations. Having sat through sustained and graphic
> depictions of anti-Semitism, class divisiveness, and drug abuse,
> a viewer could hardly accede to the abrupt resolution of these
> matters offered by the problem pictures' traditionally optimistic
> solutions (153).

For Ray, the incompatibility of individualism and communitarian participation

appears as ambivalence, a troubling conflict between the two ideals that cannot be

reconciled. While pre-WWII films had aimed to suggest that both ideals were still

possible, post-WWII films expressed an "emerging anxiety that if before, both had

been possible, now neither was" (Ray 174). What this represents, for Ray, is the

beginning of a breakdown in the reconciliatory pattern.

Critically, the breakdown of the reconciliatory pattern did not emerge across

all Hollywood film. It appeared at first in a number of specific genres. One of these

was what Ray calls "youth rebellion" pictures like *The Wild One* (1953) and *Rebel*

Without a Cause (1955): these were the first teen films. Films such as these "often

reinforced the anxious, irresolvable quality of crucial sequences" rather than their

reconciliation (Ray 177). Ray observes that it was "[i]nevitably, the young, with less

invested in the traditional attitudes and values, [who] were among the first to detect

the damage done by WWII and the Cold War to the most basic American

assumptions" (161). It was in the 1950s, then, that discourse on youth and

Hollywood cinema converged in the teen film, and converged in a way that staged a

crisis in Hollywood's reconciliatory pattern.

The idea of "youth" was particularly important for Hollywood's reconciliatory

breakdown. Youth was used to express uncertainties that could not be

acknowledged elsewhere about the value and compatibility of America's founding

ideals. By virtue of its construction as a "natural" space for rebellion and ideological

critique, youth was a convenient construct in which parent culture could voice the

growing suspicion regarding individualism and communitarian participation. As a

liminal, transient phase, youth is theoretically a space in which this crisis could be

safely contained and resolved. After all, youth is a phase that necessarily *ends* in

growing up. However, the authenticity with which the first screen teens expressed

distrust toward American ideals could not be easily allayed by the thought that they

would one day become adults. The anxiety they expressed was too widely felt to be

entirely attributed to, and contained by, "youth".

Ray's analysis of Hollywood's reconciliatory pattern and breakdown extends

up until 1980. He argues that until then, American cinema tended to remain faithful

to Classical Hollywood paradigms of reconciliation, apart from a period of

experimentation in the 1960s and 1970s. Ray argues that while individual films like

The Godfather (1972) and *Taxi Driver* (1976) manage a carefully balanced critique of

American cultural ideals, most films remain conservative in their reconciliation of

individualism and communitarian participation.[6] Certainly, Ray's argument

regarding Hollywood cinema in general is well-illustrated and supported. The aim of

this thesis, however, is to argue that the teen film has continued to function as it did

when it emerged: as a genre that remarks on the difficulty of reconciling of

individualism and communitarian participation in a given historical period.

The "Teen Film" as a Critical Category

In framing the teen film as a genre structured by certain frontier anxieties, this

thesis makes some important contributions to the critical literature on the teen film.

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[6] For Ray, the "careful balance" of these two films relates to their ability to attract what he calls both "Left" and "Right" audiences by using moments of stylistic experimentation, but only in service of narrative developments.

In order to discuss these contributions in more detail, I will first outline more

specifically my area of focus—the teen film—and summarise the key features of the

analytical field.

In the opening paragraph of my introduction, I tentatively described teen films

as being *about* and *for* youth. This descriptive phrase exists with good reason.

Although teen films were not the first films to be produced about youth, they were

the first films about youth to come out of Hollywood that also pitched themselves

explicitly at the youth audience (Neale 119; Betrock 29; Rollin 185).[7] Pre-WWII films

about youth tended to be "optimistic fables" and were typically viewed by adults and

youth alike when the whole family went to the cinema together (Shary, *Generation

Multiplex* 3). As a result, they constructed youth somewhat paternalistically. Youth

were either pre-adolescent (for example, Shirley Temple), responsible young adults

(as in the Andy Hardy series starring Mickey Rooney), or "old-before-their-time"

(like the Dead End Kids) (Shary, *Generation Multiplex* 3). Industry practices also

played a role in these depictions. Before the 1950s, the idea that cinema might have

"corruptive potential" saw most filmmakers adhere closely to the Hays Code, which

tightly delineated acceptable moral content for American films (Shary, *Generation

Multiplex* 3). This dictated the way youth could appear on screen.

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[7] Some of the first films produced *for* youth were actually educational films shown in schools
(Tropiano 22), which acted to instil youth with certain government-sponsored values on a variety of
issues. Ken Smith argues that the educational (or hygiene) films were "preachy" with concepts of right
and wrong "rigidly defined" (qtd. in Tropiano 24). This thesis is primarily interested in films
produced for cinemas, however, and not the classroom.

In the 1950s, a number of cultural, legal and industrial changes took place that changed the way in which Hollywood dealt with youth. The youth population grew rapidly in number, making them "a formidable market force, and their leisure time (and money) rendered them a highly sought after audience for a variety of cultural products" (Neale 119). Youths' greater access to automobiles and to disposable income gave them increasing independence from parent culture, and the advent of television—a medium oriented towards families—encouraged youth to move outside the home in search of entertainment (Oswell 46). Youth began to stay longer in high school and college, which elongated the period between childhood and adulthood (Shary, *Generation Multiplex* 3). In addition, two legal decisions altered film industry practices. The "Paramount Case" dismantled the studio system and allowed smaller, independent studios to begin to cater to niche markets, like youth (Doherty 17; Shary, *Generation Multiplex* 4), and the so-called "Miracle Decision" in 1952 brought First Amendment protections to film, which allowed for the depiction of a much broader range of moral issues that had previously been taboo (Shary, *Generation Multiplex* 4). Each of these changes helped to facilitate the development of the teen film: a genre made exclusively for youth audiences that was designed to attract their attention and their dollars with a distinctly youthful point of view. Though it was still a relatively new phenomenon in the mid-1950s, the teen film proliferated at a rapid rate: "[w]hile 1956 had seen perhaps a total of ten features geared primarily toward teenagers, 1957's total was almost forty" (Betrock 29).

I call the teen film a "genre" here, though I use the word somewhat loosely. The teen film is primarily identified by its characters (youth) and its audience (also youth) rather than by any common narrative patterns. As Alan Betrock rightly points out, the teen film borrows its narrative structures from other genres (29). As a result, it is somewhat problematic to call the teen film a genre in itself, but it is a practice that is now widespread in the critical literature. Doherty offers an incisive discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of using "genre" to refer to the teen film (9-12), so I will not repeat it here. However, "genre" seems the most appropriate term to employ, as long as that caveat is noted.

Despite the teen film's booming popularity in the 1950s, this decade by no means signalled a halt to adult-oriented films about youth. Both adult- and youth-oriented films about youth persisted. For many critics, there exists a meaningful distinction between films only *about* youth, and films both *about* and *for* youth. Driscoll and Tropiano are two critics who have usefully labelled these youth and teen film respectively; youth film is film simply *about* youth (but not for them), while teen film encompasses any film that is both *about* and *for* youth. This thesis will follow their lead. For other critics, however, these two kinds of films are not meaningfully distinguished, which also means the labelling I use here is not consistent across the literature. Lewis and Timothy Shary, for example, focus their attention on all films about youth, so their analyses encompass both teen and youth films. In *The Road to Romance and Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture*, Lewis examines films about youth,

but labels his area of interest "teen films". Shary is less decisive, calling films about

youth "teen" films in some of his works ("The Teen Film", "Angry Young Women"

and *Teen Movies*), but not in his larger text, *Generation Multiplex: the Image of Youth in*

Contemporary American Cinema. Here, he instead acknowledges that films about

youth are elsewhere considered "youth" film and "young adult" film, and therefore

summarises his focus as "youth/teen/young adult" (2). In what is still an emerging

critical field, these primary issues of labelling and definition are still very much open

for debate.

For me, there are important distinctions between youth and teen film that can

be seen by looking at a few examples. Youth films are typically directed to adult (and

in recent decades often "arthouse") audiences and therefore tend to construct youth

as an object of concern—a social problem to be understood or "solved". Films like

Blackboard Jungle (1955), *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), *The Outsiders* (1983), *River's Edge*

(1986), and *Kids* (1995) speak to parent culture about the supposed problems faced by

the nation's youth. Teen films, on the other hand, are aimed squarely at youth,

aiming to capture that audience with narratives that feature youthful characters and

with films that have a distinctly youthful point of view. Rather than constructing

youth as a problematic social population, teen films are constructed as being allied

with youth, appearing to be "on their side". They might represent youth problems,

but they do not represent youth *as a problem*. Teen films are typified by examples like

Rebel Without a Cause, *Animal House* (1978), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), *Heathers* (1989) and *Clueless* (1995).

For the purpose of setting parameters, it is certainly useful to say that the teen film is both *about* and *for* youth. For the purposes of analysis, however, this definition has implications this thesis seeks to problematise. Within the critical literature, most theorists' analyses appear to take this definition literally and assume that the teen film is, should be, or can be, *about* and *for* youth. These analyses thereby proceed from essentialist stances, which assume that the teen film, although fictional, might capture the "true" nature of youth or appeal successfully to the youth audience's "inner" desires. These stances are based on the idea that youth has some "essence" that exists independently of discourses that construct it. In the critical literature, then, critiques of the genre tend to evaluate the films according to certain benchmarks of verisimilitude.

Each critic holds their own understanding of what youth's essential qualities are or should be. This means that the terms on which the teen film is evaluated differ from critic to critic, based on the degree to which they perceive the films to be structured according to their particular model of youth. There is some consistency within the literature, however, in that the ideal models of youth tend to be based on one of the three discourses on youth discussed above: youth, adolescence and teen. Some critics adhere to the discourse of youth, and therefore evaluate the films according to the degree to which characters live up to an ideal of rebellion. Other

critics adhere to the discourse of adolescence and consider how the narratives either depict or appeal to youth's "raging hormones". Still others adhere to the discourse of teen and discuss how the films appeal to youth as vapid consumers, driven by their devotion to pop culture. I will discuss each of these approaches in turn as each produces different readings of the teen film that this thesis will respond to.

Many critical readings of the teen film—and certainly the most commonly cited ones—appear to hinge upon the romantic discourse of youth, using it as a measure of how youth should be depicted on screen. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, ideas about what being young means (politically and socially) have shifted dramatically throughout history, particularly over the last 100 years. The discourse of youth once represented the young as carrying the possibility of generational change, ideological resistance or out and out rebellion. However, the discourse of adolescence depicts the young as being controlled by their biology and the discourse of teen positions them as being interpellated into hegemonic structures. Contemporary discourse of youth/adolescence/teen is therefore perceived to contain much of the intangible threat that the romantic discourse of youthful excess once represented. Readings of the teen film that privilege the romantic discourse of youth therefore see youth as ideally rebellious, and evaluate the teen film according to the degree that it depicts youth as resistant.

Such readings, I would argue, are heavily influenced by British cultural studies and in particular, the work of theorists working within the Centre for Contemporary

Cultural Studies (CCCS—otherwise known as "The Birmingham School") in the early 1970s. This centre pioneered the contemporary study of youth culture, though not specifically the study of youth on film. In their seminal work on youth culture, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson), the contributors examine a number of subcultural groupings, like "mods", for ways in which youths overtly and consciously resist authority through cultural rituals. The contributors' common approach differentiates strongly between "youth" and "teen" culture, locating political significance only in youth. Things described as "teen", like teenage culture and teenagers, are consistently related to the "market" and the term is only used when the critics discuss aspects of youth culture that are solely composed of ready-made consumables. Phrases like "teenage leisure market" (Clarke et al. 15; McRobbie and Garber 213) "teenage consumer culture" (Clarke et al. 18) and "teenage entertainment industry" (Murdock and McCron 206) are contrasted with youth culture in a way that renders the term "teen" descriptive of anything that emanates from the mass market and is consumed by young people without much interaction or appropriation. "Youth culture", in contrast, comes to refer to aspects of culture that arise from the "real" conditions of existence for young individuals in which class differences are articulated, and the inference is that "youth" has far more politically important consequences. Teen culture is that which is produced by the mass market to sell to youth, but it is something very different from "authentic" youth culture. Within the CCCS

approach, "teen" culture—of which the teen film is a particularly visible part—is either problematic or unimportant because it creates a chimera of a classless youth culture. This is articulated by Graham Murdock and Robin McCron when they describe the formation of subcultures as the process of "appropriating the ostensibly classless artefacts and commodities of the 'teenage culture' industry and investing them with class-based meanings and resonances" (203). In this way, "youth" is *active* in that it is able to form ritualised responses to hegemonic structures, and to make and contest meanings. "Teen" culture is entirely commodified and powerless. The CCCS approach contests the discourses of "adolescence" and "teen", privileging "romantic" conceptions of youth as powerful, rebellious and counter-hegemonic. It works from an assumption about the function youth should ideally serve in relation to dominant ideological structures: resistance.

An example of a reading of teen and youth film informed by the discourse of youth (and the work of the CCCS) is offered by Driscoll. Citing *The Wild One* and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) as examples of teen and youth film respectively, she writes that while alienation is intrinsic to most films about the young, alienation in youth film is "intrinsic to youth as a group" (206). She writes "[f]or Alex and his friends [in *A Clockwork Orange*] alienation is not a matter of individual circumstances but of a structural social position for youth" (Driscoll 206). In the teen film, however, Driscoll argues that alienation is individualised, with the central conflict becoming a personal melodrama. In the case of *The Wild One*, Johnny (Marlon Brando) becomes the lone

hero who cannot be tamed by small-town society. For Driscoll, "youth", in itself, is

not a problem in the teen film, meaning that problems are attributed to individuals

rather than to social, systematic issues. This is a point that will be contested in this

thesis. Driscoll argues that commodity culture like the teen film "produced a bridge

that allowed popular culture to take up some of the gloss of youth rebellion. This

differentiation between commodification and rebellion is reflected in that between

teen films and youth films" (209). According to this view, youth film stages social

critique and more comfortably sits with ideas about youth as rebellious and anti-

establishment. In the teen film, however, youth is commodified and ideologically

contained, because narratives depict personal dramas situated squarely within social

institutions, like the family, the peer group and the school.

A number of other writers agree with Driscoll's reading of the teen film, also

privileging romantic ideas about youth as ideally rebellious and resistant. Geoff

Pevere, for example, argues that the main purpose of most American teen films is:

> the defusing of any perceived threats to conventional order
> posed by the constant threat of teen transgression. Typically,
> these threats are channelled in a cathartic, temporary and
> largely harmless fashion, specifically into the clarion call of
> apolitical passions represented by (straight) sex, drugs and rock
> and roll (qtd. in Lewis, *Road to Romance* 141).

According to Pevere, although teen films may take pleasure in portraying youthful

transgression, the disruption is momentary and trivial. In a much cited statement

summarising the ideological function of the teen film, Lewis agrees:

> [t]een films mitigate against the stylised rebellion of youth.
> What at first appears to be counter-hegemonic is in the end just
> deviant and transient, chronicling . . . the eventual re-insertion
> of authority. We are forced then to re-read the narrative of
> youth (on and off screen) as hardly antisocial, as a ritual . . . of
> impatience and need in the absence of functional and deeply
> desired authority ("*Rumble Fish*" 135).

For Lewis, the teen film constructs youth as a phase that necessarily ends with interpellation.

The scholars cited above tend to seek overt, systematic rebellion in the teen film, looking for counter-hegemonic acts that emerge specifically from observable rituals. While this approach might be appropriate in some cultural contexts, when applied to film it has the capacity to overlook important cinematic devices. Certainly, it works for a film like *A Clockwork Orange*, in which characters explicitly position themselves as oppositional with their unsubtle attire and aggressively alien "argot". This approach does not work as well for films like *Rebel Without a Cause*, however, in which youth are less conspicuously separated from parent culture. For example, Peter Biskind uses the red jacket motif in *Rebel Without a Cause* to argue that although the film illustrates a tension between youth and parent culture, the narrative charts the eventual containment and re-incorporation of delinquency within the family and the "therapeutic state". He argues that Jim's red jacket is "the badge, the mantle of rebellion" (210). Jim gives it to Plato just before Plato's confrontation with the police, and the jacket finally leaves the picture with Plato's dead body (Biskind 210). But in reducing the tensions between youth and parent culture in *Rebel Without a Cause* to a

symbol, Biskind overlooks the importance of other components of the film. For example, James Dean's alienated teenage delinquent is a re-working of the outlaw hero typical of the Western, an observation made by Ray. This intertextual cinematic reference creates tensions that cannot be entirely captured by an analysis of *mise-en-scene* inspired by a cultural studies approach. I will examine these tensions in detail in Chapter Two.

For analysts who privilege counter-hegemonic acts as the measure of a successful narrative about youth, the teen film appears to be either not at all representative of youth or a completely hegemonic genre. As Shary observes, many critics chastise "the middle-class melodramas of John Hughes . . . as fanciful and vapid fictions . . . while they praise more extreme dramas of struggle and deprivation that pertain to a much smaller portion of the population" ("Teen Film" 40). Via this polarisation, films like *River's Edge*, for example, are eventually turned into "expansive indictments" of youth culture (Shary, "Teen Film" 40), while films like *Sixteen Candles* (1984) are dismissed as inauthentic.

Henry A. Giroux has discussed possible reasons for this polarisation in critical responses to teen and youth film. He interrogates the claims by many critics that Larry Clark's controversial film *Kids* was representative of 1990s youth culture. Giroux critiques reviews praising the film's accuracy, arguing:

> [w]hat such thinking shares with current right-wing attempts to
> demonise youth is the assumption that young people are
> primarily identified with their bodies, especially their sexual

drives. Stripped of any critical capacities, youth are defined
primarily by a sexuality that is viewed as unmanageable and in
need of control, surveillance, legal constraint, and other forms
of disciplinary power (184).

For Giroux, films and reviews that consider youth to be inherently or ideally

rebellious and uncontrollable function to eroticise and commodify teenage bodies.

They present youth behaviour as the result of a raging adolescent libido, while at the

same time present this sexualised energy as justification for a reduction of young

people's agency. Giroux therefore perceives youth similarly to Grossberg (and me) in

that he contests discussions of verisimilitude with regard to youth and instead

examines the ways particular youth images are manipulated and exploited by parent

culture.

Analysts who privilege the romantic discourse of youth have also been pivotal

in shaping the definition of the teen film, with many inclusions and exclusions based

on an ideal of resistance. For example, the delinquency cycle almost always rates a

mention as a teen film cycle (Roz Kaveney is the only exception) due to its characters'

relatively oppositional stances. Yet the "beach party" films, which are certainly *about*

and *for* youth, are almost never discussed in any detail. Doherty offers a possible

reason:

[w]hatever the packaging, most of the early teenpics showcased
the underside of teenage life, portraying a reckless, rebellious,
and troubled generation beset by problems of inner and/or
outer space. Whether imperial and negative or indigenous and
affirmative, they accentuated subcultural differences,
resistance, and alternatives to parent cultural values. Their
appeal, by and large, was to the male half of the target

audience. The clean teenpics, by contrast, were light, breezy,
romantic, and frankly escapist. They forswore the anguish of
the 'troubled teen' for the innocence of the 'sweet sixteen' (160).

Doherty goes on to explain that "[t]o later generations tending to value conflict rather

than accommodation, the incarnations of the former [delinquency and monster films]

have always appealed more than the latter [the 'clean' teenpics]" (161). The

dominance of models of youth as resistant has therefore resulted in a definition of the

teen film that proceeds from rebellion.

Other critical readings of the teen film appear to hinge upon the discourse of

adolescence and perceive youth as chiefly biologically driven. This can lead to an

assumption that the teen film constructs its narratives in order to appeal to certain

physical, "uncontrollable" desires harboured by the teen film's youth audience.

Jonathon Bernstein provides an example of this:

[t]he eighties . . . was the decade when Hollywood gave up any
pretense of engaging the emotions and challenging the intellect,
concentrating solely on meeting the demands of the
marketplace. It was a time dedicated to catering to the basest
whims. . . .It was a time when movies were made for kids, and
dumb kids at that. Dumb, horny, crater-faced, metal-mouthed,
14-year-old boys who lurked around the multiplex or the video
store (2).

Bernstein is an unabashed fan of the teen genre and contests the derision with which

the films are often approached. However, he does not contest essentialist

understandings of youth in his analysis, arguing that the films are "dumb" because

they are made to cater to a "dumb" audience. In suggesting that the films do indeed

cater to "adolescent desires" (Bernstein 3), he makes a bold generalisation about what

those desires are. He suggests that textual devices appeal to the supposed raging hormones of adolescent boys, rather than perhaps serving some larger ideological purpose.

Reliance on the biological discourse of adolescence can also lead to an assumption that the teen film's narratives are constructed in order to "accurately" reflect youth's supposed hormonal excesses. Stuart Voytilla, for example, praises the immensely popular *American Pie* (1999) for the success with which it exploited the supposed centrality of sex to youth life. He writes: "*American Pie* delivers raunchy and embarrassing moments that ring true to the teenage sexual experience. Jim's parents catch him masturbating. His Dad walks in on him having relations with a pie" (Voytilla 139). In the scene that gave birth to the film's title, Jim (Jason Biggs) inserts his penis into a warm apple pie in order to simulate sex. Voytilla relies upon the taken-for-granted constructions of adolescent sexual desire as uncontrollable and irrational behaviour to frame Jim's behaviour as "realistic" or natural. Voytilla's discussion overlooks the ways in which the teen film might use this representation of youthful sexuality as uncontrollable as an ideological device. In this thesis, for example, Chapter Four will examine how the animal comedy relies strategically on certain constructions of male sexuality in order to stage a backlash against the feminist movement.

Still other critical readings of the teen film employ the discourse of the teenager. These approaches view youth as being easily lured by pop-cultural

products, which are perceived to hold little cultural value. Teen films—and the

youth that view them—come to be read as vapid. Betrock, for example, argues that

"[t]eenagers, as a group, are less sophisticated and experienced than adults, and

because of this are easily lured toward something that speaks to their interests, fears,

or escapism" (ix). Joseph W. Reed agrees, arguing that the High School film is a

"simpleminded" genre, and to say that these pictures exist because it's what teens

want to see is "not tautology, but probably defines the essence of the High School

Picture" (132). The alleged vapidity of the films is held to reflect the vapidity of their

teenage audiences, and vice versa.

For me, these essentialist foundations—regardless of whether the contributing

discourse is youth, adolescence or teen—create a strange contradiction within the

literature. While many critics acknowledge the unrealistic nature of the films, they

seem unwilling to abandon the notion that there *is* an essence of youth that as yet

remains largely outside the grasp of representation. This contradiction can be seen in

the following extract from Voytilla, which is a set of instructions on how to write a

teen/coming of age comedy. Voytilla writes:

> [t]he comedy writer tackling the teen audience should begin by
> looking within themselves, and tapping their memories and
> experiences. Try to see the world again through teen-angst
> eyes. They will unearth a wealth of unique situations and
> characters with a universal resonance that can effectively touch
> the emotions and speak for the teen audience (136).

In these instructions, the teen film is a fictional product concocted by adults. It is a

mesh of ideas about youth that are derived in part from subjective and collective

memories and experiences. The idea of youth depicted by the teen film is shaped by the producers' shared cultural and generational understanding of what youth means. The films necessarily speak, then, at least partly from the perspective of parent culture. At the same time, however, the teen film is assumed to have "universal resonance" and be "about" youth everywhere. Voytilla's instructions depict the contradiction well: while youth is thought to contain some "universal" essence that can then in turn be captured by the teen film, it is also a signifier constructed by parent culture.

Kaveney also reproduces this contradiction in her work: "[t]eenage Americans watch movies about themselves to make sense of their lives, to be reassured that the pangs of adolescence are a universal truth, not a personal wound" (184). For Kaveney, youth is a universally-experienced phase that the teen film endeavours to depict and youth audiences seek to relate to. Yet, she then goes on to say that the teen film "has no more to do with the actual lives of existing teenagers than the Pastorals of Virgil had to do with actual shepherds" (Kaveney 185). Here, she acknowledges that teen films are fictional products that are based on a mythical idea of youth rather than reality.

As discussed in the introduction, my understanding of youth proceeds from a stance similar to Grossberg's in which youth is a "signifier of change and transition" (176) that is utilised to represent the ideals and values of parent culture in a particular era. Certainly, my discussion in this chapter regarding the evolution of discourse on

youth demonstrates that youth in America is invested in heavily as a symbol of the future. As a result, youth is constructed as a frontier space, a site in which parent culture projects its future-oriented mythology. The teen film forms a part of this discourse. In the teen film, the subject is a certain idea of youth, one that encompasses discourses of youth, adolescence and teen, and one that facilitates the depiction of distinctly American ideological crises. In the teen film, youth is deployed as a signifier that represents the relative values of individualism and communitarian participation in contemporary America. While the teen film might feature youthful characters doing supposedly youthful things, the depictions of youth within the teen film are historically and politically produced and inherently contingent. Although the teen film may be understood to be "about" youth, there is no essential, universal "nature" to youth that the teen film could ever capture. By extension, the teen film is "for" youth only to the extent that it is pitched at youth by marketers and consumed and appropriated by young audiences.

In framing the teen film as a genre that is primarily structured by frontier anxieties and the reconciliatory dilemma, this thesis reads the teen film from a perspective quite new to teen film criticism. Only one writer, Robert C. Bulman, has examined frontier themes in the teen film and his analysis reads the films in a way contrary to the argument made here. Bulman also utilises Ray's text, but suggests that the teen film *reconciles* American ideological contradictions, specifically those between two models of American individualism (115): "utilitarian" individualism,

which is forged through hard work and self-sufficiency (19), and "expressive"

individualism, in which the "inner self" is discovered by casting off society's

expectations and becoming "free" to express individuality (20). Bulman argues that

teen films—like Hollywood cinema in general—are constructed in order to leave the

audience "feeling content and pleased" (148) and do this by defusing or containing

the uncomfortable contradictions between utilitarian and expressive individualism.

To support his assertion that closure and containment are achieved, Bulman employs

a statement from early in Ray's text, which specifically discusses pre-WWII cinema.

Bulman then overlooks the remainder of Ray's argument in which Ray explicitly

illustrates the ways this tendency toward reconciliation broke down temporarily in

the post-WWII period, and did so in the teen film. I will conduct a more

comprehensive analysis of the implications of Ray's argument in order to explore the

teen film as a genre that was formed in order to expose ideological contradiction

rather than contain and resolve it.

In response to the existing literature, then, this thesis seeks to counter readings

of the teen film that proceed from essentialist understandings of youth. I look to

position youth as a malleable idea, one that is strategically used and re-used by

parent culture to represent its own contemporary ideological uncertainties. I

therefore read the teen film here as an American genre, and do so by examining the

way in which Hollywood cinema's reconciliatory pattern and the

individualism/community opposition manifests in three different eras in four teen

film cycles. My discussion therefore contributes both to literature on the teen film

and to literature on Hollywood cinema more broadly.

Chapter Two
Rebels and Wild Ones: Youth is Cast as Outlaw Hero in the Delinquency Film

The teen film emerged onto the cinematic landscape in the 1950s, and it did so with the theme of delinquency. Although the teen film was produced across a range of generic forms, most of the films released in this decade—regardless of genre—typically share delinquency as a common thematic concern. Their narratives characterise youth as delinquent, feature at least one delinquent character, or contain at least one scene in which delinquent acts are pictured. Even the teen science-fiction and horror films, which are otherwise concerned with aliens and monsters, demonstrate an underlying concern with youthful delinquency (Janovich; Hendershot, "Monster").

Of all the genres, it was the melodrama, or more precisely, the teen "problem picture", that produced the most resonating images of delinquency in the 1950s and played an important role in determining how youth would be represented on screen in the newly-emerging teen film. Although some problem pictures about youth from this era are adult-oriented, like *The Unguarded Moment* (1956), *The Restless Years* (1958), *Blue Denim* (1959) and *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), they construct youth very differently from the youth-oriented, teen problem picture. In the teen problem picture, delinquency is represented by the emotive expression of alienation and anomie, and is embodied by a figure who has come to stand for delinquency and for youth in the

1950s: the rebel. So central is the rebel figure that in the critical theory of the teen

film, it is discussed as a kind of archetype of youthful behaviour against which other

representations of youth are measured (Doherty 161).

In the literature on the teen delinquency films, two mainstream films dominate

the critical landscape: *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause*. These two films and

their respective rebels—Johnny Strabler (Marlon Brando) and Jim Stark (James

Dean)—were largely responsible for creating the image of the brooding, alienated,

misunderstood teenager so characteristic of youth in the 1950s. These rebels were

perceived to be the voice of youth in the 1950s, a perception that has no doubt

contributed to the films' lasting resonance. Jerold Simmons, for example, recalls the

sense of connection his generation felt to Jim in *Rebel Without a Cause*: "[i]n the era of

Father Knows Best, *Rebel* was the first motion picture to express our world rather than

theirs. More than any other, it captured our youthful torment, our restless natures,

our craving for acceptance. . . .We, too, were causeless rebels, and *Rebel Without a

Cause* was our picture" (63). As Simmons illustrates, the rebel is notionally

representative of youth's social experience in the 1950s.

Although the rebel seemed to speak for the "new" population of teenagers in

the post-WWII period, the nature of the rebel's youthful torment is derived from

much older symbolic structures. The rebel's conflicting feelings of alienation and

belonging, while reflecting an anxiety contemporary to the 1950s, evoke a

fundamental contradiction that emerged at the American frontier and has since

remained unresolved: that between individual liberty and communitarian

participation. In addition, the specific methods used to characterise and represent the

rebel figure are modelled on a number of important cinematic antecedents that

addressed that frontier conflict prior to the teen delinquency films. Particularly

important is the Western and its central figure of the "outlaw hero" (as discussed by

Ray 59-66).

The aim in this chapter is to examine the ways in which the teen delinquency

films established youth in the teen film as a signifier of contemporary uncertainties of

parent culture. I will explore the ways in which the teen delinquency films dealt with

the conflict between individualism and community in the post-WWII period, chiefly

by recasting the traditional figure of the outlaw hero as a youthful rebel. By

contextualising the rebel figure of the 1950s within a broader historical and cinematic

framework, I work toward an understanding of how the rebel figure came to

epitomise youth in the teen film and came to command such a pivotal position within

the critical literature.

As well as analysing the two most popular "rebel" films, *The Wild One* and

Rebel Without a Cause, this chapter analyses a range of teen delinquency dramas,

including low-budget films from small or independent studios. One reason for this is

to consider female delinquency more closely, which was explored more widely in "B"

or "exploitation" films than it was in mainstream films (Hendershot, "Rebellion" 10-

11). By performing a broad analysis of cinematic delinquency in the 1950s, an

understanding will be gained of what it was the rebel figure offered that was valued

over and above other types of youthful delinquency. The particular films discussed

in this chapter are *The Wild One*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Hot Rod Girl* (1956), *The Violent*

Years (1956), *The Delinquents* (1957), *Teenage Doll* (1957) and *High School Confidential*

(1958).

A note is needed about terminology. While Cyndy Hendershot ("Rebellion")

uses the term "B" film to label the low-budget films of the 1950s that addressed the

theme of delinquency, Doherty argues convincingly that the label of "B" film does not

apply and that "exploitation" is more fitting (29-31). "B" films are formulaic, low-

budget films designed to run second in a double-bill behind higher budget films.

Many of the films discussed here, and by Hendershot ("Rebellion") and Doherty, *are*

low-budget, just like B films. However, they often were not run as "B" films behind

"A" films, but were placed in pairs or stood on their own. Proceeding from Doherty's

discussion, this chapter will utilise the term "exploitation" as a descriptor for films

that are low-budget, non-mainstream and treat the theme of delinquency in more

sensational ways than films like *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause*. Doherty

offers the following definition:

> the 1950s exploitation picture favoured the bizarre, the
> licentious, and the sensational—and, following the Hollywood
> mainstream, depicted same with escalating daring and
> explicitness. In delving unashamedly into often-disreputable
> content and promoting it in an always-disreputable manner, the
> exploitation label acquired a pejorative distinction its exemplars
> usually lived up to (7).

This chapter defines exploitation films according to the descriptive elements of Doherty's discussion regarding sensationalism and explicitness, while it seeks to downplay the negative connotations often alluded to by Doherty.

Reconciliation or Ambivalence: Distinguishing Adult-oriented and Youth-oriented Delinquency Films

In order to examine the different ways in which delinquency was addressed in film, it is necessary to briefly discuss the concept of "delinquency". The term "delinquency", though it is associated with rebellion and transgression, is also a term used to enact social controls over certain populations and behaviours. Sophia M. Robison explains that delinquency, as a sociological term, does not define *youthful* deviance per se: "unlike the term 'crime,' which usually refers to specific acts—theft, murder, assault—the legal term 'delinquency' is an umbrella for a wide variety of socially disapproved behaviour that varies with the time, the place, and the attitudes of those assigned to administer the law" (3). In the 1950s, "delinquency" was predominantly used to categorise certain youthful behaviours as troublesome and to legitimate the exercise of parental and state control over youth. Robison, who analysed definitions of juvenile delinquency in America up until the late 1960s, writes that delinquency in the first half of the 20th century was generally defined as "ungovernable behaviour", or the unwillingness to submit to parental or societal controls—whatever those might be (8). She states: "sometimes the term

'ungovernable' refers to the boy or girl who refuses to get up in the morning, help with the household chores, spend his money as his parents think proper, or go to bed at what they consider a reasonable hour" (Robison 8). Under the banner of "delinquency", youth was subject to a wide range of controls that did not apply to adults. This control was not confined to the home and familial relationships. In public spaces, for example, youths who talked too loudly were frowned upon (Palladino 82), as were youths who "lounged" on sidewalks, which was "a popular pastime that infuriated adults who were forced to cross the street or walk around them" (Palladino 158). In the mass media, too, delinquency ballooned into a "major national problem" (Betrock 9). There was an abundance of texts published in this period offering definitions, causes and cures. One notable example is the often cited *1,000,000 Delinquents* by Benjamin Fine, and another is psychoanalyst Robert Lindner's *Rebel Without a Cause: the Hypnoanalysis of a Criminal Psychopath*.[8] So although youth crime rates were actually in decline in the post-WWII period (Hine 77), there was an explosion in the public concern over juvenile delinquency (Hine 241). Despite being on their best behaviour, youth were officially problematised.

The discourse of delinquency was associated, in most forums, with the social control of youth. "Delinquency" constructed youth as a disruptive problem that needed to be solved. When contemporaneous events are considered, however, the

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[8] Though published in the 1940s (first in New York in 1944, then in London in 1945), interest in Lindner's book was reignited in the 1950s in part by the film *Rebel Without a Cause* and also the publication of a number of others texts by Lindner, including *Prescription for Rebellion* (1952) and *Must you Conform?* (1956).

intensity with which youth behaviour was debated in the 1950s is somewhat

puzzling. Biskind observes:

> [c]onsidering that 1954 was the year that Dulles announced the
> policy of massive retaliation, the year that three Puerto Rican
> nationalists shot up the house of representatives, wounding five
> Congressmen, the year that Ike considered (and decided
> against) nuking Ho Chi Minh to bail the French out of Dien
> Bien Phu, and the year the Supreme Court decided that
> segregated schools were separate but unequal, the fuss over
> delinquency seems peculiar, to say the least. There was
> delinquency in the fifties, but the inflation of the problem into a
> national obsession reflected more than a social reality (197).

Indeed, the drop in crime rates noted by Thomas Hine indicates that the focus on

youth seems unlikely to be the product of any tangible threat they represented.

The panic over delinquency can be read as a reflection of youth's important

symbolic position within 1950s culture. Many critics assert that youth's perceived

delinquency gave voice to an undercurrent of anxiety that was emerging in America

in the post-war period in response to a number of internal national problems. Lewis,

for example, argues that "deviance and delinquency . . . [are] (seen as) a kind of

ritual(ised) refusal, a form of inarticulate protest emblematic of larger problems the

adult society is unable to reconcile" (*Road to Romance* 40). Discussing the gangs

typical of 1950s representations of delinquency, Biskind agrees, arguing they "weren't

dangerous so much for what they did as for what they represented: wholesale

disaffection of a major stratum of society" (199). Ron Briley puts forth a similar view,

but specifically discusses the representation of delinquency in film. For him, the

alienated motorcyclists in *The Wild One*, for example, "were an indication that not

everyone was content with the values of middle class America, and that some young people were feeling marginalised within the affluent society" (355). The threat that delinquency represented, then, was not simple disobedience, but ideological dissent, which was a response to America's own internal contradictions. This perhaps explains the disproportionate national response to delinquency; discourses that tackled and "solved" delinquency took part —symbolically—in tackling and "solving" the contradictions between conflicting ideals of the nation's parent culture.

Many adult-oriented films about youthful delinquency from the 1950s participated in this kind of symbolic resolution. *The Unguarded Moment*, *The Restless Years*, *Blue Denim* and *Blackboard Jungle* are a few examples in which the treatment of delinquency reflects the popular discourse described above; delinquency is a serious problem that must be—and, indeed, can be—solved within the films' narratives. While adult-oriented delinquency films acknowledge the attitudinal distinctions between delinquent youth and parent culture, they offer moral lessons about how the ideals of the delinquents can be reconciled with the values of the society in which they exist. While the films raise the issue of delinquency and depict the problems it can cause for youths and adults, they reconcile the tensions created in the narratives between the delinquent characters and their families and communities by tidy, idealistic closures in which delinquents are reincorporated neatly back into society. These films comply with the pattern described by Ray as the "reconciliatory pattern".

A clear example of this kind of reconciliation can be seen in *Blackboard Jungle*. Richard Dadier (Glenn Ford) is a new teacher at a rough, urban school populated by disillusioned teachers and delinquent students. Dadier—alone among his colleagues—is characterised as an idealist who tirelessly works to inspire the students to become interested in bettering themselves. One of his students, Gregory Miller (Sidney Poitier), is marked at the outset as being different from his classmates. Miller, though loyal to his fellow rebel students, is articulate, respectful, hard-working and creative. He works part-time at a garage, plays the piano and runs a singing group after school. As Dadier says, Miller is "a born leader". Dadier is torn between the pessimism of his fellow teachers and his own individual ideals that drive him to work harder to win over Miller and the others. Miller is also torn: between the allegiances he has with his rebellious classmates and the opportunity Dadier is offering to nurture his potential and talent.

The narrative develops to the point where both Dadier and Miller are faced with a choice between remaining loyal to the attitudes of their peers or forming a new allegiance with each other. This moment occurs during a particularly violent showdown between Dadier and Artie West (Vic Morrow), who is the most defiant and violent boy in the class. In this confrontation, Dadier is driven into a fight with West, but Dadier uses it as an opportunity to assert his authority. As an ex-Marine, Dadier can hold his own, but the rest of the class are surprised to see a teacher resort to the same violent behaviour that would typically be reprimanded. When it looks as

if West's friends are about to come to his aid and help him overpower Dadier, Miller makes the decision to step in and assist Dadier, an act that seems to encourage most of the other members of the class to do the same. West is then escorted out of the classroom by two students who were previously loyal to him. With the chief trouble-maker gone and loyalties shifted to the authority figure, the implication is that order in the classroom—and, by way of inference, in the broader community—has been restored.

The central conflict in the film can be framed as a conflict between individualist and communitarian values. Miller and the other delinquents initially represent individualism in that they rebel against society's rules and values, while Dadier and his fellow teachers, who espouse education and obedience, represent the value of communitarian participation. The reconciliation that eventually takes place requires a more complex depiction of these values, however, and the film actually works to portray both Miller and Dadier as embodying both ideals, to varying degrees. While Miller is initially positioned as an individualist by his opposition to authority, throughout the film he also shows a longing for communitarian participation in his numerous after-school commitments, through which he contributes usefully to society. By the end of the film, the pressure to conform to the oppositional stance of his peers is such that Miller must rebel against his fellow students in order to obtain the satisfaction he is seeking through communitarian participation.

A similar complexity exists in Dadier's shifting role. Although Dadier is an authority figure aligned with values of communitarian participation, he is constructed as a kind of renegade, who in his own way represents individualism: he is new in the school community and therefore not familiar with its common practices; he acts against the consensus that exists among his fellow teachers; and he uses highly unorthodox techniques (violence). Both Miller and Dadier ultimately seek to encourage the students to be obedient to law and order and to commit to education and hard work. To do so, however, both need to rebel against the communities with which they are aligned—students and teachers respectively. The film thereby neatly reconciles the two ideals of individualism and community, in that overcoming delinquency and reinstating communitarian values requires the actions of particularly brave or maverick individuals. Communitarian values are thereby maintained and reinforced in the film by individualism.

Dadier and Miller's obedience to law and order is not compromised in the film, despite their resorting to violence to achieve their goal. While the use of violence is something which otherwise might have created some ambiguity in the closure, contrary to communitarian ideals as it is, *Blackboard Jungle* is able to legitimate it. It does this by depicting West as totally irredeemable and therefore a clear and present danger to society. This is a common technique used to render violence against enemies to a community defensible, as for example, in Westerns like *High Noon* (1952) (Ray 342). The depiction of youthful resistance in *Blackboard Jungle*

utilises a kind of "doubling" process in which an extremist double and a moderate double are created and played off against one another (Biskind 206). According to Biskind, "[t]he extremist double is detached from the moderate double and jailed or killed, while the moderate is redeemed" (206). Biskind argues that "West is clearly the extremist here. A good deal more intransigent than Miller, he's an irreconcilable, a *refuse*" (206). According to Biskind, "West can't be assimilated into the consensus like Miller. Therefore he must be branded a criminal and destroyed" (207). Once branded a criminal, West is positioned outside the bounds of society and the violent means used to contain him are framed as reasonable. Dadier's previous occupation as a marine also works to legitimate his tactics: he is a man who is trained to use violence in defence of his country. As *Blackboard Jungle* is chiefly told from the point of view of the authority figure, expelling the extreme delinquent (West) and gaining the allegiance of the moderate delinquent (Miller) signals a clear victory for authority and what Biskind calls the "consensus". Narrative reconciliation of individualism and community is achieved.

It should also be added that *Blackboard Jungle* simultaneously enacts another form of reconciliation: a racial one. Miller is a black student at an integrated school in which many of the social problems stem from conflicts between different racial groups. The resolution that is ultimately achieved in Dadier's class reconciles the individualism/community opposition and also unites the different ethnicities within the nation's educational system, thereby offering a narrative in which problems

associated with integration are resolved. Released the year after the famous "Brown vs. The Board of Education" case, in which segregation of schools was ruled to be unconstitutional, *Blackboard Jungle* suggests that the complex problems associated with integration might be solved by faithfully employing traditional American models of individualist action.

For a number of writers, adult- and youth-oriented films about delinquency are similar to each other in that they treat youth as problematic and delinquent behaviour as "bad". Michael Barson and Steven Heller, for example, argue that delinquency was typically admonished without qualification in films of that era—even the ones aimed at youth audiences:

> [g]ood and evil make themselves evident in real life not as absolutes, but as gradations along a virtually infinite continuum. The American mass media, however, always has operated most comfortably when presenting clearly etched polarities to its consumers. So it has always been with the teenager in American pop culture. There are good teenagers and bad teenagers, and being just a little bit bad is rather like being just a little bit pregnant—in America, you are either pure as newfallen snow or you carry an indelible taint (12).

Barson and Heller provide examples of a number of early exploitation films in which delinquency is depicted as a *very* slippery slope. On a poster for the film *Girls under 21* (1940), for example, a printed quote from *Kinematograph Weekly* states: "THEY START BY STEALING A LIPSTICK . . . FINISH WITH A SLAYING!" (Barson and Heller 39). A poster for *Where are Your Children?* (1943) shows the promotional statement "FIRST FRANK STORY of WAYWARD YOUTH" and includes references

to "murder", "rape" and "robbery" (Barson and Heller 37). Doherty agrees that, as a

theme, delinquency was not controversial in and of itself, because "all considered it a

scourge" (93). Discussing the exploitation films of the 1950s, Doherty argues that any

debate that arose in the films was not over the rightness or wrongness of delinquency

but over "causes and cures and, in regard to the film industry, the role movies played

in both" (93). For Barson and Heller and for Doherty, constructions of delinquency

are characterised by a dramatic schism between "good" and "bad" behaviour. Even

showing signs of being slightly "wayward" will result in crimes of the most

abominable kind. For these critics, the films mirror sociological discourse of the

period that constructed delinquency as a serious social problem not to be taken

lightly.

Despite Doherty's assertion that all considered delinquency to be a "scourge",

there is much to indicate that the teen delinquency films are more ambivalent about

their delinquent characters. In the films that addressed a youth audience, the

treatment of delinquency is more complicated and nuanced than in films like

Blackboard Jungle. For one, the teen films are told from the point of view of youth, not

from the point of view of the authority figure. In *Blackboard Jungle*, the hero is an

adult and the audience is encouraged to identify chiefly with the ideological stance he

represents. In youth-oriented films, however, adults exist mainly on the periphery of

the narratives. Youth are the source of the films' central ideological positions. This

indicates that the attitudes reinforced by the teen delinquency films are unlikely to

align entirely with those of parent culture. In addition, industry pressures of the 1950s complicated the allegiances of film makers. While the American film industry had long produced films about youthful or "juvenile" delinquency, the 1950s was the first era in which many of those films were produced for teenage audiences rather than just for a concerned parent culture (Kern 50; Considine 183). For the first time, people were making films aimed squarely at the youth audience whose behaviour was under attack in most popular and sociological discourse. While censorship pressures required the films to condemn delinquency as a social problem, youth— who were actively sought as a lucrative market—scorned any film that attempted to teach moral lessons (Barson and Heller 61). Biskind argues that as a result:

> Hollywood found itself caught in the middle of the fight over delinquency, torn between the kids and their critics. On the one hand, when the teen-agers who were running wild in the streets paused to catch their breaths, they went to the movies, and Hollywood was understandably loath to bite the little hands that fed it. On the other hand, it could hardly risk offending a large sector of society by seeming to give its imprimatur to the rebellious teen-agers whom so many found frightening (198).

The teen films were therefore shaped by cultural and industry pressures to satisfy both the conservative ideologies of a parent culture concerned with delinquency, and the youth audience. The result of these competing interests produced what Biskind argues is a "blizzard of films . . . that displayed a bewildering array of contradictory attitudes" (198).

There is more to indicate that cinematic depictions of delinquency are framed ambivalently than merely the divergent commercial and industrial imperatives

pointed to by Biskind. Narrative contradiction also arises from an underlying

ambivalence that existed within American culture in the 1950s toward the two

fundamental ideals the films depict: individualism and community. While there was

certainly a widespread fear of delinquency in the 1950s, there was an equally pressing

concern over the increasingly conformist character of American culture, particularly

with regard to the middle-class suburban milieu in which the delinquent was usually

positioned on screen.

A number of critics examine the fear of conformity that existed in the post-

WWII period and their work helps to establish the context in which cinematic

delinquency will be considered here. Grossberg argues that the economic climate of

the 1950s was characterised by the central value of mobility: more specifically,

upward social mobility, attained through the accumulation of economic as opposed

to cultural capital that was made available by the rapidly increasing consumer culture

(141). While the ethic of "success" appeared to offer a democratic social framework,

Hendershot points out that 1950s America was at the same time "frightened of the

perils of economic success, believing that they would lead to a society of conformist

drones ("Rebellion"). On the one hand, as Grossberg argues, the ideology of success

offered an opportunity to reconcile the ideals of democracy and individualism;

success was something that had to be "earned" through hard work, and was

therefore represented as being available to people across different social groups, or

"anyone who wanted to work hard enough" (142). On the other hand, to move into

the mainstream required the "socially marginal" to "take on the appearance of the increasingly dominant face of the new middle class" (Grossberg 142). For many, this was worrisome. Hendershot cites the publication of *The Lonely Crowd* by David Riesman, *The Organization Man* by William Whyte and *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* by Sloan Wilson—each texts that address increasing middle-class conformity—as indications of the growing concern that individualism was under threat ("Rebellion"). As Riesman comments:

> modern consumer capitalism demanded a revision in personality structure to conform to the demands of bureaucracy and efficiency. In this type of personality, human motivation moved out of the conscience to reside in the peer group. To please others, to conform to superficial niceties, to be congenial and easy to get along with—that is, to be shallow—these were the demands of a society whose principal activity had turned from work as production to work as the manipulation of people (qtd. in Gilbert 117).

Placing delinquency within this context, the middle-class conformity of parent culture represents strict adherence to communitarian ideals while delinquency represents staunch individualism. The two behaviours and their corresponding cultural ideals are juxtaposed.

The rise in consumption and conformity was nowhere more visible than in the suburbs, which is the location of most cinematic delinquency. The emphasis on consumption was focussed particularly in these private spheres: people bought houses, cars, vacations, consumer goods, and new communication technologies (Grossberg 142). Composed largely of white, middle-class families, the suburbs were

"imagined as 'a better place' to bring up the kids" (Grossberg 173). As an ideological

model, the suburban family became not only the site of consumer spending but the

reason for it (Grossberg 142). It was seen to be "part of a larger commitment

necessary if the U.S. was to realise its destiny, its dream of peace and prosperity (for

all?), not to mention protecting itself from 'godless communism'" (Grossberg 143).

The suburbs were not merely a metaphor for the changes taking place in the

American landscape, but were the means by which the nation reasserted its identity

in that they functioned to isolate and reproduce the nuclear family unit. As

mentioned above, however, in popular discourse the suburbs were also regarded

with deep suspicion. The conformity they encouraged was antithetical to the

principle of freedom central to American national identity. James Gilbert provides an

illustrative example of the Levittowns, the most well-known suburbs produced in

this period. They combined tract-housing with town planning to produce a highly

structured and homogeneous space and although the Levittown houses were

detached, they were mass-produced, with only slight variations on the basic styles

occurring through superficial differences in colour choice and external features

(Gilbert 115-117). The Levittowns were also sites of behavioural control: "Levitt

wanted relative uniformity in his residents. Homeowner manuals warned against

erecting unauthorised fences or changing house colours without permission. No

washing could be hung outside on weekends, and from April to November, owners

promised to cut the lawn once a week" (Gilbert 115). Growing fears among social

commentators of the increasing "sameness" of American culture seemed to be most

warranted when looking at the conformist lifestyle of suburban areas (Gilbert 116).

Although conformity was "needed" to protect the nation against a variety of internal

and external threats, it also threatened the very core of American identity in that

"[i]ndividuality was not taken into account. Anyone who did not conform was

automatically a misfit" (Gow 109).

Within this cultural context, the delinquent was a misfit of the highest order.

At the same time, however, the delinquent served to critique communitarian ideals—

increasingly conformist in character—by representing the other ideal that many were

looking to reclaim: individual liberty. A deep contradiction existed between the need

for conformity in a time of internal strife and the need to maintain the basic ideal of

individualism. While delinquency represented a threat to the social order, the "social

order" itself was considered problematic. Delinquency was therefore framed

ambivalently.

The teen delinquency films of the 1950s are structured by this contradiction

between the ideals of individualism and community. The (individualist) delinquent

youths are usually placed squarely within the context of the middle-class, suburban

family (community) and the films play out the conflict caused by the tension between

the two. Far from simply celebrating delinquency outright, as the films might have

done to play to their youth audiences, they express ambivalence both about the

delinquent figure and about the community. This ambivalence, once created, is

difficult to erase in the films' closures, and what results is a sense that reconciliation

akin to that created in *Blackboard Jungle* is very difficult indeed. What adult-oriented

films like *Blackboard Jungle* conceal is the problematic nature of "consensus" in the

post-war period, a concept challenged by cultural commentary like that described

above by Grossberg and Gilbert and by the incongruous, "contradictory" nature of

the teen delinquency films.

"You're Tearing Me Apart!": Constructing Ambivalence in the Teen Delinquency Film

Narrative contradiction emerges across all the teen delinquency films

discussed here but it can be seen most clearly in the exploitation films, in which it

results from the divergence between the films' often explicitly-stated moral message

and their overall effect. To satisfy censors, many of the exploitation films overtly

claim that they address delinquency as a social problem and that the films should be

viewed as offering suggestions regarding causes or cures. In some films, this is done

within the fictional narrative using long monologues delivered by authority figures

like police officers or judges. In *High School Confidential*, for example, such a speech

comes from the police commissioner Walter Burroughs (Ned Wever) who looks to the

camera to address the film's audience when he says "it can happen here". In *The

Delinquents*, the message is delivered by a narrator (uncredited) reading over the

closing credits, who offers suggestions to "help halt this disease [delinquency] before

it cripples our children, before it cripples society". Many films also use opening

written statements, placed before the narratives begin, to frame the action. These

testify to the films' notional function, and supposedly guide the audience with regard

to the spirit in which the films should be viewed. *Teenage Doll* is an example of a film

that inserts such a statement. In part, it reads:

> This is not a pretty picture . . . it could not be pretty and still be true. . . .
> We are not doctors . . . we can offer no cure . . . but we know that a cure
> must be found.

This warning suggests that producers can be forgiven for depicting the scandalous

images in the film as long as it is for the audience's own good. The messages

delivered by these various means suggest that the films cannot, in good conscience,

be consumed for enjoyment but are acceptable as viewing material if they serve some

larger social purpose.

There is a sharp distinction, however, between these supposed moral messages

and the delight with which the films convey delinquent acts, which creates some

ambiguity of meaning. An analysis of *The Violent Years* demonstrates this. Before the

narrative of *The Violent Years* begins, the following written statement appears on

screen:

> [t]his is a story of violence: a violence born of the uncontrolled
> passions of adolescent youth, and nurtured by this generation
> of parents, those who in their own smug little world of selfish
> interests and confused ideas of parental supervision refuse to
> believe today's glaring headlines. But it has happened. Only
> the people and places have been given other names.

This is notionally a message for the audience to warn them of the dangers of delinquency. The film thereby claims for itself a connection to communitarian values, and implies that its ultimate aim is to play a role in solving the problem of delinquency. But the meaning of this message is not necessarily reinforced by the spectacular crimes the film depicts. The film follows a demure, middle-class girl, Paula Parkins (Jane Moorhead), who embarks on a crime spree that involves robbery, organised crime and a shootout with police. The spree is marked, most extremely, by her raping a man in a secluded park. After falling pregnant as a result of the rape and being apprehended after the shootout, Paula is imprisoned and eventually dies dramatically during childbirth, thereby punished for her transgressions. The film aims to contain the disruption created by Paula's activities in the narrative with a long closing monologue. This monologue is delivered by Judge Clara (I. Stanford Jolley), whose role is to give Paula's parents, Jane (Barbara Weeks) and Carl (Arthur Millan), a stern talking to. Judge Clara advocates a "return to religion" as the "easiest" solution to the problem of delinquency. This oversimplified, almost comical solution conspicuously fails to mitigate the film's outrageous storyline, which is almost carnivalesque in its depiction of teenage delinquency. Also, the monologue is conveyed with a condescending tone that would likely elicit resistance from any audience. As if to rejoice in the failure of this closure, the film cuts away from Clara in the final section of his monologue. Clara is then not seen but only heard in voice-over as we instead view a montage that replays the most titillating scenes from the

film. The judge's diatribe competes with jazz music that begins to play in the background, music that contributes to the sense of excitement created by the images. The film's conservative message is, therefore, internally contested and ineffectual, with the film taking much more pleasure in the scenes of delinquency. While the film's moral message appears to work toward the reconciliation of communitarian and individualist values, its structure makes their reconciliation impossible. The exploitation genre notionally provided a space in which scandalous themes too dangerous for the mainstream could play out. The irony is that it could not—and did not sincerely seek to—safely contain the disruption it depicted.

The ambivalent treatment of delinquency in the exploitation picture has been observed by a number of other critics, specifically with regard to the science fiction and "monster" films. Hendershot, for example, argues that in *The Giant Gila Monster* (1959) and *The Blob* (1958), certain delinquent acts, like sneaking out of the house at night and breaking windows, are framed as positive, appropriate acts within the context of the crises being faced ("Monster"). She writes "adult authorities fail . . . because of their caution and lack of open-mindedness", while the teens save the day because of their capacity to act quickly and decisively ("Monster"). Mark Janovich argues that *I was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957) mounts a dissenting critique of the treatment of youth at the hands of parental authority (212). He writes that in *I was a Teenage Werewolf*, "Tony has no significant problems with his home life. . . .Tony's problem is that he doesn't want to conform or adjust to either the world of his peers

or that of adults. He is a genuine outsider who only wants people to recognise and

respect his difference, a desire which is ultimately frustrated and denied him"

(Janovich 200). *I was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957) carried a similar message,

presenting the relationship between the monster and his creator as one between a

"sensitive alienated teenager" and "abusive parental control" (212). According to

Janovich, *How to Make a Monster* (1958) is the same, showing a concern for youth who

are victimised. Hendershot and Janovich confirm that in the exploitation pictures,

there is considerable ambivalence about delinquency and parent culture and by

extension, about the values of individualism and community.

These critics argue, however, that the ambivalence the exploitation films create

does not extend to mainstream melodramas, an assertion I contest in this chapter.

Hendershot argues that *Rebel Without a Cause*, for example, leaves the audience with a

feeling of "hope" that delinquency might be cured, thereby constructing youth as a

problem, while the horror genre "comes to a much more hopeless conclusion about

the problem of juvenile delinquency", creating a "deep-seated suspicion that those in

charge are more insane than the diseased youth of Fifties America" ("Monster").

Janovich too argues that the "very 'trashiness' of these [teen exploitation] films

allowed them more space to be critical and subversive than many more mainstream

films" (200). Hendershot's and Janovich's positions can be countered, in part, by a

brief analysis of *The Wild One*, which uses an opening written statement like those

usually seen in exploitations films. *The Wild One* is framed by text that aims to satisfy

conservative audiences. It warns viewers about the spectacular nature of the events it

is about to depict, stating "[i]t is a public challenge not to let it happen again".

Contradictions similar to those seen in the exploitation films are created in the

narrative, however, by Brando's charismatic depiction of Johnny. With his brand of

sexually-charged rebellion, Johnny became an icon of the era and his popularity

undermines the film's purported function as a cautionary tale. Hendershot's and

Janovich's positions are also contradicted by much of the critical literature in which

Rebel Without a Cause and *The Wild One* are cited as clear examples of films that create

stirring cultural critique. Elayne Rapping, for example, argues that James Dean's

character in *Rebel Without a Cause* "exposed the contradictions and cruelties of the

American dream. To be integrated into the family and corporate worlds of 20th

century America, one was obliged to give up one's dream of a meaningful authentic

life as an individual" (15). Doherty observes the same anxiety in *Rebel Without a*

Cause, writing that the film worked to "dramatize the tensions behind the

tranquillity" of 1950s, middle-class, suburban America (84). For Rapping and

Doherty, certain mainstream melodramas are also characterised by the exposition of

ideological ambivalence.

The two mainstream teen delinquency films discussed here, *Rebel Without a*

Cause and *The Wild One*, do construct a deep ambivalence toward both individualism

and community, but they typically do so differently from the exploitation films. In

order to explore the mainstream melodramas' construction of ambivalence, it is

necessary to briefly unpack the discussion of Ray, who offers an extensive analysis of

what he calls the "youth rebellion" pictures—here called the teen delinquency films.

According to Ray, the creation of ambivalence in these films occurs primarily via the

rebel figure, who is modelled on, but creates different meanings from, the outlaw

hero seen in many Classical Hollywood films. Ray argues that the outlaw hero was

one of the main mechanisms by which Hollywood cinema traditionally exhibited its

reconciliatory tendencies. The outlaw hero was a single character who was able to

embody both possibilities of individualism and communitarian participation (Ray

58). Describing this character, which developed in the Western, Ray writes:

> [t]his mythology's effectiveness derived from its strategy of
> reducing national ideological tensions to the manageable size of
> outlaw hero-official hero conflicts. Within this pattern . . . the
> self-determining, morally detached outlaw hero came to
> represent America itself. The town's claims on that hero, by
> contrast, stood for those historical developments (domestic or
> international) that required collective action. The importance of
> the reluctant hero story lay in its ability to preserve for the
> whole ideology both possibilities: individual autonomy and
> communitarian participation (91).

In this configuration, "[t]he outlaw mythology portrayed the law, the sum of society's

standards, as a collective, impersonal ideology imposed on the individual from

without" (Ray 62). Far from lawless or immoral, however, the outlaw hero was led

by "a natural law discovered intuitively" (Ray 62). The outlaw hero is democratic

and moral, but positioned outside the bounds of society.

Ray uses the title character in *Shane* (1953) as a "model" example of the outlaw

hero and the reconciliatory pattern. Shane (Alan Ladd) is a wandering ex-gunfighter

who rides into a dispute between the Starrett family and a pair of local cattlemen who want their land and seek to take it using brutal means. Pressed to assist, Shane is very reluctant to get involved, wanting to keep to himself. At the same time, he expresses a longing for family and community life, compounded by his obvious romantic feelings for Mrs Starrett (Jean Arthur), Joe Starrett's (Van Heflin) wife. Although he is himself conflicted, Shane is eventually pivotal in resolving the conflict when he kills the cattlemen's hired gun, Jack Wilson (Jack Palance), in a gunfight. Injured, Shane rides off into the sunset at the end of the film, leaving it unclear whether or not he survives his wound. For Ray, Shane represents individualism with his "solitude, self-determination, and freedom", while Joe Starrett represents communitarian values, embracing "family, society, and responsibility" (72). Mrs Starrett, "[w]ith her affections wavering between the two men . . . represent[s] the audience's own dilemma about which man and which set of values [is] to be preferred" (Ray 72). The film negates the necessity to choose between the two. Firstly, it depicts Shane and Joe Starrett as two men struggling with the same set of contradictory impulses; Joe is a community man, capable of fighting when necessary, while Shane is a fighter, capable of affection towards Mrs Starrett and Joey Starrett (Brandon de Wilde), Joe's son (Ray 72). According to Ray, each man offers "in miniature" a reconciliation of the film's larger oppositions (72). In addition, the film continually demonstrates that the values that initially appear to contradict within and between Shane and Joe are actually reconcilable, shown largely in moments where

the two work together to achieve a goal they might not have been able to achieve

separately (Ray 72-73). In one scene, for example, they win a fight and in another

they uproot a large stump at the Starrett's home. The two men are depicted as

mutually dependent: "Starrett depend[s] on Shane's intervention for the safety of his

farm, Shane depend[s] on Starrett's community for the sense of purpose he had lost"

(Ray 73).

Despite the pattern of reconciliation, Ray argues that the film ultimately hinges

on Shane because in order to reinforce the values of community, "the narrative

reinforce[s] the sense of civilization's ultimate dependence on the self-determined,

unentangled individual" (75). Whether Shane simply rides away to another frontier

at the end of the film, as in Ray's reading, or whether he rides off to die alone, the

effect is the same: "[b]y avoiding the outlaw hero's final assimilation into the

community (always the greatest threat to his independence), . . . [it] not only

postpone[s] indefinitely that hero's demise, but also preserve[s] the sense of his

centrality to American culture" (Ray 73). The outlaw hero is able to symbolically

reconcile the contradiction between individualism and community, concealing the

need to choose between the two. The similarity between this reconciliation and the

one described earlier in *Blackboard Jungle* is clear.

In the mainstream teen delinquency films, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *The Wild

One*, the outlaw hero is recast as a rebel. Ray writes of the delinquency films that

"[a]ll had protagonists whose alienation, nihilism, and impulses toward violence and

rebellion were profoundly antisocial. In effect, they were extreme versions of the

outlaw hero, with cars and motorcycles instead of horses" (161). In *Rebel Without a*

Cause, the rebel is Jim Stark, while in *The Wild One*, the rebel is Johnny Strabler. Like

the outlaw, these rebels express conflicting feelings of belonging and alienation: a

yearning to be a part of society, but a feeling that society is ultimately no place for

them. And like the outlaw, these rebel figures thereby express the fundamental

contradiction between individualism and communitarian participation. Yet unlike

the outlaw, these rebels do not resolve the contradictions raised in the narrative.

Instead, they articulate the impossibility of reconciling individualism and community

in the post-WWII period. While films like *Shane* aim to suggest that both

irreconcilable ideals are still possible, the mainstream teen delinquency films express

what was then an "emerging anxiety" that neither ideal is really possible (Ray 174).

The films do this in a number of ways, which will be illustrated here.

For Ray, the ambivalence in the mainstream delinquency films emerges largely

from style. Ray discusses the knife fight scene in *Rebel Without a Cause* as an example,

arguing that the director's use of discontinuity editing techniques, such as

"unmotivated oblique angles and 180° violations . . . [suggest] Jim's . . . irreconcilable

feelings of superiority and inconsequentiality, and his contradictory impulses toward

solitude and belonging—contradictions set loose during the immediately preceding

planetarium lecture" (177). Ray argues that the film's "conventional happy ending",

one that offers a simplistic solution filmed using continuity editing techniques, cannot

sufficiently reconcile the ambivalence that is so "powerfully" expressed in the

planetarium and fight scenes (178-9). For Ray, the use of discontinuity editing style

creates contradictions that the closure leaves "implicitly unresolved" (179). Jackie

Byars also observes the importance of style in *Rebel Without a Cause*. She discusses the

film's camerawork, which often adopts Jim's own subjective point of view and

thereby encourages the audience to identify with his experience:

> [a] particularly notable example is the dizzy, circular-moving
> shot when Jim lies on the living room couch and watches his
> mother enter the room. Portraying the modernist split on a
> psychic level, Jim longs for unity—with his parents and with
> his peers—and is repeatedly and frustratingly blocked from it.
> A shot like this one enforces our awareness of the physical and
> psychic distance between Jim and his mother, the perversity of
> their relationship. We feel it in our guts; we cannot help but be
> aware of it (Byars 128).

For Byars, the young characters simultaneously aspire to be a part of the same

domestic and social class as their parents but at the same time question the value of

this class (124), thereby creating a troubling feeling of ambivalence. Once this

ambivalence is "felt in our guts", it cannot easily be elided by the happy ending.

Another way in which the mainstream delinquency films are able to deny

reconciliation of the conflicts they raise is through the rebel figures' emotive

expressions of angst. The rebel figures' emotional openness helps the audience "feel"

the rebels' conflict, just like the use of discontinuity editing. While Shane holds his

cards tightly to his chest, never quite revealing his conflicting feelings in any

definitive way, the rebels are open books, exposing their pain for all to see. Take

Jim's cry of "You're tearing me apart!", for example. Screamed at his parents in a moment of frustration, it is an expression so heartfelt and deep that the ending cannot easily recuperate Jim's obvious pain. While Shane's romantic feelings for Mrs Starrett are subtly conveyed by way of lingering glances, Jim's and Johnny's romantic desires for Judy (Natalie Wood) and Kathie (Mary Murphy), respectively, are shown physically and often desperately. While Shane quietly avoids involvement in community affairs, Jim and Johnny brood and wail over their feelings of alienation. Where Shane is stoic, the teens' emotional conflict is dramatic and physical, frustrating the audience's capacity to resolve the inherent contradiction that has been so feelingly expressed.

There are many other elements of the films that work to create ambivalence. For example, David Baker argues that in *Rebel Without a Cause*, Jim's conflict with his parents stems from a clash between Jim's individualism and his father's (and mother's) need for conformity. Baker argues:

> the conflict between Jim and his father is rather more interesting than simply that of a weak father who fails to assert his authority upon a son who *craves* that authority. Rather, the conflict is between two competing discourses: Jim's discourse of romantic authenticity, which operates primarily around the values of honour and sincerity; and Mr Stark's liberal pragmatism (45).

Although Jim is positioned in a middle-class family and community, "his passionate commitment to honour and sincerity means that he is unable to find an authentic

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space for himself in the mainstream world of compromise. He must, without actually

leaving that world, create liminal spaces of pleasure and authenticity which largely

mirror the world he rebels against" (Baker 50). When Jim and Judy run away to the

mansion, they create "a kind of liminal space where Jim, Judy and Plato enact various

fantasies. What is remarkable about these fantasies is that their horizon and their

substance are entirely defined by the middle-class American dream the teens are

each, for their own reasons, escaping from or rebelling against" (Baker 46). In this

space, "Jim and Judy perform the parts of adults discussing the issue of children,

projecting their own feelings of hopelessness and disempowerment into these

discussions" (Baker 46). The result is a scene in which middle-class values are

constructed ambivalently, both as a source of pleasure and also as the cause of the

characters' feelings of alienation.

It is the kind of narrative tension described by Baker that *Rebel Without a Cause*

shares with other teen delinquency films, which do not tend to utilise the same kinds

of stylistic experimentation discussed by Ray and Byars. Ambivalence is largely

created by the way the rebel is positioned with regard to society and communitarian

values. Jim in *Rebel Without a Cause* begins the film as the new student at school, in a

town to which he and his family have just moved. It is revealed in the course of the

film that Jim's mother, Carol (Ann Doran), forces the family to move around a lot as a

result of Jim's behaviour, so in a similar way to the outlaw, he is nomadic and

without a clear connection to society. In *The Wild One*, Johnny is the same. The action

in the film takes place in a town that Johnny and his gang happen upon during one of their motorcycle journeys. Although there is a brief reference to Johnny holding down a job during the week, the film never shows Johnny in his hometown context. He literally rides into town at the beginning of the narrative, at which point the main plotlines begin. Both Jim and Johnny are alienated from the communities in which the narratives play out.

At the same time, however, each expresses some desire to belong to their communities. Jim articulates a desperate desire to have a good relationship with his parents and tries at numerous points to explain to them how they might change their behaviours in order to forge a more understanding relationship with him. Feeling more comfortable talking to the authorities than his family, however, Jim confides in Officer Ray Fremick (Edward Platt) in the opening scenes about his parents' relationship and his feeling that it is dysfunctional. For Jim, his mother is overbearing, while his father Frank (Jim Backus) is spineless and too willing to accede to his mother's every demand. While Jim does rebel against his parents and their values, he also seeks their understanding and acceptance. In *The Wild One*, Johnny also expresses a longing for acceptance, despite seeming to revel in his feelings of alienation. Although Johnny expresses no interest in many of the values of mainstream community, like money, he places great value in a racing trophy stolen for him by one of his fellow gang members. As Briley notes, the trophy is the film's "symbol of middle-class acceptability" (356), representing Johnny's desire to be

acknowledged by certain markers of success typical of mainstream society. Briley

discusses the importance of the trophy in the scene in which Kathie tells Johnny of

her wish that a stranger might come to the town, order a coffee from her, and then

whisk her away from her boring life. Kathie is a Cinderella seeking her Prince

Charming (Briley 355). Johnny's feelings for her indicate he might be contemplating a

life with her, but he refuses to give up his trophy when Kathie asks if she can have it.

The trophy is highly prized by Johnny. While he may be unsure about the kind of

life that Kathie is seeking, he seems more attached to the kind of success symbolised

by the trophy. Briley writes "[w]hile Johnny's embrace of the open road and Kathie's

rejection of her small town life may be perceived as an assault upon traditional

values, it is also possible to view this scene as indicative of the power of the American

dream" (355). The result, Briley argues, is that "[w]hether intentionally or not, *The*

Wild One leaves the viewer in confusion" (356).

The exploitation films also hint that at the heart of delinquency lies a feeling of

deep ambivalence toward individualism and community, although the delinquents'

feelings of inner conflict are much less pronounced. For example, in *The Violent Years*,

while Paula eventually commits a number of heinous acts quite gleefully, she initially

seeks to forge a strong relationship with her parents, who simply seem uninterested

in her. When Paula tries to have a talk with her mother, her mother instead decides

to go to her regular charity meeting, admitting frankly that she enjoys the flattery she

receives from her friends there. The implication is that Paula longs for a happy family life and, when consistently denied it, she turns to delinquency.

As well as using the conflicting feelings of the rebel figures to create ambivalence toward individualist and communitarian ideals, the exploitation and mainstream films alike create ambivalence toward these ideals via their treatment of the family. The family is depicted as a troubled site, one that is responsible for the delinquents' feelings of alienation. But it is also the object of the delinquents' longing and a site that is consistently incorporated into the films' closures as a necessary social institution. In *High School Confidential*, for example, Tony Baker's (Russ Tamblyn) delinquency is attributed to his less-than-wholesome familial relationships. He lives with his aunt Gwen (played by sex symbol Mamie Van Doren) and uncle (unnamed), who are depicted as unacceptable guardians. Tony's uncle is absent for most of the film, and as a result of her loneliness, Gwen repeatedly tries to seduce Tony. At the end of the film, it is revealed that Tony is not actually a "real" delinquent but an undercover police officer posing as a delinquent in order to break a drug ring. At the same point in the narrative, Gwen's husband returns home, restoring the family unit. The film's narrator explicitly states: "Gwen's problem is also solved: her husband came home". Gwen's misplaced sexual desire is explained and validated by labelling it a "problem" that can be solved by a present, loving husband. And the alignment of the familial resolution and the cessation of Tony's delinquency implies that one necessarily leads to the other.

Similarly, in *Teenage Doll*, the family is constructed ambivalently. A number of

members of the female delinquent gang, the Black Widows, have home lives that are

particularly wretched. For example, Lori (Sandy Smith) lives in squalor with her

younger sister, whom she mistreats, leaves alone in the dark (to save electricity), and

neglects to feed. Helen (Fay Spain) largely takes care of herself and is neglected by

her father (Paul Bryar) who is an unemployed philanderer. These horrid home

environments "explain" the characters' delinquency. A number of other female gang

members have parents who are all present in the family home, hard-working, and

concerned about their children (even though their concern results in misguided

parenting). While both the troubled families and the intact families produce

delinquent children, the film ends with the children of the intact families making a

decision to abandon their delinquent ways, return to their families and choose new

non-delinquent friends. The girls whose families are depicted as completely beyond

repair choose to maintain their delinquent ways at the film's close. Delinquency is

constructed as a direct product of troubled familial relationships but the implication

is that an intact family might be the solution to youth's delinquency. While the

disturbed and broken families in these two films depict the nuclear family as a

troubled site in the 1950s, the films also seem unwilling to discount entirely the role

of the family in American society.

The depictions of the family unit are further complicated by the inclusion of

the authorities in the films' closures; police are typically involved in assisting families

to reunite with their delinquent children. This is congruent with much of the emerging sociological discourse of the period that constructs the family as an increasingly plagued site. As a result of the shifting value of the family, the state was often posited as offering more appropriate institutions for managing social problems, particularly those that related to youth. For example, writing in 1956 on the centrality of schooling to the lives of youth, S.N. Eisenstadt comments that the importance of the educational institution "clearly bears witness to the shrinkage of the family's scope of activities, and to the inadequacy of the family as the sole educational agency. In other words, [schools] arise because family and kinship age-heterogeneous relations cannot ensure the smooth and continuous transmission of knowledge and role dispositions" (163). The family, cited by Turner in his "Frontier Thesis" as one of the founding institutions of American society (30), was in doubt in the 1950s, increasingly viewed as inadequate for helping youth adjust to the new post-WWII world. Reflecting this, the teen delinquency films often portray the family as being inadequate to solve the problem of delinquency on their own. The state must intervene. The involvement of the state in familial reconciliations has been noted in *Rebel Without a Cause* (for example by Briley and Biskind). In addition, *High School Confidential*, *Teenage Doll*, *The Violent Years*, *Hot Rod Girl* and *The Wild One* all contain closures in which families and/or youths co-operate with authorities like the police or teachers. Youth behaviour is typically seen as the result of parents who are either absent (in the case of Paula in *The Violent Years*, Tony in *High School Confidential*, and

Lori in *Teenage Doll*), over-bearing (in the case of Barbara in *Teenage Doll* and Steve (Del Erickson) in *Hot Rod Girl*) or abusive (Johnny in *The Wild One*). The authorities, meanwhile, are depicted as caring, understanding and better equipped to deal with youth. What results is a construction of the family that is framed in highly ambivalent terms; while the teen delinquency films depict a sound nuclear family as the ideal place for youth to grow up, they also suggest that the nuclear family, on its own, cannot maintain appropriate relationships with youth.

Even the state is not free from ambivalent framing, however, with the closures of the films making the state and the law the objects of considerable distrust. Both Johnny in *The Wild One* and Jim in *Rebel Without a Cause* are central to incidents that highlight the inadequacies of the law and law enforcement. *Rebel Without a Cause* climaxes at the planetarium in which Jim's friend Plato (Sal Mineo) has barricaded himself and is armed with a gun. Jim decides to take individualist action; he sneaks in to where Plato is hiding, unloads the gun without Plato noticing, and thereby diffuses any threat. When Plato goes outside holding the gun, the police take aggressive action before Jim is able to tell them the gun is not loaded. Plato is needlessly shot and killed. In *The Wild One*, a similarly disturbing scene takes place. Events are set in motion when Johnny witnesses a dispute between a biker, Chino (Lee Marvin), and a townsperson, Charlie (Hugh Sanders), who nearly come to blows. Chino is thrown in jail while Charlie remains free. Johnny feels compelled to intervene and enacts his own individualist solution in the interest of justice; he takes

Charlie from his home and puts him in jail with Chino. Angry, Charlie incites a mob

of townspeople to go and track down Johnny. As Johnny is trying to leave town, the

angry mob sets upon him and throws a tyre iron at his bike. The impact causes him

to lose control and his bike careens into the elderly Art Kleiner (Will Wright), killing

him. Johnny is detained for an unknown length of time before Kathie's uncle, Frank

Bleeker (Ray Teal), plagued with guilt, finally comes forward to clear Johnny's name.

The authorities are thereby associated with injustice and incompetence.

In a traditional Western, like *Shane*, the end of the film typically depicts the

resolution of the social problem and the cowboy—who is integral to solving that

problem—rides off into the sunset remaining unfettered by the restraints of

community responsibilities. In the delinquency films, however, the endings are much

less reconciliatory. The individualist actions of Johnny and Jim, though intended to

be heroic and just, are ultimately ineffectual. The endings of the films are also unable

to convincingly resolve the rebels' conflicting feelings of alienation and belonging.

Jim and Judy leave the final shot separately from Jim's parents; arm in arm, Jim and

Judy exit to the right of screen, with Jim's parents following behind. The obvious

separateness of parent and youth culture in this final shot demonstrates that Jim has

not been absorbed into the culture his parents represent. Yet, Jim and Judy and Jim's

parents do appear to leave together as a "group"—albeit a divided one—who are

headed in a similar direction. This signifies the continuation of some kind of

relationship between youth and parent culture, though it is likely to be a perpetually

troubled one. Jim is certainly not free and unfettered in the way that Shane might have been. In *The Wild One*, Johnny rides off toward the horizon, but he does so with a lingering feeling of melancholy about his inability to participate in the life of Kathie and her community. This is signified by his brief return to the Bleeker cafe to leave Kathie with a token of his presence: the stolen trophy. The look Johnny and Kathie exchange when he delivers it to her indicates his persistent desire to belong to a community, but acknowledges both his and the community's inability to make it work. In these closures, the films construct ambivalence about both communitarian participation and individualism by displaying the ineptitude of the law and the family and the futility of individual action.

In each film, the delinquent represents both a disruptive force and a romanticised ideal of individualism. The family unit represents both an ideal space for the resolution of crises and a mechanism ill-equipped to understand the needs of their teenagers. The state is both a benevolent protector and an overly authoritarian force. While delinquency is depicted as a perpetually tormented option, the family unit and the state are also subject to such convincing scrutiny as to render them impossible alternatives. What arises in the films, therefore, is a deep ambivalence toward both individualist and communitarian ideals. The audience is left unsure about which value—if any—is possible in the post-WWII period.

Although the rebel gave voice to contradictions that created profound anxiety in 1950s America, he was not demonised for doing so. In fact, he was heroicised.

Biskind's discussion of "doubling" is very useful for explaining how the value of delinquency was negotiated in teen films of this period. His idea of the extremist and moderate doubles helps to explain why the rebel figure—though a delinquent—was not reincorporated back into the cultural order at the ends of the youth-oriented films. As well as existing in *The Blackboard Jungle*, the doubling technique can be seen in a number of other films: *Rebel Without a Cause* has Plato and Jim; *The Wild One* has Chino and Johnny; and *Hot Rod Girl* has Brock (Mark Andrews) and Jeff (John Smith). Very clearly there is, to use Biskind's terms, "bad" delinquency and "good" delinquency. In *Rebel Without a Cause*, for example, Jim's drunkenness and anomie pales in comparison to his friend Plato's puppy-shooting and not-so-latent homosexuality. In *The Wild One*, Chino's extreme drunkenness and aggression are far more anti-social than Johnny's brooding. Plato and Chino are the wrong kind of delinquents: youths whose behaviour stems from malice toward society rather than simple alienation, and the delinquency films take care to make this distinction. The punishments of Plato and Chino are death and imprisonment (respectively), ends that depict their behaviour as unacceptable. Analysing *Rebel Without a Cause*, Biskind asserts that it creates the same meanings as *Blackboard Jungle*, an assertion I contest here. Biskind argues that by killing the film's extremist delinquent (Plato), the film "exorcises" Jim's "asocial other half" and Jim is reincorporated into the consensus at the end of the film (210). For me, Biskind's analysis does not apply as neatly to youth-oriented teen films like *Rebel Without a Cause* as it does to *Blackboard Jungle*. As

my analysis above suggests, the moderate delinquents in the teen films are not convincingly reincorporated into society in the final scenes of the films. By killing off the extremist delinquents, the teen delinquency films instead authorise the kind of rebellion that the moderates represent: one that voices ideological ambivalence. Baker agrees, reading the ending of *Rebel Without a Cause* in a similar way, arguing that the closure is not "an admonition to conformity, but rather a recognition and respect for the necessary limits of rebellion" (46).

The teen delinquency films, in their use of the outlaw hero model to characterise the rebel figure, demonstrate the importance of exposing ideological ambivalence in the post-WWII period. The outlaw hero is a central figure in Hollywood cinema, one who typically resolves the difficult tensions at the heart of American culture and stands heroic as a result. In modelling the rebel figure on such a hero, the films grant considerable significance to the rebel's ambivalent take on fundamental American ideals. Far from being a mere depiction of "juvenile" misbehaviour, the rebel figure is an important cultural construct providing a "heroic" statement about the relative values of community and individualism in the 1950s. Furthermore, by recasting the outlaw figure as youth, the films reveal the increasing intensity with which youth was invested in as a vessel for the examination of American ideals.

_He's_ a Rebel: the Masculinisation of Delinquency

This analysis of the rebel figure has consequences not only for teen film critique but also for the scholarship of "identity". In particular, this discussion responds to the work of Leerom Medovoi and his book _Rebels: Youth and the Cold War Origins of Identity_. Medovoi charts what he describes as a genealogy of the concept of "identity" and argues that the rebel figure was important for the emergence and development of this idea. For Medovoi, contemporary identity politics were forged in the 1950s-1970s because the U.S. needed figures to represent America's "emancipatory character" in the face of particular post-WWII phenomena that were constructed as particularly "homogenising", like communism and America's own middle-class suburbs (1). As a result, identity was "conceived as the product of self-defining and self-affirming acts that confront a punitive, authoritarian Other" (5). For Medovoi, this began with the rebel figure—epitomised by James Dean's character in _Rebel Without a Cause_—who was produced as the "dialectical antithesis of containment" and was symbolic of liberation rather than repression (50). In addition, Medovoi argues that the rebel figure was responsible for masculinising the notion of personal sovereignty (156) in order to respond to the shifts occurring in the domestic sphere around traditional gender roles in the 1950s (171-176).

While Medovoi acknowledges the fundamental contradiction between democracy and sovereignty at the heart of American culture, he asserts that the rebel was the first figure to embody that opposition, locating the origins of identity in Cold

War culture. It is perhaps Medovoi's broader focus on the genealogy of contemporary identity politics that results in a foreshortened perspective of the democracy/sovereignty opposition in much earlier American literary and cinematic narratives, like Turner's "Frontier Thesis" or film genres like the Western. Medovoi overlooks obvious links with these kinds of narratives at a number of points. He includes a quote from an editorial in *Life* to liken the rebel figure to earlier "adventurers" and "explorers" (176). However, he does not explicitly consider figures like Daniel Boone, whose story was part of the tradition in which individualised identity was forged by a conquering of the wilderness. Nor does he consider the importance of figures like Boone, or the cowboy figure in cinema, for rendering the ideal of sovereignty masculine. This discussion suggests that the rebel figure is clearly prefigured in earlier narratives and that theorists examining contemporary identity politics might locate its foundations in earlier texts.

Medovoi's discussion leads me to an important point about the rebel figure. One effect of using the outlaw hero motif to privilege a certain mode of delinquency is that delinquency and youth were masculinised. Although the exploitation and mainstream films do display different kinds of female delinquency throughout, they both negate its validity in various ways. The kind of delinquency heroicised by the films is masculine.

The mainstream and exploitation films marginalise female delinquency in slightly different ways. The mainstream films create a set of tensions around

femininity in which women are represented as both a source of pleasure and a threat to masculine individualism. This construction is derived from much older literary and cinematic traditions, and is so common that Ray calls it a "stock motif in American mythology" (60). In contrast to the freedom that the outlaw hero embodies are civilisation and immobility, which are often represented by women and marriage (Ray 60). Women represent entanglement, confinement and responsibility, all things that are contrary to the ideal of individualist freedom (Ray 60). Their domesticity is consistently represented in literature and in film as a "betrayal" of the American spirit of adventure (Ray 187). Although there are some women, "bad" women, whose loose morals and lack of domesticity make them suitable as simple "objects of lust", their capacity to turn into "clinging" women makes them dangerous (Ray 60).

The two girls in *The Wild One*, Kathie and Britches (Yvonne Doughty), are characterised by this motif. They are constructed as a threat to Johnny's individualism, even though he is attracted to them in various ways. Baker observes this, writing that Johnny shows "dualism" in relation to women in that he desires women as sites of pleasure, fun and fantasy but is resistant to the threat of containment that they also represent (41). Britches is a "bad" woman who has transformed into a needy clinging one. There is a reference in the film to a past tryst shared by Britches and Johnny. She now longs for him, a longing that he firmly rejects. Her desperation to regain his interest in her symbolises her reliance on him, something his individualism cannot afford. Kathie is initially portrayed differently,

though eventually she comes to represent the same threat as Britches. Kathie is

initially an object of attraction for Johnny and he attempts to get close to her

throughout the film. Kathie's initial disinterest in him and her fear of his friends

seem to drive him to chase her more aggressively. At this point she represents a

conquest. As Johnny's gang run amok in the town, Kathie is inadvertently caught up

in the action. She flees and ends up surrounded by Johnny's gang in a dark alley.

Johnny, who is trying to catch up with her, comes to her rescue and rides her out of

town on his motorcycle. This pursuit culminates in a park where, as soon as they

dismount the bike, Johnny grabs Kathie aggressively, kisses her and then throws her

to the ground. She responds by telling him that he should go ahead and do

"whatever it is he is about to do" because she is too tired to fight back; the implication

is that he is about to rape her. As they begin to talk, Kathie reveals her desire to get

out of her small town. She often dreams that a boy will stop in the town and take her

away with him when he leaves. The conversation then proceeds:

> JOHNNY. Where did you want this guy to take you?
> KATHIE. I don't know. Wherever he was going I guess.
> KATHIE. I wish you were going someplace . . . we could go together.

At this point in the conversation, Kathie no longer represents a simple,

uncompromising object of lust, but a needy threat to Johnny's individuality and

independence. Although Kathie wants to leave the town, thereby rejecting

community and domesticity, her reliance on Johnny to facilitate that makes her a

domesticating influence. As Medovoi points out, the role of the rebel girl was

somewhat ironic. While she was often depicted as a domesticating influence, she

wanted to join in the rebellion (Medovoi 266). Kathie throws herself on Johnny to

hug him but Johnny is now obviously uncomfortable. He initially does not respond

but then he throws her off him, sending a clear message that his desires have

changed.

Rebel Without a Cause grants Judy slightly more agency than *The Wild One* does

its female characters, but her delinquency is still marginalised and individualism is

explicitly masculine. David Laderman's discussion of the "road" film helps to

unpack Judy's role. Laderman argues that the "road" movies, like *Easy Rider* (1969)

or *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) emerge from sources like the delinquency films of the 1950s

and the literary source *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac.[9] Laderman argues that these

texts draw on the same basic gender pattern: "the woman as either passive

accomplice to the man or a threat to him, part of the road that lures him to his

downfall" (45).[10] In *Rebel Without a Cause*, Judy plays "passive accomplice" to Jim's

rebellion. She is initially characterised separately from Jim (before they meet) in the

scene at the police station in which she has been brought in for wandering the streets

at night. Jim has also been detained, though much more importance is placed on his

rebellion than hers. He discusses his feelings at length to a police officer who listens

intently to his plight. Jim's delinquency is thereby granted primary narrative

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[9]   Laderman also argues the "road" movies owe a debt to the Western, the gangster film and film noir.

[10]   *Bonnie and Clyde* plays with this gender pattern considerably in its depiction of Bonnie (Faye Dunaway), who is as thirsty as Clyde (Warren Beatty) for the adventure associated with the road.

importance and he becomes the chief character with whom the audience is encouraged to identify. Judy is not granted the same opportunity to verbalise her feelings in any detail until she meets Jim. Jim's feelings have already been established, so her feelings serve simply to mirror and reinforce his. In this way, the rebel girls, though certainly playing second fiddles to their rebel boyfriends, acted "as the female supplement to his status as representative of a generation in crisis" (Medovoi 266). It is Judy's and Kathie's milder expressions of rebellion, and their mirroring of the boys' rebellion, which allows the masculine rebel figure to stand for the anomie held to be typical of "youth" in the 1950s.

Judy's role in *Rebel Without a Cause* was in part a result of censorship pressures placed on the film's producers by the Production Code Administration (PCA). Discussing the censoring of *Rebel Without a Cause*, Simmons writes that "Judy's rebelliousness early in the script . . . proved troublesome. Because she was the only positive female character in the film, the one with whom young girls in the audience were most likely to identify, Shurlock [the PCA Director] wanted her conduct confined within acceptable boundaries" (59). For girls in the delinquency films, behaviour was rigidly delimited, while for boys, a much broader range of transgressive behaviours was available.

The ways in which gender was constructed and censored on screen were also due in large part to the political changes that were occurring in and around the family in the post-war period. David M. Considine argues that in the 1950s, unable to come

to terms with the working woman fighting for equality, Hollywood responded by representing mothers, for example, as either a monstrous, domineering, masculinised "household heavy", or "half-human creatures" that are unfulfilled because they have not embraced motherhood in its traditional forms (63). Jim's mother in *Rebel Without a Cause* is a typical example. According to Considine, by the end of the 1960s, Hollywood had "painted a murky mire of matriarchy" reducing the image of the mother to the alcoholic adulteress Mrs Robinson (67).

If women were not demonised in cinema, they were at least positioned by narratives that worked to reinscribe traditional gender roles—even if the narratives were otherwise politically critical. Discussing social problem films of the 1950s, and particularly *Rebel Without a Cause*, Byars argues that the conflicts around which the films revolved and the tenuousness of their resolutions indicated significant struggle and challenged the notion that this social unit [of the family] was actually unified" (129-130). However, the films' "discourse of deviance defined the norm and . . . their resolutions expressed the dominant ideology of the period" (129-130). In other words, while *Rebel Without a Cause* certainly critiques American values and the nuclear family unit, it does not challenge "the validity or value of the family structure and the gendered meanings it implies" (Byars 129). While the delinquency films worked to deny the possibility of reconciling the ideals of individualism and community, they simultaneously gendered those two ideals.

The exploitation pictures offer girls a range of narratives that are unavailable to them in mainstream films. In the exploitation films the girls are framed very similarly to the rebel figure: they are wild, reckless and anti-social. However, the emphasis on femininity as properly domestic and immobile—communitarian—is still reinforced. *The Violent Years* and *Teenage Doll* each deal with girls as their main characters, girls who negotiate varying degrees of delinquent behaviour, from sneaking out at night to murder. These girls are introduced and defined entirely separately from any male characters and belong to all-girl gangs that have no reliance whatsoever on males. Yet their delinquency attracts the kind of harsh punishment only doled out to extremist masculine delinquents. Paula dies in *The Violent Years* (during childbirth). In *Teenage Doll*, Barbara is threatened with extreme violence by other, more brutal, female delinquents and is "scared straight" by her encounter. While girls can certainly be outlaws in the exploitation films, they cannot simultaneously be heroic. Female delinquency is, by definition, always extremist and must be expelled or reincorporated. Ambivalence is not an option.

Other exploitation films work to contain certain female characters in a different way, by depicting their domesticity as the stabilising antithesis to masculine delinquency. For example, *Hot Rod Girl* is about the dangers of drag racing and sets up a debate between those who advocate licensed drag-racing events to keep it off the streets and those who believe that licensed events send the message that drag racing is condoned. The title of the film refers to Lisa (Lori Nelson), who is an excellent

driver who never exhibits reckless driving on public streets. Along with her boyfriend Jeff, Lisa spearheads the initiative to authorise the drag strip as a space in which youth can congregate to drag race safely. While every other male character exhibits reckless public driving at some point in the film, Lisa is a picture of civic responsibility, never drag racing outside the strip. Writing on drag race exploitation films of the 1950s, Doherty argues that resolution in these films means "containment of teenage energies within a limited, supervised arena" (88). In *Hot Rod Girl*, it is Lisa who is always contained. She does not show any interest in the kind of individualism expressed by adventure, freedom and rebellion. When Lisa visits Jeff's house for the very first time, she begins to tidy as soon as she enters. She even goes right to the kitchen to fix him coffee, reinforcing her tie to the domestic. Even though the apartment belongs to Jeff and has never been seen by Lisa before, she is depicted as being "at home" in the domestic space.

The Delinquents also constructs femininity as a stabilising influence on masculine delinquency. Scotty (Tom Laughlin) is told by his girlfriend Janice's (Rosemary Howard) parents that he is no longer allowed to see her, as Janice's parents feel "going steady" is inappropriate for a girl aged 16. Scotty, distraught at losing his girl, inadvertently becomes involved with a group of delinquents and it is implied that his lack of a girlfriend caused his wayward behaviour. Femininity is thereby reinforced as a stabilising, communitarian influence. Later in the film, Janice and Scotty secretly meet to go to a party held by his new delinquent acquaintances.

Janice reluctantly attends and then, seeing the gang's behaviour, flees. In her haste to leave, she leaps behind the wheel of the car and Scotty has to dive in the passenger side in order to keep up. Not far down the road, however, it is clear that Janice is a completely incompetent driver and Scotty makes her pull over so he can take over. A good, wholesome girl as she is, Janice is denied the ability to drive, thereby denying her the individualism and freedom that it entails.

At her most empowered, the female in the mainstream delinquency film works to reinforce the rebellion of the central male figure, for example Judy in *Rebel Without a Cause* and to a degree, Kathie in *The Wild One*. When female delinquency occurs independently of a male figure, as it does in the exploitation pictures, it is harshly punished. The model of feminine behaviour is that represented by Lisa and Janice: they are law-abiding, domestic, and provide the communitarian "balance" to their boyfriends' individualist tendencies. Briley has noted this function of the female in *The Wild One*. In the opening voice-over, for example, when Brando states "a girl got to me. I changed", it implies that "all these rebels need is a domesticating influence; perhaps these bikers could be rehabilitated into the American mainstream through a relationship with the right woman" (Briley 355). Women are thereby disassociated from individualist American ideals and forced instead to embody the opposite: community. The kind of individualism validated by the delinquency films is resolutely masculine.

Given that the mainstream teen delinquency films are "social problem" films, it is not surprising that delinquency was depicted in this way. Byars argues that the orientation of social problem films, like *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, is "distinctly male—white male" (115). She argues that "although female characters may play crucial roles in solving the problem, the problem is rarely theirs" (115). I think Byars' position can be contested, somewhat, when applied to the delinquency films discussed here. Certainly, the delinquency validated by these films is typically white and male. However, it is important to acknowledge that the girls in *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause* do exhibit their own subtler forms of rebellion or anomie that are not punished by the narratives. While girls are often relegated to be supportive of masculine expressions of social malaise or to provide the static counterpoint to male individualism, it is partly Kathie's and Judy's expressions of alienation and dissatisfaction that enable the rebel figures' delinquency to be depicted as a social problem, or emblematic of "youth" as a whole generation. While "heroic" delinquency is certainly male, the problem of alienation at its core is also—in a small way—female. This feminine move toward individualism becomes amplified in later teen film cycles, particularly the slasher film, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

As the first teen cycle, the delinquency films provided ideas about what constituted "youth" in a post-WWII American context and established the key thematic concerns of the teen film genre. The delinquency films heroicise the male

rebel figure by constructing him according to the outlaw hero motif of Classical

Hollywood Cinema. Internal conflict between alienation and belonging is thereby

constructed as the "authentic" expression of youth's social experience in the 1950s.

However, it is a kind of conflict that only boys could legitimately participate in. Gill

Valentine, Tracey Skelton and Deborah Chambers argue that the discourse on youth

that has emerged since has been "preoccupied" with images of youth as "deviant,

spectacular and male" (16). The images of the rebel figure are no doubt largely

responsible. Yet, the conflict between alienation and belonging is less representative

of youth's experience than it is of the then-pervasive cultural anxiety over the

contradiction between individualism and communitarian participation. The rebel is

significant because he gave voice to a widely-experienced anxiety—a frontier

anxiety—while at the same time he embodied individualist liberty: a value that was

perceived to be in peril in the 1950s. The delinquency films therefore established the

teen film as a genre that could mobilise youth as a "naturally" rebellious frontier

space and could examine the troubling uncertainties at the heart of American culture.

In the cycles that follow, youth is mobilised similarly, however the uncertainties it is

used to address continually shift with each new era.

Chapter Three
Kicking and Screaming: Contesting Masculine Individualism in the Slasher Film

The juvenile delinquency that had characterised teen culture in the 1950s gave way to a different kind of youthful civil disobedience in the 1960s: countercultural movements including the civil rights, anti-war and feminist movements. Driven most visibly by youth, these movements gave youth a level of agency and political relevance that the 1950s "teenagers" did not have. In the 1960s, youthful rebellion finally *had* a cause. Because ambivalence toward American values was everywhere in this period, as various groups took to the streets to voice their dissatisfaction, it did not require a purely symbolic outlet, so there was a hiatus in the teen film genre. When the teen film did re-emerge in the mid-to-late 1970s it had taken on a horrific new form: the slasher film.

The slasher film is most often analysed as a subgenre within the larger genre of horror. However, it is also commonly included in critical discussions of the teen film. For example, critics like Shary, Bernstein and Lewis all include discussions of the slasher film in their works about teen films. Certainly, the slasher film straddles both categories; the films are horror but they are also about youth, because their central characters are typically groups of high school students, and they are consumed by youth (Clover, *Chain Saws* 23; Magistrale 151; Dika 9).

The slasher film was first examined in detail by Carol Clover in her 1992 book

Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film. In this work, Clover

distinguishes the slasher film from other horror subgenres, such as the rape-revenge

film and occult or possession films, by its basic plot: the slasher film usually contains

"a psychokiller who slashes to death a string of mostly female victims, one by one,

until he is subdued or killed, usually by the one girl who has survived" (*Chain Saws*

21).[11] Clover calls this one lucky survivor the "Final Girl" (*Chain Saws* 35), a term now

widely employed in slasher film criticism.

The slasher film plot outlined above presents theorists with a central critical

problem: the slasher film constructs two seemingly-conflicting attitudes toward girls.

On the one hand, the films inflict extensive torture on young, mostly female victims—

much more than on young male ones. On the other hand, a female character always

survives the carnage. Usually, she is the only one who lives to tell the tale. Only in

two of the 12 films discussed here does a male also survive. Critical responses have

therefore grappled with the problem of how to reconcile these two contradictory

facets.

The most commonly-cited analyses of the slasher film's contradictions have

been from feminist scholars employing a psychoanalytic framework, for example,

work by Clover, Barbara Creed, Vera Dika and Isabel Cristina Pinedo. The most

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[11] The cluster of films sharing these plot elements have elsewhere been called the "stalker" cycle, in *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th, and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* by Vera Dika. "Slasher" is the more commonly used term, however, and Clover's usage described above will be employed here.

comprehensive of these, by Clover and Dika, assert that girls in the slasher film are

depicted according to a trajectory of "phallicisation". The torture of the young female

victims depicts femininity as passive, a characteristic that is cast off only by the Final

Girl when she saves herself and in the process, becomes masculinised. This model

and its critique by other feminist scholars who use psychoanalytic theory will be

discussed here.

Other analyses aiming to reconcile the slasher film's contradictions have come

from the field of teen film criticism and tend to read the films' narratives as enacting

punishment against youth. Shary illustrates this position when he suggests:

> [t]he burgeoning preadult population that threatens to express
> the repressed, in the form of sexuality, crime, hedonism, and
> basic resistance to social norms, must be contained and
> controlled. When parents fail to do so and institutions such as
> schools and the law cannot make up for the parents'
> shortcomings, 'higher' natural and supernatural forces are
> brought down upon the youthful others (*Generation Multiplex*
> 145).

For Shary, youth in the slasher film functions similarly to youth in the delinquency

cycle: as a rebellious, potentially socially disruptive force. The killers are a

disciplinary mechanism, the ultimate result of which is the containment of youthful

energies. Other teen film theorists read the killers similarly, as figures of authority

who punish youthful sex and sexuality in order to discourage teenage audiences from

having premarital sex (Bernstein 35; Lewis, *Road to Romance* 68). In these readings, it

is suggested that the Final Girl is relatively "virginal" when compared to the other

females in the film and is therefore spared.[12] While this argument might be supported by singular films like *Halloween* (1978) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), it is not as well-evidenced by their sequels or by the *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* or *Friday the 13th* series. In the slasher subgenre as a whole, it is unclear how an understanding of female torture as a punishment for sexual activity might be reconciled with the survival of the Final Girl.

This chapter seeks to account for the slasher film's ambivalent attitudes toward girls by examining its engagement with frontier tensions in the wake of the feminist movement. I will argue that the slasher film emerged during a historical moment in which past traditions of patriarchal cultural dominance were being rethought in the face of numerous social and political shifts, and that a specific form of frontier narrative—the captivity narrative—was used to explore these uncertainties. In the slasher film, certain frontier oppositions of past/future, civilisation/statelessness and individualism/community are overlaid onto masculinity and femininity so as to examine the status of those oppositions and their alignment with gender in the 1970s. I will begin with a plot analysis to illustrate in detail the contradictory impulses discussed above. I will then outline the critical context by exploring Clover's and Dika's positions and challenges from other critics. Finally, I will draw on the captivity narrative and a number of critical analyses of it to suggest that the slasher films, when examined in relation to earlier teen films, appear to update the teen film's

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[12] In recent years the *Scream* series, which pays self-reflexive homage to the slasher films, has also made this assertion.

representation of femininity and individualism in order to take account of feminist

challenges. This chapter will discuss four key films and a number of their sequels:

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (1974), *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* (1980) and *A Nightmare*

on Elm Street.[13]

Torture and Survival in the Slasher Film

The common plotline summarised neatly by Clover appears with some

variation in each of the films under discussion here. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*

follows brother and sister, Sally (Marylin Burns) and Franklin (Paul A. Partain), and

three of their friends on their journey through the heart of Texas to find Sally and

Franklin's grandparent's old house. Once there, the members of the group are slowly

disposed of one by one by a murderous neighbour, Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen),

and his family. Sally, though horribly tortured and traumatised, is the only one who

manages to escape. At the close of the film she finds the highway and leaps into a

passing pick-up truck, much to Leatherface's disappointment. *The Texas Chainsaw*

Massacre 2 (1986) is set 16 years after the first film. It begins with the murder of two

college boys in their car at the hands of Leatherface (Bill Johnson) and his brother

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[13] A number of these franchises have spawned many sequels and remakes. *Halloween*, for example, has 7 sequels (the most recent released in 2002) and one remake, released in 2007 and directed by Rob Zombie. However, the aim in this chapter—to discuss the slasher film's engagement with cultural tensions surrounding gender in the 1970s and 1980s—means that the films analysed here are limited to this period. The particular sequels addressed are *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (1986), *Friday the 13th Part 2* (1981), *Friday the 13th Part 3* (1982), *Friday the 13th The Final Chapter* (1984), *Halloween II* (1981), *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* (1987) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (1988).

Chop-top (Bill Moseley). At the moment of the murders the two boys are speaking on their car phone to a local Texan DJ named Stretch (Caroline Williams), who overhears the events and begins to investigate. Stretch quickly teams up with Lefty (Dennis Hopper), Sally and Franklin's brother, who has been trying to find their torturers for the last 16 years. Together Stretch and Lefty find the murderous family's home, though Stretch is quickly taken captive. Lefty comes to her aid and kills Leatherface but only Stretch escapes alive when she clambers out of the underground caverns and slays Chop-top with a chainsaw.

The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 is important for this discussion because it is the film on which Clover's reading of the slasher subgenre is fundamentally based, as will be discussed shortly. As Clover points out, Stretch escapes safely and in addition, she manages to kill Chop-top. However, the degree of self-sufficiency suggested by Clover to be typical of the Final Girl is somewhat undermined by Lefty's crucial involvement in the climax; Lefty facilitates Stretch's escape and slays Leatherface and Leatherface's father. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* also diverges from Clover's plot "model". Sally certainly evades Leatherface, but she does not subdue or kill him. He is left swinging a chainsaw maniacally as the film ends. The other films discussed here also diverge from Clover's "model" in important ways, as I will show.

Halloween opens with the murder of Judith Myers (Sandy Johnson) at the hands of her younger brother Michael (Will Sandin), aged six.[14] The film then leaps forward 17 years, at which point Michael (Tony Moran), now aged 23, escapes from a mental facility to continue his interrupted murdering spree. He focuses his attention on Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) for reasons that are not revealed until the sequel. As Laurie and her friends each settle in at different houses for a night of babysitting, Michael stalks and kills them, leaving Laurie until last. Laurie survives, however, with the help of Dr Loomis (Donald Pleasence), who has been tracking Michael since his escape. *Halloween II* is set on the same night, following Laurie to the hospital where she is taken by Dr Loomis after the events of the first film. It is revealed that Michael is actually Laurie's brother and he has returned to try to kill the sister he left behind 17 years before. Michael, having survived numerous injuries and a fall from a second storey window in the first film, returns to try to kill Laurie once and for all. As in the first film, Laurie evades him with the help of Dr Loomis. Michael is eventually engulfed in flames when Dr Loomis ignites a leaking gas canister. Laurie's behaviour in these films resembles that of Stretch in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*. Although she does survive by fighting back against her attacker, she does not kill him. In both films, Dr Loomis—a male—ultimately puts a stop to the rampages.

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[14] When I refer to *Halloween* in this chapter, I refer to the original 1978 version and not the 2002 remake, unless otherwise noted.

Friday the 13th is set at a summer camp on the edge of Crystal Lake, which is reopening after a long closure. The closure was the result of two unfortunate events: the drowning of a young boy, Jason Voorhees, in the lake, and the murder, one year later, of two camp counsellors. As the new counsellors prepare for the camp's reopening they are murdered, one by one, by a killer who is revealed in the closing scenes to be Mrs Voorhees (Betsy Palmer), Jason's mother. Only Alice (Adrienne King) lives to tell the tale, putting an end to the terror when she decapitates Mrs Voorhees with a machete. The death of the killer at the hands of the Final Girl means that this film more closely aligns with Clover's plot outline than many of the films discussed so far. In the three sequels discussed here, new generations of counsellors and campers return to Crystal Lake and meet the same fate as the first unlucky group. In the sequels, the killer is Jason himself, apparently alive and well. In *Friday the 13th: Part 2*, the action takes place at another camp on the lake where counsellors are attending training. In *Friday the 13th: Part 3*, the group of youths comprise campers staying at a lakeside property. In *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter*, the unlucky victims are youths who have hired a holiday house on the lake. In each of these films the survivor is a girl: Ginny (Amy Steel) in *Friday the 13th: Part 2*, Chris (Dana Kimmell) in *Friday the 13th: Part 3* and Trish (Kimberly Beck) in *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter*. *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* is the only one in which there is more than one survivor. Trish's younger brother Tommy (Corey Feldman) also survives.

In these sequels to *Friday the 13th*, the Final Girls' behaviour closely resembles

that of Laurie in *Halloween*. Though they often stage flash assaults on their attacker,

their aim seems to be to elude him rather than kill him. The exception may be Ginny,

who dons Jason's mother's jumper in order to lull him into a false sense of security so

she can attack him, though her attack is unsuccessful and Jason survives. In *Friday the*

13th: The Final Chapter it is Tommy who ultimately slays Jason so he and Trish might

survive. Tommy's survival serves a more ominous purpose, however; upon slaying

Jason he becomes possessed by his spirit, thereby ensuring the murderous rampage

will continue.

A Nightmare on Elm Street follows the attempts of Nancy (Heather

Langenkamp) and her friends to survive the murderous Freddy Krueger (Robert

Englund), a killer who attacks people in their dreams. While Heather's friends are

killed, she remains determined to catch Freddy. Heather's family continually denies

the threat but Heather struggles on and is eventually integral to halting Freddy's

rampage—though she does not kill him for good. Freddy returns in three more

sequels (up to 1988), in which he enacts terror on more groups of youths and is

thwarted each time by more Final Girls. *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's*

Revenge (1985) is anomalous in that it contains the slasher film's only "Final Boy".

Jesse (Mark Patton) is targeted by Freddy, who seeks to possess him in order to enter

the real world and thus kill more easily. While Jesse battles with possession, his

girlfriend Lisa (Kim Myers) is able to comprehend what is happening and come up

with a means of getting rid of Freddy. In a sense, then, this film contains a "Final Couple". Again, however, the boy survives because he is possessed by the monstrous killer. In the slasher film, it appears as if a boys' survival must be looked upon with some suspicion. *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* (1987) sees Nancy return as a dream specialist at a psychiatric hospital in which a group of young patients are having dreams about Freddy. One patient, Kristen (Patricia Arquette), has the power to draw other people into her dreams so Nancy and the youths utilise Kristen's power in order to band together and fight Freddy in Kristen's dream world. In *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (1988) Freddy returns to kill the remaining patients from the previous film who are now living back in society. Kristen (Tuesday Knight) is killed by Freddy, but before she dies she passes her power onto Alice (Lisa Wilcox) who finally figures out how to kill Freddy "for good", well, until the next sequel. *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and the sequels discussed here also diverge somewhat from the narrative pattern described by Clover. Though Nancy exhibits quite a high level of independent agency, the other Final Girls typically team up with peers in order to fight Freddy. And in each case he is not killed but temporarily subdued.

In addition to their similar plots, a fundamental feature of the slasher films is their unequal treatment of male and female death. The death of a female is typically drawn out and accompanied by elaborate torture. The death of a male is comparatively brief and the subject of little visual interest. The deaths of Pam (Teri

McMinn) and her partner Kirk (William Vail) in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* exemplify the difference between male and female death in the slasher film and are representative of the pattern that is taken up in the films that follow. After the group of youths arrives at Sally and Franklin's grandparents' old house, Pam and Kirk head toward the neighbouring house in the hope of finding some gasoline. Pam waits outside on a swing while Kirk ventures inside. After getting no response at the front door, Kirk hears something downstairs and runs toward a metal door leading to the basement to investigate. We see a shot of Kirk (filmed from behind) running to the basement doorway and tripping on the ramp just as Leatherface emerges from the left of the doorway and grabs him. The camera then cuts to a shot that looks over the shoulder of Leatherface, toward Kirk, and we see a medium close-up of Kirk's face as he looks up at Leatherface. This is the shot in which Kirk realises he is in danger. Instead of showing Kirk's terrified expression, the camera then cuts to a reverse shot of Leatherface, standing tall, as he slowly raises a mallet. We then see a long shot of the doorway, which denies the audience a glimpse of Kirk's face as Leatherface hits him on the head with the mallet. Kirk falls down dead. There is then a close-up, high-angle shot of Kirk. His eyes are closed and he is twitching but the close-up of his face shows us that he is no longer alive. His twitching is not flailing terror but a physical reflex beyond his consciousness or control. Kirk is then quickly dragged by Leatherface into the doorway. Leatherface slams the door shut and they are gone. There is no liminality here. Kirk does not linger on the border between life and

death. The entire sequence of shots, from the moment Leatherface appears to the moment he and Kirk disappear behind the basement door, only lasts for about 13 seconds. And between the moment Kirk realises he is in grave danger and the moment he dies is—literally—two seconds.

Pam's death sequence begins immediately afterward when the camera cuts directly to a close up of her face. Unlike Kirk, she is explicitly framed with a sense of foreboding, created in part by the death of Kirk and also by the haunting sound that suddenly interjects on the soundtrack, conveying a sense of doom. Though Pam is still unsuspecting, the audience now knows what fate awaits her. As she calls Kirk's name, she wanders into the house to search for her missing boyfriend and as she enters the lounge through a set of drawn curtains she trips over a pot and falls to the floor. As she looks up, Pam and the audience take in a grisly scene: the room contains caged chickens, bones and furniture made from human bones and skulls. These horrors are presented in a sequence that intercuts close-ups and tracking shots of gory objects with close-up zooms and pans of Pam's horrified face: wide eyes, wide mouth. She vomits in reaction, which is captured from 6 different angles, with close-ups, zooms and tracking shots, as if the audience is frantically devouring both her fear and the horrific surrounds. She screams, pants and stumbles into the hallway, arms flailing all the while. Leatherface emerges from the cellar. She turns and sees him. Screaming, her arms raise and wave about her head as she turns and runs to the door. The film cuts to a shot from outside the front doors, as if to capture Pam's

terrified face as she flees the house. However, she is grabbed from behind and

carried back in. She continues to scream and writhe. The camera cuts back to show

her full-body spasms then cuts in to a close-up of her terrified face. Alternating

between the two, the film gives an impression both of the physicality and the

intensity of her fear. Unlike Kirk, she is conscious of her experience and her writhing

is a product of her abject terror. In the basement, still writhing, she is impaled on a

hook. A close-up shows her gaping, screaming mouth. As she hangs there, the

camera moves back to show Leatherface preparing to dismember Kirk. A medium

shot of the scene takes in Leatherface with his chainsaw on the left, Kirk in the

foreground on the table and Pam in the background on a hook. As the chainsaw

begins to whir, the camera zooms in for a close-up: not of Kirk's body as it is

dismembered, not of the grotesque Leatherface, and not of the whirring chainsaw

from the film's title, but of Pam—still very much alive and still terrified. This scene

lasts for over four and a half minutes. And unlike Kirk, Pam does not die. The scene

ends while she is still being tortured.

The stark contrast between Kirk's and Pam's deaths is typical of the slasher

film. Kirk dies first and his death is only important in as much as it serves to

heighten the sense of danger that awaits Pam. The audience, having seen a brief

example of the horrors that lurk inside the house, now know the fate that awaits her.

When the camera returns to view the unsuspecting Pam waiting outside, the fact that

she is *so* unsuspecting suddenly becomes much more delicious. The speed and

power exhibited by the killer in his quick dispatch of Kirk is not employed with Pam. Instead she is subject to languorous torture.

As in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, viewing pleasure in subsequent slasher films is produced through the consumption of the terrified female. Death scenes similar to those of Kirk and Pam are common. In *Halloween II*, for example, two hospital workers, Budd (Leo Rossi) and Nurse Karen (Pamela Susan Shoop), are killed in the hydrotherapy room in the midst of a sexual encounter. They are taking a bath together when Budd goes to the control panel, located on the other side of an opaque glass door, to adjust the temperature of the water. Nurse Karen remains in the bath in the foreground while Budd, who is seen only in silhouette, fiddles with switches and knobs in the background. We see the silhouette of Michael approaching and then quickly dispensing with Budd, but there is no detail in the scene, disguised as it is by opaque glass, and there are no sounds of death. Again, the audience now knows that the girl is in very real danger, while she remains entirely unsuspecting. Michael quietly enters the room and puts his hand on her shoulder. She kisses and caresses it, thinking it belongs to Budd. She finally realises that the hand is not Budd's, at which point Michael grabs her and plunges her head into the now boiling hydrotherapy pool. Rather than simply holding her under the water to kill her, he pulls her out and plunges her back in repeatedly, as if to hear her screams and see her burning, peeling flesh. When she is finally dead he removes her from the water and the camera cuts back to a long shot. He holds her above the pool for a moment, dead,

with breasts and flesh on display, and then throws her to the ground. In this scene, the death of the male is again granted little visual importance and is masked by opaque glass. His death merely serves to establish Nurse Karen's initial lack of awareness of the danger that stalks her, making her death sequence more titillating. The fact that she is naked only serves to heighten her vulnerability.

Tina's (Amanda Wyss) death in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* is a particularly spectacular visual feast. As her death occurs while she is dreaming, Freddy is invisible to the film's audience, who can only see the physical effects of his dream-world attacks on Tina's body. As he slashes at her stomach with his knife-fingered gloves, the audience witnesses her body opening up, seemingly of its own accord. She is tossed about the room, from floor to ceiling, sliced, and violently killed—all at the hands of an invisible force. Freddy's removal from the *mise-en-scène* serves to place the emphasis on Tina's body. The audience is encouraged to focus their attention entirely on the effects of torture on Tina's flesh, without being distracted by the presence of the horrific perpetrator. The male deaths in the same film do not focus on the male body in terror and in pain to the same degree, constructing female torture as crucial to the slasher film's meanings.

There are a couple of female deaths dotting the slasher film landscape that are as brief as a typical male death. For example, Chili (Rachel Howard) in *Friday the 13th Part 3* is not stalked and the film cuts away quickly as soon as she is stabbed. However, most scenes of female terror last much longer than any death scene

involving a male. Not only are male death scenes lacking in detail, but many males in

slasher films are killed or terrorised off screen, reappearing later as dead bodies. In

Friday the 13th, the audience's last view of Ned (Mark Nelson) while he is alive is as he

enters a cabin at Camp Crystal Lake. We later see him with a slit throat lying lifeless

on the top bunk bed above Jack (Kevin Bacon) and Marcie (Jeannine Taylor). In the

same film Bill (Harry Crosby) also dies off screen. His body returns pinned to a door

with three arrows from an archery range. While these boys have obviously died

painful deaths, the film does not exhibit them. Their bodies—as the audience is

allowed to view them—are alive one moment and dead the next. This difference

between male and female death in the slasher film points to a desire to exhibit female

torture and to enact some kind of symbolic punishment against girls.[15]

Critical Responses

The timing of the slasher subgenre's emergence is important when considering

its contradictory approaches to girls. Tony Magistrale asserts this:

> where does this white male anger against women—specifically,
> young, assertive, and sexually desirable women—come from?
> As this violent pattern is repeated throughout the genre, it
> seems impossible not to view it, at least in part, as a reaction
> against the emerging independent female of a fledgling
> women's liberation movement and the corresponding erosion
> of power and gender identity associated with the traditional
> patriarchy. Women characters in these films drink, smoke
> dope, swear, fuck (149).

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[15] In the more recent slasher films, like those of the *Scream* series, male torture is much more common, suggesting that the original slasher cycle was indeed positioned with regard to feminist discourse and the backlash against it.

For Magistrale, the torture exacted upon the young women in the slasher film equates

to a kind of punishment for the destabilisation brought about by women's drive for

equality. As Magistrale points out, "[t]he election of Ronald Reagan as president

during this time with his emphasis on a return to traditional patriarchal values

corresponds perfectly to the rise of the American slasher film in mainstream cinema"

(149). For Magistrale, the films are structured by the tension between the

independent woman and the conservative political backlash against her.

Other critics support Magistrale's position, particularly feminist scholars who

unpack the slasher film's depiction of femininity using a psychoanalytic framework.

As mentioned earlier, the most frequently cited is that of Clover, who cites *The Texas

Chainsaw Massacre 2* as paradigmatic of the slasher subgenre. Clover uses the film's

sexual undertones, which are anomalous in the slasher cycle, to extrapolate that the

Final Girl is phallicised when she dispenses with the killer. She writes:

> Consider . . . the paradigmatic ending of *Texas Chainsaw II*.
> From the underground labyrinth, murky and bloody, in which
> she faced saw, knife, and hammer, Stretch escapes through a
> culvert into the open air. She clambers up the jutting rock and
> with a chain saw takes her stand. When her last assailant
> comes at her, she slashes open his lower abdomen—the sexual
> symbolism is all too clear—and flings him off the cliff. Again,
> the final scene shows her in extreme long shot, standing on the
> ledge of a pinnacle, drenched in sunlight, buzzing chain saw
> held overhead.
>   The tale would indeed seem to be one of sex and
> parents. The patently erotic threat is easily seen as the
> materialized projection of the viewer's own incestuous fears
> and desires. It is this disabling cathexis to one's parents that
> must be killed and rekilled in the service of sexual autonomy.
> When the Final Girl stands at last in the light of day with the

knife in her hand, she has delivered herself into the adult world
(*Chain Saws* 49).

Clover's work is derived from Lacanian models that suggest the experience of growing up and entering the symbolic requires the breaking away from the mother and the assumption of the phallus. She uses these models to suggest that gender in the slasher film is not rigidly aligned with sex, but is equated with a set of behaviours that can be "performed" or embraced by various characters in the film. Clover argues that the victim function is feminine, whereas the hero and monster functions are masculine. Screaming and cowering—in short, terror—is gendered feminine and is the result of the lack of the phallus. As Clover argues, "the lack of the phallus . . . is itself simply horrifying" and this is resolved through the reconstitution of the Final Girl as masculine when she kills her attacker ("Her Body, Himself" 181). For Clover, Stretch and the other Final Girls of the slasher film castrate their attackers and in the process assume the phallus for themselves. The torture and survival of females in the slasher film are thereby reconciled by a model in which they move from feminine to masculine within the narrative.

Clover argues that the Final Girl's victory is foretold throughout the film, in part by her "boyish" characteristics. She argues the Final Girl is "not fully feminine— not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends. Her smartness . . . and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself" ("Her Body, Himself" 176). Her "unfemininity" is signalled also by her desire to investigate and drive the

narrative (Clover, "Her Body, Himself" 238). In the end, "[i]t is the male killer's

tragedy that his incipient femininity is not reversed but completed (castration) and

the Final Girl's victory that her incipient masculinity is not thwarted but realized

(phallicization)" (Clover, *Chain Saws* 50). For Clover, the terror exhibited by girls

symbolises their femininity, which is "killed" only by the lucky Final Girl when she

embraces her latent boyish characteristics and slays the monster. Agency is equated

with masculinity, which is something that must be realised in order to be victorious.

Dika reinforces Clover's argument when she discusses the formal and stylistic

elements of the slasher film, or what she calls the "stalker film":

> the look inscribed into the films as the killer's gaze is masculine,
> not only because of its power over others and its control over
> the narrative, but also because the film as a whole objectifies
> what has been noted as being an unconscious male conflict. By
> extension, the victims in the film, since they are presented as
> the object of this gaze, unable to return it or to generate
> narrative action, occupy a female position in the film. They are
> powerless objects of desire and scrutiny, symbolically castrated
> and therefore subject to a reenactment of their fantasised
> humiliation by brutal means (71).

Dika classifies the ability to "see", in formal terms, as male. The Final Girl therefore

struggles toward a masculine position within the film (Dika 47). In Clover's and

Dika's uses of Lacanian models, the Final Girl is phallicised by the film's narrative

structure and style. Within the context of the 1970s and early-1980s, the intertextual

reference is all too clear: in order for women to be granted equality in a patriarchal

world, they must abandon their femininity. Agency and independence are

masculine.

Readings such as Clover's and Dika's have been contested by a number of other feminist writers who also use psychoanalytic theory. For example, Pinedo, in her work *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, argues: "if a woman cannot be aggressive and still be a woman, then female agency is a pipe dream" (83). When the "femaleness" of the survivor is reduced to her abject terror, and her power is attributed to her "maleness", then female agency within this formulation is a total impossibility (Pinedo 82). Also in response to Clover's discussion, Creed has suggested that most readings of the slasher film adhere to the interpretation that woman is castrated or lacking (*Monstrous-Feminine* 7). This means that readings of the slasher film tend to proceed from the assumption that woman is always already a victim. Creed argues that this position "only serves to reinforce patriarchal definitions of woman which represent and reinforce the essentialist view that woman, *by nature*, is a victim" (*Monstrous-Feminine* 7; emphasis in original), and that man, by nature, is the powerful hero/monster. When Clover argues that the embrace of the phallus is a "victory" for the girl and feminization a "tragedy" for the killer, she narrows the possibilities for defining femininity; femininity cannot be victorious, surviving and self-sufficient. Under Clover's and Dika's models, the Final Girls in the slasher film are granted power, but at the cost of their femininity. Their terror is not only a punishment, but a ritual that reinscribes the impossibility of feminine agency.

For me, Clover's and Dika's readings are problematic. Not only do they

negate the possibility of feminine agency, they are also are not entirely supported by

the films, which contain many instances that problematise their assertions. While

Clover's work suggests the Final Girl castrates the killer and then "stands at last in

the light of day with the knife in her hand" ("Her Body, Himself" 180), the level of

aggression used by most Final Girls rarely comes close to that of Stretch in *The Texas*

Chainsaw Massacre 2 and the Final Girl rarely, if ever, emerges still grasping her

phallic weapon triumphantly. In nearly all cases the heroine shows extreme

reluctance to use excessive force in fending off her attackers and has an obvious

disdain for using penetrating weapons of any kind. In addition, the Final Girls are

typically catatonic at the ends of the films, rather than triumphant and powerful. In

the slasher film, the girls do demonstrate self-sufficiency and independence but they

are not as clearly masculinised as Clover's and Dika's readings suggest.

The depiction of Sally in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* supports this. Hers is

perhaps the most drawn out of any female terror sequence in the slasher subgenre:

"[f]or nearly thirty minutes of screen time—a third of the film—we watch her shriek,

run, flinch, jump or fall through windows, sustain injury and mutilation. Her will to

survive is astonishing; in the end, bloody and staggering, she finds the highway"

(Clover, *Chain Saws* 36). Sally then desperately waves down a passing truck whose

unfortunate driver does not pull away quickly enough and is killed by Leatherface.

Sally is finally lucky enough to leap into a passing pick-up truck that happens to slow

as she waves it down. As it pulls away, she laughs maniacally, displaying severe

psychological instability rather than victorious delight. Leatherface stands by the

road, swinging the whirring chainsaw above his head, furious that she has managed

to get away. This ending suggests that Sally, rather than emerging triumphant and

"phallicised", has undergone a horrific experience that has left her a quivering mess

and rendered her forever damaged, or haunted. And Leatherface is far from

"castrated", swinging the chainsaw like a violent phallic symbol. The sense of victory

suggested by Clover to be characteristic of the Final Girls' ultimate states of mind is

therefore not as straightforward as she implies. While Sally certainly escapes, neither

her phallicisation nor her would-be killer's castration is fulfilled.

Other films' closing scenes are similar in that they cannot be appropriately

captured by Clover's and Dika's trajectory of phallicisation. Alice in *Friday the 13th*

repeatedly hides from her attacker: in a cabin, the kitchen, a shed, behind a bench and

in a pantry. Alice opts over and over again to evade and flee rather than take

aggressive action. She grabs a poker and instead of stabbing with it, she knocks Mrs

Voorhees' knife away. When Mrs Voorhees falls, Alice hits her across the back and

flees. Later she hits Mrs Voorhees over the head with a frying pan, creating a

bleeding head wound, and then leaves without lifting the large knife on the floor to

finish the job. All in all, Alice chooses to evade her attacker five times before she

finally decapitates her. While Mrs Voorhees shows no reluctance to use brutal and

penetrative force—she even wields an oar with a stabbing motion—Alice drops the

machete as soon as the terror is over and nestles in a canoe in the middle of the lake until morning.

The closure of *Friday the 13ᵗʰ: the Final Chapter* also contradicts Clover's and Dika's positions. The Final Girl, Trish, hits her attacker, Jason (Ted White), with the blunt face of a hammer countless times before she finally turns the hammer to strike him with the penetrating end. She does this just once so he will release her brother Tommy. She then drops the hammer and flees. She later tries to kill Jason with a machete, but after she knocks his mask off, she throws the knife away. She is too traumatised to continue with the machete attack and merely watches, whimpering, as Tommy takes over and kills Jason. *Halloween* is similar. Laurie stabs Michael in the neck with a knitting needle and he falls behind the couch. Taking his knife, she leans over to check that he is immobile, but she does not use the knife to stab him while he is defenceless. Rather, she sits back down and drops the knife as if it is dirty and unwanted. When she finally does stab Michael with a coat hanger and a knife, she does so reluctantly, while wincing. After he is felled, she emerges holding the knife and again drops it as soon as she is able. Michael emerges yet again and Dr Loomis appears just in time to shoot him. The reluctance on behalf of most Final Girls to use the ultimate force, and the obvious dislike of "penetration" as a weapon, clearly problematises the assertion that the Final Girl moves toward a form of agency that is phallicised or masculinised. The Final Girls fight for survival and win, but the films go to great lengths to depict them as just that: girls.

In addition to these narrative elements, aspects of the films' camerawork and editing contradict Dika's assertion that slasher film form constructs the killer or the Final Girl as entirely masterful and masculinised. Xavier Mendik writes that the Gaze in horror film is a "reactive gaze", as opposed to Laura Mulvey's sadistic, voyeuristic Gaze. The horror gaze instead lacks "mastery of the visual field, and is above all exposed, vulnerable, and open to attack, puncture and mutilation from within the diegesis" (198). The most widely discussed device used to this effect in the slasher film is the killer "I-camera", or a lurking shot taken from the killer's point of view. Contrary to Dika's assertion that this device constructs the killer's power and omnipotence, Clover states:

> the fact is that the 'view' of the first-person killer [in the slasher film] is typically cloudy, unsteady, and punctuated by dizzying swish-pans. Insofar as an unstable gaze suggests an unstable gazer, the credibility of the first-person killer-camera's omnipotence is undermined from the outset (*Chain Saws* 187).

By placing the audience in this unstable, subjective viewing position, the audience is forced to inhabit a limited field of vision. This draws attention to the viewers' vulnerability, reminding them of the space outside the frame, which undermines the sense of mastery of both the audience and the killer (Clover, *Chain Saws* 187).

The slasher film also experiments with this device in different ways to ensure that the horror gaze is perpetually uncertain. In the opening scene of *Friday the 13th*, for example, viewer familiarity with the killer "I-camera" is exploited in order to destabilise the audience's sense of generic knowledge and mastery. The song being

sung on the soundtrack by the campers is continuous, implying that time is also, "but the various point-of-view shots present widely disparate spaces, going from long shots to close-ups, and from outside to inside shots" (Dika 67). While the unsteady camera and partially concealed views are typical generic devices used to indicate the killer's point of view, the discontinuity of time suggests that the killer's location is not, in fact, behind the camera, but is unknown. Although Dika makes this observation, she does not consider it to contradict her assertion that characters in the slasher film can indeed inhabit an entirely masterful position. For me, the viewing position in the slasher film is always a tentative one, which problematises Dika's stance that the Final Girl moves toward a masculine mode of seeing.

For me, the slasher film continually reproduces what Mendik describes as the "horror gaze", a gaze whose power is perpetually undermined: subjective viewing positions are typically unsteady; the viewer's subjectivity is continually fragmented by being forced to identify with various and conflicting characters throughout the film; there is a constant threat of attack from outside the frame, and established generic patterns are overturned without warning, placing even the most seasoned slasher film viewers at the mercy of the camera and the killer. This ensures that the slasher film's "gaze" is never masculine and omnipotent.

This discussion of narrative and form in the slasher film demonstrates that Clover's and Dika's models of phallicisation/castration are contradicted by the slasher film's ambivalent depictions of masculinity and femininity. The killer is never

completely masculinised in that his point-of-view is always unstable and vulnerable. Nor is he ever fully "castrated"; while he is often subdued at the end of the film, he is never killed. The Final Girl escapes and subdues the killer, demonstrating great powers of survival and self-sufficiency. At the same time, she uses violence reluctantly and avoids penetrating weapons, demonstrating that she cannot be neatly aligned with masculinity. The dichotomies suggested by Clover and Dika, in which the killer moves from masculine to feminine and the Final Girl moves from feminine to masculine, are not supported by the slasher film, which is much more ambivalent about masculinity and femininity than their readings allow.

Re-reading Ambivalence in the Slasher Film

Here I offer a reading of the slasher film that accounts for the ambivalence about masculinity and femininity illustrated above. As mentioned early in this chapter, the 1970s was a period in which a number of taken-for-granted cultural practices—of white, Western, patriarchal dominance—were being challenged from all sides by various political movements. The political discourses of the era provoked widespread uncertainty about the nation's fundamental values. As a result, the 1970s have been described by Robin Wood as "a period of extreme cultural crisis and disintegration" (84). At the same time, it was an era of great regenerative potential. As Wood points out, the kind of "crisis and disintegration" that occurred in the 1970s "alone offers the possibility of radical change and rebuilding" (84). It was therefore a

period of considerable ambivalence, in which the potential cultural shifts that lay on the horizon were approached with equal measures of uncertainty and anticipation.

Linnie Blake argues that this socio-political context was such that the cinematic audience was "engaged in a reconsideration of the old certitudes regarding their nation's history" (216). Many films from the 1970s revisit fundamental American ideals and traditional conceptual oppositions—derived from the frontier—in order to examine their value and relationship in the context of contemporary uncertainties. According to Blake, the City Movie is one example of this. Narratives typical of the traditional Western were recast in the City Movie in urban settings, as a way of exploring the supposed divide between traditional frontier oppositions. Citing *Little Big Man* (1970) and *Taxi Driver* as two important examples, Blake argues that the divisions that were forged between frontier oppositions in the classic Western were— in the 1970s—not only "revised and reconceived", but also "relocated . . . onto the streets of the contemporary American city" (222). Citing Jim Kitses, Blake writes that the Western's "key conceptual oppositions . . . [are] wilderness and civilization, the individual and the community, freedom and restraint, purity and corruption, [and] tradition over change" (219). She argues that in the 1970s, while these oppositions were still "very much intact", they were often "inverted as a means of addressing the present moment" (219). The City Movie, for example, examines the opposition between civilisation as lawful and just and the wilderness or rural environment as lawless and savage. In contrast to the open spaces and sweeping landscapes of the

Western, the City Movie is characterised by what Blake calls "visual claustrophobia" (220). Interiors—of bars, nightclubs, kitchens and "back-room dives"—are the typical settings and they are captured through the use of tight close-ups or shots that position multiple characters within the frame (Blake 220). These techniques are used in the City Movie to convey that "life was cheap and nobody was to be trusted" (Blake 220). Blake argues that this construction highlights the boundary "between the savagery of the city and the purported civilization of an absent and half-remembered rural past" (220), thereby overturning the traditional opposition to account for the cultural context of the 1970s.

The slasher film, like the City Movie, revisits ideals and conceptual oppositions associated with the frontier in order to examine their status when placed upon a contemporary cultural backdrop. To do that, the slasher film redeploys the American captivity narrative. The captivity narrative is a tale of a pioneer—usually a woman—who is forced to venture into the wilderness after being taken captive by the "savage other": American Indians (Mogen 96; Fitzpatrick 5). Although she is exposed to unspeakable horrors, the woman develops ambivalence about her captors, "leaving the harrowed hero mysteriously transformed by the affliction" when she emerges safely to recount her story back in "civilisation" (Mogen 97). As well as being "transformed" by the wilderness experience, the woman finds religious salvation and through her suffering, reaffirms her full commitment to God. As David Mogen observes, the captivity narratives "present the journey into the wilderness not as a

quest but as a captivity, the ordeal of the first American heroes . . . struggling to keep the light of faith aglow in heathen darkness" (96). Tara Fitzpatrick also puts it clearly: the affliction endured in the wilderness "did more than punish and instruct, it redeemed. The American wilderness, the agent of God's chastising will, was Janus-faced: it destroyed yet it saved" (2).

June Namias examines American captivity narratives about white women produced between 1675 and 1870. She identifies three different kinds of female responses to captivity, and classifies the central characters accordingly, as the Survivor, the Amazon and the Frail Flower (Namias 25-47). The Final Girl from the slasher film is modelled on the Survivor, whom Namias locates in the earliest American captivity narratives from the 17th and early-18th century (25). Stories about Survivors convey the "tremendous physical, emotional, and spiritual stamina of [the] women in times of trial" (Namias 29). These particular traits reinforce the period's "Puritan dictums [that] endorsed faith, prayer, belief, and inner strength" (Namias 47). The Final Girls are not Amazons in that they do not embrace extreme violence, nor are they Frail Flowers in that they do not hesitate to fight for their own survival.[16]

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[16] The image of the Amazon was common to late-18th century captivity narratives (Namias 35). This is because the revolutionary era reinforced a different set of values: "unquestioned patriotism, fortitude, and, if necessary, willingness to fight" (Namias 47). The narratives of Hannah Dustan and Frances Scott are two examples that Namias argues typify the Amazon model. The Frail Flower developed in the 1830s and 1840s and corresponds to the "rise of True Womanhood [or the cult of domesticity] and the mass marketing of sentimental fiction" (Namias 36). Captivity narratives from this period align with ideologies that "encouraged dependence, weakness, cleanliness, and racial superiority" (Namias 47). According to Namias, although the origins of the Frail Flower can be found in the narratives of Jemima Howe and Mary Kinnan, it is clearest in the narrative of Eliza Swan (36-37).

Rather, they demonstrate strength and resilience in the face of a horrific wilderness experience.

The slasher film bears the greatest similarity to one particularly well-known "Survivor" narrative: that of Mary Rowlandson. She was taken from her home in 1675 and held captive for 11 weeks and five days, during which time she was forced to travel about 150 miles, mostly on foot. The first part of Mary Rowlandon's tale recounts the initial attack on her community, during which she witnesses unfathomable horrors, including the murder of family members and friends, one of whom is disembowelled. Recalling the slaughter, she writes: "[t]hus were we butchered by those merciless heathen, standing amazed, with the blood running down to our heels" (Rowlandson 45). The bulk of the tale then retells the story of her captivity, and explains in detail the suffering she is forced to endure. Both she and her baby are wounded in the initial attack, so in a weakened state, and without sustenance, she struggles to walk. Her baby dies in her arms eight days into the trek. She nevertheless steels herself, shrewdly befriending those who might give her blankets or water and taking scraps of food when she is able. Though she is threatened with death numerous times, she frequently remarks on her unwavering faith in God. For Rowlandson, her trials in the wilderness serve to reinforce the importance of religious devotion. Speaking of God, she writes: "as he wounded me with one hand, so he healed me with the other" (48). She also displays a degree of self-interest that contradicts traditional constructions of femininity as entirely self-

sacrificing and dedicated to the domestic and familial realm. Speaking of a conversation she has with her son: "[h]e told me he was as much grieved for his father as for himself. I wondered at his speech, for I thought I had enough upon my spirit in reference to myself, to make me mindless of my husband and everyone else" (64). When Rowlandson finally returns to her community, people welcome her back with love and support: "[t]he Lord hath been exceeding good to us in our low estate, in that when we had neither house nor home, nor other necessaries; the Lord so moved the hearts of these and those towards us, that we wanted neither food, nor raiment for our selves or ours" (88). Rowlandson's faith in herself, God and her community is thereby tested and affirmed as a result of her horrific wilderness experience.

In these early captivity narratives about women, the traditional American myth of the frontiersman—a rugged, masculine individualist—is transformed. Fitzpatrick points out: "[i]n a twist on the conventional image of an untethered man conquering a 'virgin' wilderness, the American rhetoric of self-creation in these Puritan captivity narratives issued predominantly from women" (3). Upon returning to their communities, the women's ministerial sponsors tried to use the women's experiences to teach lessons to the Puritan community about the necessity of religious devotion (Fitzpatrick 3). The ministers sought to maintain the role of the church as an individual's sole connection with God (Fitzpatrick 3). However, the stories showed that it was the women's unmediated experience in the wilderness that allowed them

to reconnect with God. These captivity narratives were inherently challenging; via these women's stories, "a rhetoric of the corporate covenant comes to be eclipsed by an emergent emphasis on personal agency in the workings of salvation" (Fitzpatrick 3). Early captivity narratives about women are important examples of American narrative in which a female finds personal agency and forges an individual identity in the American landscape, specifically through a horrific wilderness experience.

The slasher films revisit this early narrative form and subject their Final Girls to the same kind of horrific wilderness experience in which they must find the strength and self-sufficiency to escape the barbarous "other". In reworking the captivity narrative for an entirely new era, a number of important revisions are made that offer insight into how conceptual oppositions from the frontier and their relationship with gender were perceived in the 1970s.

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre represents the most direct reworking of the early captivity narrative. The central female, Sally, with her short-lived friendship group, ventures far away from her urban home into the rural American landscape. There she is exposed to unspeakable horrors and sees her friends and her brother brutally murdered at the hands of Leatherface and his family. She is taken captive and tied to a chair at their dining table, the family's plan being to kill and eat her. She tries to bargain with the family, doing everything in her power to escape. She eventually frees herself, leaps through a window, and gets to the highway, narrowly escaping.

The Texas Chain Saw Massacre also establishes the particular thematic

oppositions with which the slasher film is concerned. These have been discussed in

part by Clover. She suggests that *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* creates a geographical

frontier with the journey of the city kids into the unfamiliar landscape of rural Texas.

There they meet Leatherface and his family, who are former slaughterhouse workers

made redundant by the mechanisation of the beef industry. Clover argues that much

of the horror in the film emerges from the city-dwellers' confrontation with the rural

victims of their privileged urban life:

> the haves, the civilized urbanites, are separated from the system
> of supports that silently keep their privilege intact. What
> would happen . . . if the haves had to face the have-nots in a
> struggle for survival . . . without recourse to the law . . . ?
> Could 'we' (the film's 'we'—city people) do what is to be done
> under such conditions—eat raw meat, sleep on the bare ground
> . . . kill someone? Or have city people, like Hegel's master,
> refined themselves out of the Darwinian game? (*Chain Saws*
> 131).

For Clover, class is an important concern.[17] This excerpt also demonstrates that a

number of other crucial thematic oppositions are present: those between civilisation

and "statelessness" (*Chain Saws* 132), and between the past—America's rural past—

and the future, which is framed as one of urban-consumer capitalism.

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[17] Clover's analysis of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* diverges slightly from mine because she groups it together with a different set of films in which class is a central theme. Although she reads *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* as an important precursor for the slasher subgenre, she chiefly analyses it as part of what she calls "city/country" horror, or the "urbanoia" film. She groups *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* together with a number of other films from the 1970s, including *Deliverance* (1972), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) and *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) and her discussion of the frontier tensions they depict does not extend to the rest of the slasher subgenre considered here. I therefore extend Clover's discussion by locating many of the same themes she observes in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* in the rest of the slasher subgenre. Class, however, is not a theme taken up in subsequent slashers.

In the slashers that follow *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, there is a geographical shift similar to that observed by Blake in the City Movie. While *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* takes place in a rural setting, there was a subsequent movement of frontier themes in the slasher subgenre out of the rural landscape and into locations much closer to "home". *Friday the 13th* and its sequels are set in home-like settings of summer camps, which, though surrounded by forest, are located near the edge of a township, while *Halloween* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and their sequels are set squarely in the suburbs. While these slasher films are not set in the wilderness, they nevertheless subject their Final Girls to horrific wilderness experiences in the same way as the captivity narratives and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. They do this by creating a wilderness effect within more urban locales, thereby problematising the traditional opposition between the city-as-civilised and the country-as-savage. Slasher films that follow *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* feature horrific psycho-killers who invade—or, rather, emerge from within—notionally "civilised", idyllic spaces. The films then work to isolate the killers' intended victims within their own communities, leaving them surrounded by a society that remains frustratingly out of reach. To achieve this sense of isolation, telephones always fail when they are needed most; once the threat is uncovered and the youths realise they are in very real danger, they are unable to contact anyone to assist them. Either the killer has cut the wires, or the phone is simply not working. In the same vein, cars often do not start, leaving the potential victims similarly stranded. As Clover observes, the slasher film is in many

ways "pretechnological" (*Chain saws* 31). She observes that while "victims sometimes

avail themselves of firearms . . . like telephones, fire alarms, elevators, doorbells, and

car engines, guns fail in a pinch" (Clover, *Chain saws* 31). In addition, and often as an

effect of failing phones and cars, the victims are totally without recourse to the law, or

to any of the assistance the state might offer. Each of these things places the Final

Girls in a challenging context: they are embedded within, or situated very near to,

"civilisation", but they find themselves alone in a stateless and uncivilised space.

These slasher films therefore problematise the traditional alignments of city-as-

civilised and the country-as-savage to account for the increasing urbanisation of the

American landscape.

A Nightmare on Elm Street offers a good illustration of a "stateless community".

Nancy lives in a typical suburban street, surrounded by neighbours, directly across

from her boyfriend Glen (Johnny Depp) and just a short stroll from school. Nancy's

father, Lt. Thompson (Jim Saxon) is also a police officer—a representative of the state.

In every way, she exists "safely" within a civilised space. Yet Nancy finds herself

completely isolated when Freddy looms, chiefly because none of the adults in the

community will believe her story about a dream-world murderer. When she realises

she and her friends are in very real danger, she attempts to ring Glen to warn him.

However, Glen's parents have taken the phone off the hook, annoyed with what they

perceive to be Nancy's irrational concerns. As a result, Glen is murdered. Nancy's

father, in his role as a police officer, then crosses the street to investigate Glen's death

but, also perceiving Nancy to be somewhat hysterical, he locks her inside the house

so she cannot get out. Freddy then takes this opportunity to go after Nancy. As she

tries to evade her attacker with no hope of escaping the house, she desperately tries to

attract her father's attention by screaming and hitting the window. He remains just

out of reach, visible and tantalisingly close by on a neighbour's lawn, but inaccessible.

Then, completely isolated and cut off in her own home, Nancy must face the terror

that has invaded alone. *A Nightmare on Elm Street* clearly illustrates the uncertainty

regarding the traditional division between civilisation and statelessness in the 1970s-

1980s. Isolation and statelessness could no longer be relegated to the rural landscape.

Civilised community was framed as harbouring the same threats.

The second revision made by the slasher films to the early captivity narratives

relates to the source of the horror. In the early captivity narratives, horror emerged

largely from *beyond* the frontier. The source of fear was that which was unknown,

that which lay westward beyond the boundaries of civilisation: namely, the Indian

population, or the "savage other." In the slasher film, horror emerges from a

temporal divide rather than a geographic one. The horror is evoked by the nation's

history that has been suppressed. In *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, for example,

"[m]uch of the ambient horror . . . resides in the fact that statelessness—our collective

past—is not dead and buried but is just a car ride away" (Clover, *Chain Saws* 133).

The horror springs from a fear regarding what the nation once was; although this

past is repressed, as America's own past, it is one in which "we" (the American "we")

are all implicated.

The adaptation of captivity narratives to express anxiety over a repressed past

is not unique to the slasher film. Captivity narratives were refigured in this way

during the revolutionary period in order to express fear of the British: the culture

from which the Anglophone settlers evolved. Drawing on the work of Richard

Slotkin, Greg Sieminski discusses Ethan Allen's 1779 redeployment of the Daniel

Boone narrative, in which Allen writes about his prisoner-of-war experience of being

held captive by the British. Sieminski argues that "[i]n adapting the genre to serve

political ends, Allen created, in effect, a second cultural frontier, this one to the East

instead of the West. Crossing this frontier, Allen followed the pattern of earlier

Puritan narratives in order to stress his resistance to the culture of his captors" (36).

Sieminski argues that Allen was thereby trying to establish American cultural

independence; "Allen's *Narrative* was thus the negative complement to Boone's, for it

defined the nascent republic in terms of what it had rejected rather than what it had

become" (36).

The slasher film similarly adapts the captivity narrative in that the source of

the horror is a past that has been rejected or repressed. In *The Texas Chain Saw*

Massacre, for example, the horror emerges from America's rural past that has been

rejected by modern, urban America; Leatherface and the other males in his family lost

their rural jobs and turned to cannibalism, both as a way of continuing to practice

their slaughtering skills, and as a way to survive. In *Halloween*, horror is also located in the past. The film opens with Michael (aged six) murdering his sister Judith. When the film leaps forward 17 years and Michael escapes an asylum to pursue more teenage girls, his motive is unclear until we find out that he has another sister—one he was unable to kill 17 years earlier. He is seeking to finish what he started years before. In the *Friday the 13th* series, both Mrs Voorhees' and Jason's murderous sprees are inspired by past event for which they seek revenge. In the first film of the series, Mrs Voorhees seeks revenge on camp counsellors whom she sees as being responsible for her son's drowning years before. When she is slain, Jason mysteriously returns in film after film and continues to seek revenge for his and his mother's "deaths". In *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Freddy was burned to death years before by a mob of angry parents who sought to punish him for being a child murderer. In each film he returns in the dream world in order to kill the children of those responsible for his death. In each of the slasher film series, the past is not a fond memory, but that which perpetually haunts the narrative. By extension, the refusal of the past to die means that the future is unlikely to be completely free of the burden of this past. Indeed, the use of a specific date to mark significant past events in both *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* serves as a reminder that the events will continue to be commemorated each year, with each generation doomed to relive them. The slasher film thereby problematises the oppositional construction of past and future by depicting them as perpetually intertwined.

The horrific past events that haunt the narratives also contribute to problematising the traditional opposition between civilisation and statelessness. In many of the slasher films, "city folk" are implicated in the past events that incite the murderous sprees, calling the purported "civilised" nature of the (sub)urban dwellers into question.[18] In *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, for example, the city kids are suggested to be the beneficiaries of past violence enacted upon Leatherface and his family. The city kids' privileged urban life exists at the expense of the rural dwellers, who are exploited and then made redundant. In other films, the ambivalence is even more prominent. In *Friday the 13th*, camp counsellors initially cause Jason's death when they selfishly neglect their charges in order to sneak off and have sex. In *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, a group of suburban parents—including Nancy's mother—murder Freddy Krueger by burning him to death. In the slasher film, the killers disrupt the present to serve as a constant reminder of the horrific events upon which the present state of things—"civilised" existence—is based. The slasher film is therefore highly ambivalent about the notional divisions between past/present and civilisation/statelessness.

For me, it is the slasher film's depiction of the horrific "other" that offers the most important revision to the early captivity narratives. This is chiefly because the horrific "other" is gendered masculine, with the horror emerging from patriarchal structures and traditional masculinity. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* establishes this.

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[18] *Halloween* is the only exception, as the victims' civility remains largely unquestioned.

The landscape in the film evokes a mythological past, one associated with traditional

masculinity, or rugged individuals working within farming and primary industry.

The family in the film are all male (though their decaying grandmother is kept in a

room upstairs) and practitioners of particularly "masculine" skills—slaughtering

cattle by hand—that are now lost to modern America. This rural, all male family

might once have been a bastion of American ideals. In this film, however, it is

depicted as grotesque. Discussing a particular scene in which Leatherface dons an

apron to serve dinner, Magistrale writes:

> [t]he absence of a real woman to guide and moderate this all-
> male family is grotesquely in evidence in the dinner scene, and
> perhaps this helps to explain why Sally, as the only 'real'
> woman in the house, is treated as a bizarre 'guest of honour,'
> seated in a literal 'arm chair' at the head of the table.
> Leatherface's feeble effort to appropriate femininity highlights
> the barren dysfunctional nature of the patriarchy as it appears
> in this movie. There is no maternal presence, and the cannibal
> family longs for it—why else would Leatherface serve supper
> in drag—to mediate the random cruelty of the men around the
> table (155).

Leatherface's grandfather (John Dugan), the head of the household, is ineffectual in

this scene. He is no longer able to wield his mallet. Once used to slaughter cattle, his

mallet was the tool by which he supported his family and functioned as patriarchal

breadwinner. Traditional masculinity and the traditional family unit, once icons of

national stability, are now sources of horror, trying desperately to maintain

themselves.

Masculinity is equally horrific in subsequent slasher films. There are no more all-male families, but the stalking killers overtly represent masculinity by the very fact that they are almost always male. Only in *Friday the 13th* is the killer a female and, importantly, she is the only killer who is successfully killed. Dispensed with at the end of the first instalment, she does not stalk each sequel as a supernatural grotesque to be killed and re-killed. Only male killers are positioned in that way, and are *hyper*-masculine because they are aggressive, not easily killed, and "phallic", in the sense that they seek to penetrate with weaponry. While the action film genre in this era depicted this kind of hyper-masculinity as heroic (consider the action heroes played by actors like Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger), the slasher film frames it as horrific: these males are monsters.

Other males in the slasher films are not framed any more positively. Clover observes that "[t]raditional masculinity . . . does not fare well in the slasher film; the man who insists on taking charge, or who believes that logic or appeals to authority can solve the problem, or (above all) who tries to act the hero, is dead meat" (*Chain Saws* 65). Indeed, men in authority—figures who would traditionally be expected to save the day, like police officers and fathers—"appear only long enough to demonstrate risible incomprehension and incompetence" (*Chain Saws* 44). Nancy's father in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* is a good example; although he is a police officer, he is unable to detect and prevent the attack on his own daughter. Traditional masculinity is therefore framed ambivalently in the landscape of the slasher film and,

by extension, in the cultural landscape of the late 1970s-early 1980s. Masculinity is grotesque, due either to incompetence or violence. While it cannot be permanently killed, returning in film after film as killers and as sources of authority, masculinity is ineffectual in that it is unable to either slay the Final Girl or put an end to the horror.

Continuing the thematic concerns of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, subsequent slasher films also frame the traditional family unit as horrific. They take place in families that are in various states of decay, though few are decaying as literally as Leatherface's. The monstrous killer in *Halloween* seeks to eliminate his entire family for no obvious reason. In *Friday the 13th*, when Mrs Voorhees is killed trying to seek revenge for her son's death, her son Jason mysteriously returns to exact his misplaced revenge on summer camp counsellors. He is driven by her lingering memory which he hears as voices in his head and which he keeps alive with a shrine—at the centre of which is her severed head. In *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, the killer emerges from a horrific family; it is discovered in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* that Freddy is the grotesque product of his mother's gang rape at the hands of inmates of a mental institute: the "bastard son of 100 maniacs". In the last of the major series to hit the screen, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, "the domestic surrealism of the inside of Leatherface's house, Michael's suburban obsession with innocent baby-sitters, and the total absence of mothers and fathers in supervisory or support roles are pushed to their furthest extreme" (Magistrale 165). Horror exists in all the families in the film. Glen's parents are completely overbearing and, like Nancy's, oblivious to Freddy's

threat. Tina's mother is a religious zealot. Nancy's mother is an alcoholic and her

father is an arrogant police officer who refuses to listen to Nancy's pleas for help until

it is too late. In *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, the family unit is entirely troubled.

It is in relation to these horrific traditional constructs of masculinity and the

family that the Final Girl is positioned. Masculinity and the family are depicted in

the slasher film as relics of the past, so much so that many of the men and families are

literally decaying and decomposing. Driven by memories of past traumas, the men

and the families in the films are unable to extricate themselves from a literal and

metaphoric past. History is a burden that repeatedly threatens to devour the present

and the future. The Final Girl, with her youthful, independent femininity, is in stark

contrast to this decaying patriarchal tradition and as such, she holds a privileged

place within the narratives. As Clover observes, it is the Final Girl who first grasps

the "life-and death nature of the situation" (*Chain Saws* 133). She is the one "to sense

something amiss and the only one to deduce from the accumulating evidence the

pattern and extent of the threat; the only one, in other words, whose perspective

approaches our own privileged understanding of the situation" (Clover, *Chain Saws*

44). The audience then comes to identify with the Final Girl because she is the only

one who can deliver them from horror. It is she who promises a future beyond the

apocalyptic scene. It is she who offers what little hope exists in the films for

redemption. She, alone, outlives her counterparts and escapes the decaying

patriarchal threat—taking the audience with her.

The Final Girls in the slasher film are a clear representation of the independent young woman of the women's liberation movement. The opposing forces they battle against are masculinity and the family unit: symbolic representations of the nation's traditional, conservative past. The Final Girls must, at the most primal, corporeal level, fight for their lives. They escape not Godlessness, but a patriarchal past that seeks to devour them. Community is represented in these films chiefly by the family unit, which is the source of much of the horror in the films. The community produces the murderous monsters in the films, who return to exact their revenge. The community also abandons the Final Girls, leaving them in a state of isolation and statelessness in which they must forge their own individual agency in order to live. The Final Girls are not represented as the cause of the deformed family units, as other film genres might depict,[19] but as the only available alternative if the community is to be saved (albeit temporarily) from horror. What is interesting about the slasher film is that while the films acknowledge an ideological tension between youthful, independent femininity and America's patriarchal past, the films depict patriarchy— and not the girl—as horrific.

The slasher film therefore flips the teen film genre's depiction of individualism and community. The alienated, isolated individual at the heart of the teen film—the one with whom the audience is encouraged to identify and the one who bears witness to the uncomfortable ambivalences at the heart of American culture—was, in the

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[19] See, for example, Considine (63-67).

delinquency cycle, the male rebel figure. In the slasher cycle, this individualist hero is female. In the delinquency cycle, community was framed traditionally, as feminine. The slasher film instead represents community as masculine and horrific.

Reframing the slasher film as a captivity narrative allows for a re-reading of the films' focus on female terror and torture and the Final Girls' eventual independence and power in the face of the monstrous "other". Clover and Dika read these elements according to a trajectory of phallicisation. Framing the slasher film as a captivity narrative, however, means that female torture need not be read as mere punishment and the Final Girl's agency need not be read as masculine. In the captivity narratives, detailing female terror and torture are critical in order to convey with accuracy the extent and the nature of the horror experienced. In the captivity narrative, although torture was in part a punishment, it was simultaneously the affliction via which one was redeemed (Fitzpatrick 10). It was the suffering itself that allowed women to find salvation and personal agency. It is therefore via the Final Girl's brutal torture at the hands of a would-be killer that she is able to cast off her role of victim and find the individual agency required to survive. Her so-called masculine characteristics need not be read that way. In fact, the slasher film's reluctance to depict its Final Girls using penetrative weaponry indicates that her femininity is an important component of her identity. Rather, through the Final Girl's suffering and escape she forges a new identity—one that incorporates both femininity and individual agency.

The final important revision to the early captivity narratives is to the nature of redemption, so integral to tales like that of Mary Rowlandson. In the early captivity narratives, salvation was specifically religious and women's agency was forged largely in relation to the Church and the community. In the slasher film, the depth of ambivalence about traditional constructs like masculinity and the family, and fundamental oppositions, like past/future and civilisation/statelessness, is such that clear redemption is hard to locate. There are no religious undertones and the Final Girls escape only because of their own physical and emotional determination. While the Final Girls' faith in their own strength might be affirmed, the community to which the girls must return is depicted as horrific, offering little refuge from the horrors that lurk outside and within. The murderous threat also still lingers, at least in the form of memory. As *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* reveals, upon Sally's return to civilization, "[t]he girl babbled a mad tale . . . [t]hen she sank into catatonia". Although the Final Girls survive, it is difficult to envisage an entirely positive future for them. The films reinforce feminine strength and agency but they offer little reassurance that community is a safe harbour from further horror.

Reframing the slasher film as a modern reworking of the captivity narrative also means the American landscape can be partly reclaimed—cinematically, at least—in the name of femininity. By the 1970s, the American landscape had, on film, long been a masculine space, particularly in genres like the Western, the road film and of

course the delinquency film.[20] Films like *Shane* and *Easy Rider*, for example, convey

the wilderness as having a redemptive power but one available only to men. And in

Rebel Without a Cause and *The Wild One*, the identity of the rebel figure is forged in the

American landscape, away from the community, while his female counterpart is

confined to the domestic, civilised space. The slasher films, however, take girls to the

isolation of the wilderness and allow them to access it as a redemptive space. The

wilderness experience becomes the vehicle through which a girl might affirm her

individualism. In addition, the horror found in the landscape is comprised not of

"otherness" but of traditional values once held dear, in particular, masculine ones.

The slasher cycle created a noticeable crisis in the teen film, specifically with

regard to characterisation. Before the slasher film, individualism and community had

been tangible in teen cinema largely because of the way they had been gendered, with

masculinity representing individualism and femininity representing the constraints

of community. As discussed in Chapter Two, cinematic images of masculine youth

had become an important marker of individualism in the 1950s, a bulwark against the

conformist tendencies of community. The slasher film, in reinforcing the ideals of

youth and individualism through a feminine character, works to break down that

binary opposition. The slasher cycle suggests that individualism and femininity are

not mutually exclusive. Though this had been acknowledged in early American

literature, as the captivity narratives demonstrate, it was not typically acknowledged

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[20] *Bonnie and Clyde* is an important exception.

on screen; feminine agency—even heroism—represents a threat to the dominant

cinematic mode of representing thematic oppositions of the frontier. In addition, it

represents a threat to contemporary conceptualisations of masculinity, which are

largely based on these mythological ideals.

In the delinquency films, the thorny issue was about whether or not

individualism and communitarian ideals could be reconciled in the post-WWII era.

The slasher films illustrate that the issue is no longer that simple. The issue is now

about what each of those ideals might mean in a world deeply affected by the

women's movement. In a sense, the ground is pulled out from underneath both

masculinity and individualism in cinema: traditional masculinity can no longer be

faithfully deployed in service of individualist ideals and individualism can no longer

function as the defining characteristic of masculinity.

Chapter Four
"Frat" Boys: Reclaiming Masculinity in the Animal Comedy

The two cycles so far discussed in this thesis offer narratives that re-work the frontier conflict between individualism and community and, in the process, symbolically transpose an old internal cultural rift onto a more contemporary one: that of gender. The delinquency films, like many literary and cinematic narratives before them, gender frontier conflict according to traditional American mythology in which individualism is masculine and community is feminine. The slasher films contest the ways in which these two fundamental ideals are traditionally gendered and, instead, reflect the political uncertainties surrounding gender and frontier mythology in the 1970s and 1980s.

The animal comedy continues the cinematic debate, though it addresses the thematic opposition of individualism/community rather more implicitly than the two cycles discussed so far. The reason for this, it is suggested here, is that the chief focus of the animal comedy is to contribute to the backlash against the women's movement that took place in Hollywood in the late 1970s and 1980s. The animal comedy, in no uncertain terms, seeks to reconstruct masculinity in the wake of feminism and certain conservative challenges of the Reagan era. The animal comedy's connections to "the frontier" are also not as immediately evident as in the delinquency films (with their use of the outlaw hero figure) or the slashers (with their use of the captivity

narrative). The animal comedy's narrative structure is borrowed from the WWII combat film, rather than directly from a frontier narrative or trope. Nevertheless, I argue that the animal comedy does contribute to the teen film's continuing commentary on the status of individualism and community and their relationship with gender. I use this chapter to trace the animal comedy's fervent attempts to reconstruct masculinity and will argue that they have a profound effect on the traditional alignment of masculinity and individualism—something that has had an impact on both masculinity and individualism in subsequent teen films. The films under discussion are *Animal House*, *Porky's* (1982), *Screwballs* (1983), *Private School* (1983), *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984) and *Fraternity Vacation* (1985).

The term "animal comedy" was derived, in part, from the film that launched the cycle: *Animal House*. The term is also particularly appropriate as a description of the way masculinity is constructed in the cycle; the central male characters are depicted as being corporeally unrestrained and driven by their bodies' biological desires, which they uncompromisingly seek to fulfil. In that sense, they are "animalistic".

The animal comedy's construction of masculinity as biological is congruent with the rest of Hollywood in the late 1970s and 1980s, in which the response to the women's movement seemed to be a return to the male body. The most notable examples are perhaps the action "muscle" films, like *First Blood* (1982) and *Commando* (1985). In films such as these, the physical power of the male body was emphasised, a

depiction that Susan Jeffords argues was "part of a widespread cultural effort to

respond to perceived deteriorations in masculine forms of power" (345). Jeffords

asserts:

> [t]he popularity and financial success of these films suggests
> that sequentiality itself was one of the mechanisms for
> Hollywood responses to crises in the representations and
> marketing of US masculinities in this period. It is . . . the
> question of whether and how masculinity can be reproduced
> successfully in a post-Vietnam, post-Civil Rights and post-
> women's movement era. One of the answers that these films
> provide is through spectacular repetition of the spectacles of the
> masculine body, a body that, in this case, includes the male
> hero, his weapons, and his environment (345).

Jeffords argues that "Hollywood films of the 1980s . . . highlighted masculinity . . . as

a violent spectacle that insisted on the external sufficiency of the male body/territory"

(345). In addition, these spectacular male bodies were also decidedly individualist:

lone heroes who took on entire armies or terrorist groups single-handedly. In terms

of frontier mythology, then, the muscle films worked to reconcile masculinity and

individualism. If the slasher film had suggested that historical narratives could not

provide cinema with the requisite constructs for enforcing masculinity/individualism,

the "muscle" films were predicated on the idea that perhaps biology could.

The late 1970s-1980s were also marked by a political return to conservative

values typical of the post-WWII period. This entailed a return to relationships

gendered according to the nuclear family model. Chris Jordan argues that during the

Reagan era, "[n]eoconservative free-market economists . . . claimed that men needed

the responsibility of family to achieve their full earning potential, while women

needed to be homemakers in order to ensure the inculcation of proper middle-class values in their children" (142). For masculinity, this meant more than simply a return to male dominance. This political discourse saw masculinity as encompassing certain paternal and familial responsibilities.

The youthful masculinity depicted in the animal comedy differs from the masculinities constructed by both the muscle films and the conservative discourse discussed above in two important ways. Firstly, the animal comedy conspicuously fails to adopt the motif of masculinity as individualistic. Instead, the animal comedy represents masculinity with narratives about *groups* of boys. No single male character is privileged over another in terms of narrative time. The animal comedy therefore appears to reconstruct masculinity via a narrative of "community". Secondly, the animal comedy privileges values that are opposed to the conservative values discussed above. The animal comedy is structured by a masculine drive for "freedom" in which one's masculinity is defined by the degree to which one is liberated from social constraints. The result is that traditional markers of masculinity such as "loyalty, bravery and nobility" are devalued in favour of characters who are independent and irresponsible (Paul, *Laughing Screaming* 211). The parental duties discussed by Jordan represent quite a threat to the animal comedy's construction of masculinity as free and unrestrained. In the late 1970s-1980s, then, youthful masculinity in particular was perceived to be in peril, both from an increasingly independent and empowered femininity that sought to contest masculine dominance,

and from the conservative ideology that would have boys adopt economic and familial responsibility. For this reason, the animal comedies represent a confrontation between youthful masculinity and the two discourses of the period that sought to negotiate it in divergent ways.

"Our Manhood is at Stake": Masculinity as a Mission

Like the films of the slasher cycle, the animal comedies share plots that are remarkably similar, as the following synopsis of each shows. Set in 1962 in Faber College, *Animal House* follows the attempts of Delta house fraternity members to stay in college after Dean Wormer (John Vernon) teams up with another fraternity, Omega house, to have them ejected. Omega fraternity comprise the social elite, the conservative upper-class, while the Delta fraternity is made up of a range of social misfits, deviants and outcasts. After the Dean finally disbands Delta and expels its members from the college, Delta House members hatch a revenge plot to humiliate the Dean and the Omega fraternity in front of the mayor (Cesare Danova). *Revenge of the Nerds* follows Louis (Robert Carradine) and Gilbert (Anthony Edwards)—two "nerds"—in their first year of college. Shortly after they arrive, they and their fellow Freshmen are ejected from their dorm after the Alpha Beta—"jock"—fraternity members burn down their own frat house and usurp the Freshman dorm. Louis and Gilbert then become part of a small group of social outcasts who are unable to find alternative housing and decide to convert a run-down house into their own dorm and

form their own fraternity: Lambda Lambda Lambda. The Alpha-Beta fraternity

members continue to terrorise the nerds, but the nerds finally get revenge. The other

films examined here have more sexually-oriented narratives, though the plot

structures remain essentially the same. In *Porky's*, a central group of high school boys

devises a number of plans to try to "get laid", largely for the benefit of Pee Wee (Dan

Monahan), who is a virgin. They visit a prostitute, Cherry Forever (Susan Clark),

who lives in the woods, spy on their female classmates in the showers, and visit

Porky's, a strip club hidden away in a swamp across the county line. At each stage,

they are frustrated in their attempts, often by an authority figure. Being refused

access to the strippers by Porky (Chuck Mitchell) is the final straw and they seek

revenge against him. In *Screwballs* a group of five boys makes a pact with regard to

their arch enemy, Purity Busch (Linda Speciale). Rick (Peter Keleghan) bluntly

summarises the boys' aim: "[b]efore homecoming, let's make it a point, that at least

one of us will get a shot at her [Purity's] bod . . . or at least a glimpse of her tits". The

boys all hatch their own plots, with some aiming to see her naked and some trying to

initiate sexual activity. They fail each time until, in the closing shot of the film, they

manage to forcibly disrobe her at the homecoming assembly. In *Fraternity Vacation*,

the nerdy Wendell (Stephen Geoffreys) accompanies two of his fraternity brothers,

Joe (Cameron Dye) and Mother (Tim Robbins), on a spring break holiday. Joe and

Mother (short for "mother fucker") compete with their arch rivals, Chas (Leigh

McCloskey) and J.C. (Matt McCoy), to be the first to "nail" a girl named Ashley

(Sheree J. Wilson) by the end of the weekend for the prize of $1000. The boys fail in their attempts and their plot is eventually uncovered by a furious Ashley. At the end of the film, she gets together with Wendell. In *Private School*, there are a number of plotlines in which sex is a feature. The one primarily under discussion here features a central group of high school boys that tries to trick Jordan (a very attractive girl, played by Betsy Russell) into having sex with one of the boys, Bubba (Michael Zorek). They take bets on the level of "access" she will grant him to her body.

In a number of ways, the films display nostalgia for the 1950s-1960s, perhaps to stage a return to the gender/power relations that existed in that period. The setting of a number of the films in this era is an indicator of this; *Porky's* is set in 1954 and *Animal House* is set in 1962. Though the setting of *Screwballs* is more ambiguous, likely due to low production values, the film creates a strong feel of nostalgia for that era through music and *mise-en-scene*.[21] In each of these cases, the films revisit a bygone era in which their depictions of inequitable gender roles might have been more acceptable.

The structure of the films also hearkens back to earlier periods. As Paul observes, the animal comedy's narrative structure, in which a central group of males undertakes some kind of "mission" against an opposing force, mirrors that of the WWII combat film ("Rise and Fall" 75). Indeed, the similarities are striking. Like the

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[21] The *mise-en-scene* in the opening scene is conspicuously littered with items that indicate a 1950s-1960s setting, for example hula hoops and tail-finned cars. At the same time, there are a few extras loitering in the background with clothing and hairstyles that are clearly punk-inspired.

WWII combat film, the focus in the animal comedy is on male groups, or more specifically, male groups that exist within the bounds of an institution. In the combat film, the groups exist within the armed forces. In the animal comedy, some films take place in college and follow members of fraternities (like *Animal House*, *Revenge of the Nerds* and *Fraternity Vacation*), while some take place in high school (like *Porky's*, *Private School* and *Screwballs*) and follow friendship groups.

Also akin to the World War II combat films is the central plot device of a "mission". The central groups of boys are brought together chiefly by some kind of shared goal, bet, or pact. While the groups in the combat film might have sought to blow up a bridge or capture a hill, the mission in the animal comedy is less heroic. It might be one of simple revenge, either against an authority figure or power structure, as in *Animal House* (Dean Wormer) and *Revenge of the Nerds* (the popular and powerful "jock" fraternity). More common, however, is a mission in which revenge is intimately bound up in a plot to "get laid", as in *Fraternity Vacation*, *Porky's*, *Private School* and *Screwballs*. In *Porky's*, for example, the boys hatch a number of plots with the aim of having sex, targeting female classmates (in the famous shower scene, for example), a prostitute and a strip club (Porky's) in which the strippers are rumoured to be willing to "go all the way" if offered sufficient payment. At each stage, the boys are thwarted, encouraging the audience to invest in the boys' mission more heavily as the narrative gains momentum. When humiliated at Porky's, the boys finally seek retribution by making his club sink into the swamp. Their jubilant victory against

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Porky is capped off in the final scene when Pee Wee finally "gets laid". Victory is thereby complete; the boys' revenge against Porky is reinforced by Pee Wee's sexual triumph to provide a symbolic retribution for every instance in the film in which the boys were thwarted in their mission. In *Fraternity Vacation*, *Private School* and *Screwballs*, the focus of both the revenge plot and the plot to have sex is a single girl: in *Fraternity Vacation* it is Ashley; in *Private School* it is Jordan, and in *Screwballs* it is Purity. Each of these girls is perceived to invite the boys' attention with her beauty, yet each rejects the boys' attempts to engage her in sexual activity. Refusing to play along with the boys' sexual advances, the girls—and their perceived unavailability— are a slight against the boys' power, thus making them targets for revenge. The animal comedies therefore depict males "ganging up" against forces that are perceived to threaten masculine liberty. These forces are either sources of authority or girls.

Examining the WWII combat film provides insight into the ways in which the animal comedy redeploys the combat film's central mythology. Typically, the WWII combat film follows a racially and socio-economically diverse band of soldiers, which—in the post-war period—worked to signify America's supposed heterogeneity and democratic ideals (Basinger 56; Slotkin 469; Alpers 143). Richard Slotkin discusses the mythology at work in the WWII combat films and traces its reworking in the Vietnam war films of the late 1970s-early 1980s. He argues that the mythology at the heart of most war films in general is derived from the frontier. He

asserts that "[t]he health of the state requires a myth of national identity, to sustain its solidarity against external enemies (rival nation-states) and to overcome the disintegrative potential of internal divisions (intercommunal hostility, religious disagreement, class struggle)" (Slotkin 470). The function of a nation's mythology "is not only to sanctify and glorify the state, but to promote imaginative resolutions of the conflicts that inevitably arise between the constituent ethnicities (or class ideologies) of a culturally diverse folk and the 'fictive ethnicity' of the unified nation-state" (Slotkin 471). Slotkin argues that as a result of this purpose, the national mythology tends to be focussed on territorial and cultural boundaries as a way of demarcating the nation's "people" (471). Military or war films, then, are vital for the making of this mythology because they depict characters involved in the very work of defending the state's boundaries against "others" (Slotkin 471-472). Those "others"—crucially—can be external, internal, or both simultaneously.

Though Slotkin discusses race and ethnicity specifically, his argument applies to the animal comedy's treatment of gender. In the late 1970s and 1980s, gender was an internally divisive issue that threatened not only traditional conceptions of masculinity but also the idea of a unified national identity. In borrowing its narrative structure from the combat film, the animal comedy depicts its male characters in the very act of boundary defence, where they struggle to uphold their freedom against "others". In the animal comedy, these "others" are conservative, authoritarian discourses, and women. The structure of a battle or mission against these "others"

serves to demarcate boundaries not around the concept of nationality, but around a certain idea of masculinity, whose liberty was perceived to require "defending" against oppositional forces.

The capacity for the combat film to successfully unite conflicting ethnicities and class ideologies with a national identity relies upon the authentic heterogeneity of the central military group. The soldiers' capacity to work together for a single cause—despite their genuine differences—then provides a unifying mythology that acts as a defence against internal divisiveness and external challenges. The heterogeneity of the central group works as a counterbalance to the films' focus on the group and its mission, which ensures that the individuality of the members is not entirely subsumed under the bond of "nation". In the animal comedies, substantial distinctions between characters' social positions or cultural backgrounds akin to those of the combat film are often non-existent. In *Revenge of the Nerds* and *Animal House*, the central groups of boys are all socially marginalised, sharing the same position as outcasts with the college community. In *Porky's*, the differences between the boys' characters are seemingly unimportant, as the film does little to distinguish between them meaningfully. Only two stand out, with their identities defined largely according to their penis size; "Meat" (Tony Ganios) is reportedly well-endowed while Pee Wee is not. *Screwballs* is one film that gestures toward heterogeneity in its central male group. It contains five boys who register as different teen film "types": a good-looking "jock", a "nerd", a "WASP", a fat guy and a thoughtful, "average" guy.

However, the differences between individuals are entirely superficial, created simply through clothing and mannerisms. In the animal comedy, heterogeneity is inadequate or non-existent. The result is a cycle that certainly reinforces the dominance of masculinity, but one in which the bond created by the masculine mission has a homogenising effect, overwhelming the individualism of its male characters.

The animal comedy effaces the traditional bond between masculinity and individualism in other ways also. It has been mentioned already that masculinity in the animal comedy is chiefly defined by the "animal" body, one driven by "biological urges". The "animal" body manifests in one of two ways, however: corporeal crudeness or unbridled sexual desire. Though both of these construct masculinity in terms of the body, and both tend to feature in every animal comedy at some point, each does damage to masculine individualism in a slightly different way and requires separate elaboration.

"That Boy is a P-I-G Pig": Corporeal Crudeness in the Animal Comedy

There are two films under discussion here that construct masculinity as being corporeally crude. These films are *Animal House* and *Revenge of the Nerds*. In these two films, the central groups of protagonist "animals" seek to free their bodies from all societal constraints. In *Animal House*, for example, the central group of boys lives to express and to satiate distinctly physical desires: to eat, to drink, to have sex and to party. Academic pressures, civic responsibility and relationships with girlfriends are

all ultimately distractions from their main quest: fulfilling their own bodily urges. The boys' aim in life is to be unfettered and free to do entirely as they please. The "liberation" of the masculine body results in scenes of excessive drinking and eating, dope smoking, vomiting, urinating, raucous dancing and sex. In *Animal House*, the boys aim to free themselves from socially-determined standards of civility.

In *Revenge of the Nerds*, there is corporeal crudeness similar to that in *Animal House*; there is excessive drinking, dope smoking, and a burping contest. The boys in *Revenge of the Nerds* seek a slightly different form of freedom, however. The "nerds" are all outcasts primarily because of the way they look: most of the boys wear thick glasses, high-waisted slacks and shirts; Lamar (Larry B. Scott), a gay member of the nerd fraternity, wears highly feminine clothing and speaks in a soft, high-pitched voice, while Booger (Curtis Armstrong), another "nerd" member, is completely slovenly and unkempt. Their appearances are contrasted with the Alpha Beta members' jeans and letterman jackets. The nerds' main aim in the film is, therefore, to free themselves from socially constructed markers of status that label them inferior to more popular, powerful males because of their appearance. In this context *Revenge of the Nerds* is more about a fight to have all forms of masculine corporeal liberty recognised.

The focus on masculinity as corporeally unrestrained has led to the animal comedy cycle being dubbed the "gross-out" cycle in a number of critical texts.[22] Indeed, the masculine body in these films is visually immediate, physical, often vulgar and deliberately used to confront and titillate the audience. The films play with bodily contours, and traditional boundaries of cleanliness and decency. They represent overeating and gastronomic feats, abuse of the body, bodies intermingling with other bodies (through dance or sex), and the excretion of various substances from a range of orifices of the body, often in public places. The "gross-outs" have a complete disrespect for bodily boundaries that have been symbolically inscribed. Opposed to this kind of body is the civilised body, one that is bound by societal constraints. As Paul observes, in the worlds of most animal comedies, "being animal commands more respect than being civilized. Being civilized . . . has to be opposed because it promises a deathlike existence of repression and a negation of spontaneous feeling" ("Rise and Fall" 76).

In many ways, the animal comedy's opposition between the "liberated" masculine body and the forces of repression are akin to the opposition between the grotesque body of carnival and classical conception of the body developed in the Enlightenment. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that the classical conception of the body emerged out of a movement to repress the "commonality" in the aim of

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[22] See, for example, Bernstein's *Pretty in Pink: the Golden Age of Teenage Movies*, Foster's "Film in the Classroom: Coping with 'Teenpics'" and Paul's "What Rough Beasts: Confessions of a Gross-out Maven."

creating "a sublimated public body without smells, without coarse laughter, without

organs" (93-94). In the interests of bourgeois culture's "serious, productive and

rational intercourse" public spaces were "*de-libidinised*" (Stallybrass and White 97;

emphasis in original). The classical body represents an entirely different "somatic

conception" of the body from that of the grotesque; the classical body is the "radiant

centre of a transcendent individualism . . . raised above the viewer and the

commonality" (Stallybrass and White 21). Stallybrass and White liken the classical

idea of the body to a statue, "always mounted on a plinth which meant that it was

elevated, static and monumental" (21). It is a body which is, in a way "disembodied"

(Stallybrass and White 22). The grotesque body of the carnival opposes a bourgeois,

individualist conception of the body, and instead:

> imagines the human body as multiple, bulging, over- or under-
> sized, protuberant and incomplete. The openings and orifices
> of this carnival body are emphasized, not its closure and finish.
> It is an image of impure corporeal bulk with its orifices (mouth,
> flared nostrils, anus) yawning wide and its lower regions (belly,
> legs, feet, buttocks and genitals) given priority over its upper
> regions (head, 'spirit', reason) (Stallybrass and White 9).

As described by Stallybrass and White, the grotesque body is a body that enjoys

"[i]ntoxication, rhythmic and unpredictable movements, sexual reference and

symbolism, singing and chanting, bodily pleasures and 'fooling around'" (97).

The animal comedy's interest in this opposition between the "liberated"

grotesque body and the "repressed" civilised body begins with *Animal House*, in

which it is explicitly explored. The film opens with a shot of a stately building at

Faber College. As classical music plays we are shown a series of shots of different college buildings, many with Roman columns adorning the facades. The final shot in this sequence rests upon a statue of the school's founder in the foreground, and as the shot pans down to the plinth at the bottom we see a plaque on which is written his educational edict: "knowledge is good". The simplicity of this statement, perhaps unwittingly, points to the arbitrariness of the search for rationality over bodily interests and helps to establish Faber as an educational institution that is very much embedded in the Classical tradition. At Faber, rationality, individualism and sublimation are valued. We then meet Larry and Kent, two freshmen who are on their way to Omega fraternity house to register as new pledges. They are greeted at the door by Mandy Pepperidge (Mary Louise Weller) and Barbara "Babs" Jansen (Martha Smith), who giggle derisively behind their backs, calling them a "wimp" and a "blimp". Shortly after the boys enter the main room it becomes clear that Omega is the "best" of the college frat houses. It is the home of the Faber elite. Larry and Kent are introduced briefly to members of the fraternity, and then ushered to sit with a small group of boys at one end of the room. These boys are immediately identifiable as social and cultural outcasts: a blind boy in a wheelchair, an obvious nerd, a boy from India and a boy from the middle-east. Larry, who is small, pale and thin (the "wimp"), and Kent, who is plump and acne-ridden (the "blimp"), are also outcasts.

As Larry and Kent later walk toward Delta house, they discuss its reputation as the "worst" house on campus, immediately distinguishing it from Omega. As they

approach the Delta building, we hear "Louie Louie" blasting from a stereo inside the house. The boys stop outside and look up at the building, a reverse shot of which gives us our first glimpse of the Delta fraternity house. It is a small, filthy, weatherboard building, very different from the stately white Georgian mansion that is Omega's home. As the boys stare up at the house, an upper-storey window smashes and a dirty, naked mannequin comes crashing through it and lands at their feet. In a symbolic attack on the classical notion of the body, the mannequin has been extensively vandalised. The head—representing rationality and reason—has been lopped off. The figure has also become detached from its base, the plinth that once raised it to the status of an object for admiration. Its dishevelled state suggests that before its flight from the window, this mannequin was placed in compromising sexual positions with fraternity members, danced around the room to blues music and subjected to other sordid things never imagined by the manufacturer. As the boys make their first trip up the Delta steps, they meet Bluto—short for John Blutarsky (John Belushi)—who drunkenly turns to greet them and pisses on their shoes. As the boys rather nonchalantly shake off the urine, the audience is presented with a fraternity house that clearly embraces the grotesque.

The classical/grotesque opposition set up in this opening sequence is then reinforced by the initiation ceremonies of the two houses. The Omega initiation is highly ritualistic and looks almost religious. The members are dressed in robes and the pledges have been stripped down to their underwear. The members read an

official induction and smack the pledges on the backside with a paddle while the

pledges recite "thank you sir, may I have another". The procedure is clinical. The

members are separated from any actual contact with the pledges by a wooden

paddle, and a power hierarchy is constructed through the stripping of the pledges to

their underwear. The same power hierarchy does not exist in the Delta fraternity. By

contrast with the Omega pledges, the Delta pledges stand amongst the rest of the

fraternity and all—pledges and members alike—are dressed in their pyjamas. The

pledges are given animal-like names by Bluto, while Moose (James Widdoes) reads

an unofficial oath that he is obviously making up as he goes along. They are then

doused in beer, and in the frivolity that follows, they dance around, drinking,

swaying, rocking together and head-butting each other. In this initiation, the Delta

members revel in forming the body of the "commonality", a physical mass of

intermingling smells, fluids and bodies.

The cafeteria scene in which Bluto puts together a tray of food for lunch is

possibly the most well-known scene from *Animal House*, and it again works to situate

the Delta House members within the grotesque tradition. Bluto is driven by his

body's openings, particularly his mouth. In the cafeteria line, Bluto's gaping gob

consumes whatever he touches, seemingly working entirely for his belly, which

obviously rules over standards of social etiquette. He eats halves of things then puts

them back on display, then eats a whole hamburger in one mouthful. He piles

desserts, dinners, fruit and sandwiches onto one plate, mixing separate meals into

one large pile of food. At one point, he consumes the inedible—a golf ball. To reinforce his grotesqueness, his bodily boundaries of inside and outside are unstable. Any food that goes in may also come out. When he joins a number of the Omega members at a table, he asks them to "guess" what he is about to impersonate. He carefully loads his mouth with food, chews it, puffs his cheeks, then thrusts his fists into his face, spraying the Omegas with cake. "I'm a zit! Get it?" He then flees the angry Omegas and, on his way out of the cafeteria, starts a food fight that ends the scene.

The Omega's alignment with the classical body is confirmed in the scenes that depict sex or sexual discussions. The two Omega name tag hostesses mentioned earlier, Mandy and Babs, are at one point discussing sex when Babs describes it as a "dirty deed". We don't quite realise how literal her description is until we see Mandy and her boyfriend Greg (James Dawson), the Omega president, in his car together at a "make-out" spot. The shot from outside the car simply shows Mandy leaning over toward Greg's lap, her arm moving up and down vigorously, but mechanically. The implication is that she is giving him a "hand job". Greg looks a little averse to the act, and when she asks him, "is anything happening yet?", he seems very distracted. She stops in frustration, and—providing the scene's punch line—angrily snaps off the surgical glove she had been wearing. For the Omegas, direct bodily contact is to be avoided. Members of the Omega house are therefore characterised as de-libidinised

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and (physically) un-reactive with the people or environment around them, while the Delta members indulge all their bodily desires and drink, dance and have sex.

The distinction between the grotesque and the civilised bodies in *Animal House* is framed as an opposition between freedom and repression, an opposition that structures the animal comedies that follow. The grotesque masculine bodies of the Delta members are depicted as being entirely liberated, while the Omega members are depicted as suppressing their "natural" masculine desires. The Delta house is therefore aligned with a value fundamental to American national identity—liberty— while the Omega members are depicted as opposing it. As Paul observes, however, the drive for masculine liberty played out in the animal comedy can also be read as a drive for power. Paul points to the narrative structure, arguing that the rebellion played out by the Delta members "is antiauthoritarian only to the limited extent that it is directed against specific authority figures" like Dean Wormer and the Omega house members (*Laughing Screaming* 122). The boys' ultimate act of rebellion "never seeks to overturn the *notion* of authority itself" (Paul, *Laughing Screaming* 122; emphasis in original). Paul's point is evidenced by the closing scene that outlines the future careers of a number of the Delta members. Otter becomes a gynaecologist, Larry becomes the editor of a magazine, and Bluto becomes a senator. Each takes up a position of considerable social power. In addition, scenes involving Bluto, like the ones in which he urinates on people or spits food on them, are as much about power as they are about "liberation". The framing of freedom versus repression disguises

the fact that "[a]narchic energies, always contained within larger orders, are paradoxically presented as a stage en route to the assumption of power" (Paul, *Laughing Screaming* 123).

Revenge of the Nerds features a similar narrative structure in which the nerds' quest for liberty takes the form of a power struggle. Unlike *Animal House*, this film is not structured around a grotesque/classical opposition in which the protagonist males are liberated and the antagonist males are repressed. Instead, every male in the film, jock or nerd, is depicted as being animalistic and driven by his body (Paul, *Laughing Screaming* 218). The power struggle takes place between the jocks, who bully the nerds and seek to brutally repress them, and the nerds, who seek the freedom to be "themselves". The liberty sought by the nerds opposes social classifications that render them inferior because of the way they look.

The way in which the power struggle plays out is indicative of the relative positions of masculinity and femininity in the animal comedy. After the nerds band together and form their own fraternity, the Alpha Beta members, led by Stan (Ted McGinley,) remain determined to reinforce their own social superiority. They throw a rock, reading "Nerds, get out", through the nerds' window, they release pigs at the nerds' first fraternity party, and they "moon" the nerds in front of the national Lambda Lambda Lambda president, humiliating them terribly. It is at this point that the nerds seek retaliation. They do so by targeting the Pi Delta Pi sorority, which is made up of the most beautiful and popular girls on campus, many of whom are also

girlfriends of the Alpha Beta members. The nerds infiltrate the sorority and place

cameras in the girls' bedrooms and bathrooms, which allow the nerds to spy on the

girls as they undress. Paul observes: "Lewis and Gilbert are initially recognised as

nerds by sight alone, an event that establishes a connection of power to sight and that

is crucial to the film itself. Appropriately, the first revenge the nerds seek from their

good-looking tormentors is to place themselves in a superior position of *seeing*"

(*Laughing Screaming* 220; emphasis in original). What Paul does not take into account,

however, is that the retaliation against the Alpha Beta members is enacted via a

female sorority, a pattern that persists throughout the film. Rather than doing battle

with the Alpha Beta members directly, the nerds use the female sorority members, in

particular Stan's girlfriend Betty (Julie Montgomery), as sites upon which to contest

masculine power imbalances.

Another example of this use of female characters comes later in the film when

the campus fraternity houses are competing in a fundraising event. The central

contest is, of course, between the Alpha Beta and the Lambda Lambda Lambda

fraternities. The Alpha Beta members are running a kissing booth, while the Lambda

Lambda Lambda members sell pies. Stan feels confident that his fraternity will win

when Ogre (Donald Gibb) informs him that the nerds have raised much more money.

When they investigate the nerds' pies more closely, the Alpha Beta members discover

that the pies are simply whipped cream which, when eaten, reveals a nude

photograph of Betty on the base of the pie tin. Again, the contest between the two

male groups involves the use of girls as sites of masculine competition.

Shortly after this scene, the nerds' victory is finally achieved. Louis witnesses

Stan rudely dismisses Betty's sexual advances and she storms off angrily into a

carnival funhouse. Louis witnesses this, steals the mask that Stan had been wearing,

and follows Betty into the darkened maze, in which context he is able to fool her into

thinking he is Stan. They have sex, and afterwards, she remarks on how wonderful it

was. When Louis reveals his real identity, Betty is not angry or disgusted. Rather,

she seems smitten, amazed that a nerd could display such sexual prowess, and asks

Louis to meet her later on. The nerds' quest for social appreciation is finally

vindicated when Gilbert gives a stirring speech to all the college students about the

unfairness of "nerd persecution" and its threat to "freedom". In that speech, he

aligns corporeally unrestrained masculinity with liberty, re-framing the overt power

plays that have taken place during the narrative as part of the drive for freedom. He

asks anyone who has ever felt picked on to join him at the front, at which point all the

students rally around him, confirming the nerds' victory over the jocks. Betty shrugs

off Stan and joins Louis, stating with some disbelief "I'm in love with a nerd!" The

coupling of Betty and Louis brings closure to the nerds' victory; as a gorgeous

cheerleader, she functions as a trophy, a symbol of masculine social power that

changes hands as power dynamics shift. *Animal House* works similarly. When Bluto

is seen driving off at the end of the film (and we are told that he becomes a senator),

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he is accompanied by Mandy Pepperidge, who functions to help symbolise his masculine triumph. In the same film, Boon also ends up with Katy, while Larry ends up with Clorette DePasto (Sarah Holcomb), the Mayor's daughter.

In the films that reinforce masculine liberty through corporeality crudeness, girls are typically peripheral to the narratives and are granted little character development, with the exception of Katy in *Animal House*. They are often placed in passive positions, either as objects of the viewer's gaze when they are spied upon in various states of undress, or markers of shifts in masculine dominance. The boys in these films are characterised by their bodies, which are depicted as being physically unrestrained or liberated. Within the context of the late 1970s-1980s, these depictions of gender had a certain political function. The equation of masculinity with the body constructed male social power as "natural" and omnipotent. This depiction stood in direct opposition to the common assertion made by the women's movement that male dominance is socially constructed and maintained. In addition, aligning masculinity with the fundamental American value of liberty and downplaying its alignment with power encourages the audience to identify with the boys' mission and root for their supposed freedom.

At the same time, the animal comedy's depiction of masculinity has particular repercussions for frontier mythology and masculine individualism. The homogeneity of the male groups and the primary importance of the shared mission or goal ensure that individual identities are overwhelmed by the group bond. The emphasis on

masculinity as a unified "fraternity" or community, ganging up against "others", is exacerbated by the films' use of the grotesque body of carnival to characterise masculinity. The grotesque body is not an individualised body with clearly delineated boundaries. Rather, it is a social, "communal" body that is part of the swarming mass in which it resides. In the "gross-out" animal comedy, the imperatives of reconstructing masculinity as powerful in the face of feminist and conservative challenges results in a narrative in which the traditional construct of masculine individualism is sidelined.

"We're Gonna Get Laid!": Masculine Sexual Desire in the Animal Comedy

In films that equate masculinity with unbridled sexual desire, the construct of masculine individualism is damaged a slightly different way. I call these particular animal comedies the "sex-romp" films. In the "sex-romp" films, like *Porky's*, *Private School*, *Screwballs* and *Fraternity Vacation*, the boys' primary aim is to "get laid", or at least have the chance to view a naked girl. As in the gross-outs, the central groups of boys live to express and to satiate distinctly physical desires. In the sex-romps these desires are entirely sexual. Depicted as being the result of raging adolescent hormones dwelling within, the boys' sexual desire is supposedly biological, "natural" and therefore uncontrollable. As a result, any character who obstructs the boys' "free" expression of these desires is constructed as unfairly repressive.

The sex-romp animal comedies are reliant on the discourse of adolescence and its construction of adolescent sexuality for their depictions of youthful male and female sexuality. The discourse of adolescence defines sexuality in very specific ways: adolescent sexuality is ideally focussed on the genitals (Driscoll 53) and it is heterosexual. Its ultimate goal is a union or partnership in marriage in which reproduction ideally occurs (Lesko 13). In ascribing desire and pleasure to the genitals, the discourse of adolescence circumscribes the ways in which sex may be experienced by males and females. Rhoda L. Lorand's 1965 handbook entitled *Love, Sex and the Teenager* reflects the way in which the biological discourse of adolescent sexuality supports traditional, socially-constructed ideas about male and female sexuality. Since desire is located in the genitals, sexual feeling, for the boy, is located in the penis. The traits associated with his erect penis—strength and power—are then depicted as the traits of his sexuality. In writing of the "pissing contests" and other competitions often engaged in by adolescent boys, Lorand writes affectionately that the feats of which a boy's member is capable are displayed with "prowess" and a sense of "accomplishment" (23). His masculine qualities of strength, power and courage then colour his sexual approach to girls (Lorand 23). Lorand's text does not contain a corresponding description of how feminine desire correlates with female genitalia. Feminine sexuality, for Lorand, is equated to a desire for romance, and she does not explicitly connect this with female genitals. G.S. Hall's work does, however. G.S. Hall's description of female genitalia asserts that the "larger" sex organs of girls

give a "feeling of intensified existence, sentiments of strange, nameless yearning, aimless unrest" (2: 38). This transcription of biology onto desire produces a striking difference between masculine and feminine sexuality. Males obtain power and strength from their penises that they subsequently direct toward females. Females find a "nameless yearning", indicating they are passive, waiting for something unnamed to be delivered to them. Masculine desire is something to encourage and be proud of. Feminine desire is mysterious, a desire waiting to be filled by something external to the female body.

Guidelines for appropriate social interactions are then structured by this construction of male and female adolescent sexuality. Lorand describes activities that may take place on a first date and her description indicates the particular roles ascribed to the boy and girl respectively by the discourse of adolescence:

> [t]he girl may be secretly worrying about how far the boy will try to go, struggling with all of her own conflicting desires and beliefs. Every girl wants the boy to find her attractive enough to want to kiss her and hold her in his arms. . . .The boy may be concerned about how bold he is expected to be. . . . . Many girls fear that if they refuse they won't be asked out again. . . . Some boys . . . have an almost feverish desire to make-out. They become impatient and annoyed with the girl who refuses and do not ask her out again. These boys aren't ogres. They simply haven't yet reached the stage of maturity where tenderness and awareness of the girl as an individual can be combined with their sexual drive. . . . . The manner in which the refusal is made makes all the difference. If you give an impersonation of being a Puritan . . . you will make your companions feel guilty, and they will quite naturally want to avoid you in the future. If, however, you

> remain cheerful and friendly . . . you shouldn't have much
> trouble (79, 87, 88).

In this configuration the male is not expected to be able to control his own sexual drive and it is "natural" that his focus is not on the girl or her feelings. The girl must prioritise his feelings over hers, and subtly craft a response that lets him know his desires are normal and welcomed, but that she, while willing, is chaste above all. It is left to the girl to "tame" his desires, "while at the same time encouraging his interest and continued attraction" (Lorand 87). The girl's sexuality, vague and aimless, is constructed as being ideally channelled toward (chaste) accommodation: of masculine desires and sexual advances.

The animal comedy's sex-romp films rely on this discourse for intelligibility and, indeed, reproduce many of its elements. The most obvious is perhaps the supposed "uncontrollability" of masculine sexual desire. In *Private School*, for example, when the boys are at a school dance and dancing with their female partners, the camera pans around the room to reveal the boys' throbbing penises, which look as if they are liable to burst from their trousers at any moment. *Screwballs* depicts a similar scene. A number of unnamed boys are reading pornography in the school library when the camera pans down to look under the table. The audience sees rising and falling bulges in each of the boys' laps, symbolising their sexual urges as physically irrepressible. Further, in the *Porky's* shower scene, when an overweight girl blocks the boys' view of the more attractive girls, Pee Wee is unable to contain his frustration, yelling "God dammit! Will you move it you lardass!!" The urgency of his

sexual desire is so great that he cannot control his own behaviour, resulting in the discovery of their scheme by Miss Balbricker (Nancy Parsons). The focus on a group of males also helps to reinforce the uncontrollable nature of masculine sexuality; that such a large number of male characters all exhibit the same sexual drives suggests that this kind of masculinity is biological and therefore containable only at the price of repression.

Also like the discourse of adolescence, the animal comedy constructs masculine sexuality as powerful, even aggressive. The equation of masculine sexuality with power begins with the boys' first sexual experiences in the films, which usually involve looking. More specifically, the boys spy on a nude or semi-nude girl who is completely unaware that she is being looked at. The shower scene in *Porky's* depicts just that. The boys infiltrate the walls of the girls' locker room and peer through holes in the wall to watch the girls in the shower. In *Private School*, the boys sneak onto the girls' campus to peer through the windows and see Jordan showering behind a misty screen. At the beginning of *Screwballs*, Howie adjusts a series of hallway mirrors in order to look up girls' skirts as they come down the stairs. In *Fraternity Vacation*, the boys view the girls around the hotel pool through Wendell's camera, which is eventually set up in order to view Ashley undressing in her bedroom. In these examples, boys take up a predatory gaze, under which the girls are passive, unknowing objects.

The opposition of boys-as-aggressive/girls-as-passive is also achieved by the films' plot device of the mission, pact or bet. The girls are—literally—targets that the boys must conquer or win. The means by which the boys go about this involve spying, trickery or force. In each case, the target girl is rendered passive: an unknowing victim of the voyeuristic male gaze, a dupe, or physically helpless. Paul observes that the sex in animal comedies is "rarely just sex plain and simple. Rather, any romantic quality is even further diminished because sex often coincides with a drive for power. This conflation of sex with power gives these films a much higher degree of aggression than even the sexually explicit romantic comedy of the period" (*Laughing Screaming* 32).

Despite the "aggression" in the films, the animal comedy successfully works to align the audience with masculinity. It achieves this in part by placing the audience in the films' masculine, predatory position, making the audience complicit with it. The audience views a number of critical scenes from the boys' point of view and is therefore forced to view the girls in the scenes in the same way as the "animals". In *Fraternity Vacation*, for example, the audience initially views Ashley as the boys do: through a camera. The circular markings representing the camera's viewfinder are overlaid on the screen as we view her, thereby implicating us in the boys' voyeuristic gaze. In *Screwballs*, when Rick poses as a doctor to infiltrate the Freshman Girls' breast exams, the audience sees the girl's breasts from Rick's point of view. When he is then suddenly caught in the act of attempting to grope her, the camera cuts to a

close-up of Rick taken from his right. At that point he turns to the camera and looks at the films' audience in frustration. In this movement, we are positioned as his accomplices: we are "in on" his scheme and are invited to share in his disappointment. The films therefore offer a powerful statement about the relative positions of masculinity and femininity in the wake of the feminist movement by encouraging the audience to "feel" the power associated with a biologically-derived masculinity.

The success with which the animal comedy aligns the audience with aggressive masculine sexuality rests only partly on the biological constructions described above. Much of the animal comedy's power emerges from the fact that the entire world created in the films is structured to accommodate that masculine sexuality. In much the same way that the masculine power of the action hero in the muscle films includes not only his body but also his weapons and his environment (Jeffords 345), the masculine power of the "animals" in the "sex romp" includes not only the male body but also its social environment and—most importantly—the girls within it. Feminine subjectivity is positioned entirely according to the degree to which it accedes to masculine desires.

Most of the girls in the animal comedy are "good sports". They play along with aggressive masculine sexuality and as a result, are aligned with, though certainly on the periphery of, the central masculine groups. They exist largely as "bodies" in the films. While they might be identified as friends or girlfriends, they

are chiefly *deployed* by the films—used in order to tease, to joke and to mark the status of boys—in such a way that renders the girls' subjectivity invisible or highly fragmented. In *Fraternity Vacation*, for example, Chas and J.C. ask two female friends, Chrissie (Barbara Crampton) and Marianne (Kathleen Kinmont), to help them humiliate Mother and Joe. The girls are asked to seduce them and go back to their apartment, where they get Mother and Joe to undress and get into bed. The girls strip down to their bikini bottoms and then go into the bathroom to "prepare" for the sexual act. As the boys lie in wait, the girls talk loudly about a new cure for herpes, clearly hoping to give Mother and Joe a good scare. The boys are then too afraid to have sex and ask the girls to leave. It is at this point that Chas and J.C. enter, laughing. The girls, while involved in the trickery, are merely props in the joke; as soon as Chas and J.C. enter, the girls leave quietly and the door is closed behind them. They are not involved in the scene's subsequent narrative development.

In *Screwballs*, Rhonda (Terrea Foster) and Bootsie (Linda Shayne) are the "good sports" who play along with all of the boys' schemes to get revenge on Purity Busch. When Rick hatches a plot to pose as the female home economics teacher in order to measure Purity's bust line and grope her in the process, he is recognised by Bootsy, whom he measures up first. As he feels Bootsy's breasts, she grins slyly, saying "I think I know these hands . . . you're next Purity". Rather than blowing Rick's cover and saving her female classmate from being sexually assaulted, Bootsy plays along. She endures being groped herself—she even seems to enjoy it—in order to help the

boys fulfil their own need to conquer Purity. In the same film, when Howie rips off

Rhonda's bikini, exposing her breasts, Rhonda laughs. Even though Rhonda and

Bootsy have no sexual interest in the boys, they allow the boys to use their bodies for

their own aims and are complicit with the boys' aggressive masculine sexuality. A

similar moment occurs at another point in the film when the camera pans to two

unnamed girls at the drive-in. The first turns to the second and says: "[d]on't look

now, but I think Paul's masturbating". The second whispers "[m]ake him stop!" The

first then replies "I can't. He's using my hand". The first girl, although deriving no

pleasure from the experience, passively allows the boy to use her hand to masturbate.

In each of these cases, the girls' bodies—and the boys' power over them—are

constructed as the source of considerable humour. Even the girls in the scenes giggle.

A biologically-derived masculine power is therefore depicted as extending well

beyond the male body into the environment and characters that surround it.

While the "good sports" are certainly valued in the films for the degree to

which they play along with masculinity, there is an "ideal" model of femininity in the

animal comedy. It is one in which feminine subjectivity is entirely fluid and subject

to change according to the requirements of masculinity. Wendy's evolution in the

Porky's films epitomises this, making her the ideal animal comedy female. In the first

film, Wendy is known to be a "sure-thing" who is willing to sleep with just about

anyone. Despite her apparent construction as a "slut"—a particularly evil word in

teen culture—she is great friends with all of the boys.[23] At the end of the first film, when Pee Wee has been unable to secure a sexual encounter, one of the boys asks Wendy if she will have sex with Pee Wee as a favour. She does, and as the credits roll, the sexual component of the narrative finally sees closure with Pee Wee losing his virginity. In *Porky's II*, Pee Wee realises that he likes Wendy romantically and wants to have her as a girlfriend. It is here that we find out that the "slut" rumours about Wendy are untrue. Wendy explains to Pee Wee that she has only "done it" three times. Pee Wee tells her that while he wanted the slut rumour to be true before, so that he could be assured that he might have sex with her, he no longer wants it to be. Instead, he wants her to be relatively chaste and therefore suitable as a girlfriend. He is reassured by Wendy that the slut rumour is false. In this way, the character of Wendy conveniently evolves so she can provide whatever feminine response is desired by Pee Wee. Feminine subjectivity is therefore not unified or stable, but ideally adaptable and accommodating.

Ashley in *Fraternity Vacation* evolves with a similar fluidity, again providing the requisite feminine response for each moment in the film. When Ashley uncovers the boys' plot to seduce her, she flees, understandably angry. She happens upon Wendell—Joe and Mother's nerdy, thoughtful friend—whose sensitivity wins her over. She immediately sleeps with him and professes her love. Ashley, who had until then been totally sure of herself in fending off the groping advances of the other

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[23] For an analysis of the construction of the "slut" in youth culture, see Emily White.

boys, is won over easily by little more than a sympathetic ear. The purpose of Ashley's evolution is to convey the film's moral lesson: that complete disrespect of women will not get you laid, but some superficial sensitivity will. When Joe and Mother find out that Wendell has "nailed" the girl they had been pursuing, they congratulate Wendell as if he has won some kind of prize. Rather than backing away from this praise—based as it is upon Ashley's construction as a trophy—Wendell and Ashley are thankful for it. Wendell's heroic, masculine status amongst his friends is confirmed, while Ashley stands there grinning modestly, as if to acknowledge herself as a marker of male power.

Though most of the girls in the animal comedy are "good sports" or accommodating, there are a number of characters who resist aggressive masculine sexuality. These are the girls who become the focus of the films' revenge plots and are thereby framed as "baddies" whose downfall the audience is encouraged to root for. In *Private School*, for example, Jordan initially invites the stares of the boys. When she emerges from a shower and realises she is being watched from the second storey window, she seems to enjoy it. Wrapped in a towel, she stands by the window to pose for the spying eyes. Dissatisfied that she is not offering more, Bubba reaches in and pulls off her towel, exposing her naked body to him and his friends. As this happens, the film cuts away to watch the boys (all standing on each other's shoulders) fall and hit the ground. The audience and the boys are denied a look at her body. The film thereby constructs a desire in both the boys and the audience to

see what Jordan seemed to promise us: her naked body. Because Jordan then spends

much of the film teasing the boys in the same way, by inviting them to look at her

body through flirtation, but then denying any chance that they will see her or "have"

her, she is constructed as manipulative and cold. Frustrated at their lack of power

over her, the boys lure her into Bubba's bedroom with the plan that Bubba will try to

have sex with her. They take bets on how far he will get and they hide in the closet to

obtain "proof". Bubba even sprays champagne on Jordan's clothes to force her to

undress. Although the boys are unsuccessful in their ultimate goal, the narrative

constructs Jordan as deserving of this treatment. In this world, where sexual power is

constructed as a product of biology, any girl who attempts to turn the tables is

perceived to be going against the natural order of things and is therefore deserving of

revenge.

Screwballs enacts revenge against Purity for similar reasons. The beginning of

the film charts the events leading up to the five central boys getting detention. In

each case, the boy's offence is sexual in nature, and Purity is involved in them being

caught. The boys' revenge is, of course, sexual in nature. However, Purity's

involvement in their detention is not the primary reason for the boys' decision to

target her. Rather, Purity becomes the object of revenge because she is beautiful yet

chooses to be unavailable. As the boys put it, she is a virgin and therefore a

"holdout". The implication is that the boys feel they have some right to her body

which she denies them. The boys respond aggressively by invading her house, trying

to hypnotise her, spying on her at the beach and trying to spike her drink with Spanish Fly—all in the hope that they will see her naked or get to have sex with her. Eventually, they line her homecoming dress with wire and use magnets to rip it off her body in front of the whole school. The boys forcibly take back the sexual power that the film constructs as rightfully theirs.

Purity's status as a virgin raises an important point about virginity in the animal comedy. While there is much discussion in the animal comedy about boys' virginity and/or level of sexual experience, there is little discussion of girls' virginity, which is not granted the same significance. Instead, virginity—for a girl—is depicted as anomalous. For example, in *Screwballs*, Brent says "[t]hat's none other than Purity Busch, the last holdout at T&A high". Howie confirms that "[s]he's the only girl who hasn't . . .". In *Fraternity Vacation*, the boys discuss Ashley's reluctance to acquiesce to any of the boys' aggressive sexual advances. J.C. says "[y]ou don't think she's weird or something, like a virgin?" Chas replies "[o]h come on J.C., if there's still a virgin left in this entire world over the age of thirteen I will personally put in a call to Ripley's". *Porky's*, too, reinforces female virginity as a non-issue. While the entire film is driven by a quest to pop Pee Wee's cherry and gain his friends as much sexual experience as they can get, the girls around them are all assumed to be already experienced. In constructing this myth surrounding female virginity (or its non-existence), the films normalise femininity that is always-already sexually experienced. The assumption made by the boys in the film is then, of course, that experience

necessarily results in perpetual willingness. This reinforces Randy Theissen's

assertion about *Porky's*. He writes: "[t]he masculine appreciation of the woman as

nothing more than a receptacle for the excited penis is expressed in Pee Wee's

comment, early in the film, that 'a hole is a hole'" (71). Girls' supposed sexual

experience conveniently renders them permanently "open".

There are generally two versions of femininity available to girls in the animal

comedy. Girls are either entirely complicit with masculine sexuality or they are

depicted as castrating monsters and/or frigid shrews. Indeed, *Screwballs* contains a

scene in which these two "modes" of femininity are explicitly compared side by side.

This scene takes place in a diner. Howie complains to Rhonda that he didn't order

sausage and, wanting to fix his incorrect order, she slowly takes the entire sausage in

her mouth and swallows it—without chewing—in one go. The boys are agog,

believing that this is the way Rhonda would perform oral sex. Purity then enters and

happens to order sausage. The boys watch eagerly to see if she will devour the

sausage in the same way. Purity, however, raises her fork, stabs the sausage, and

then slices it with her knife. The way she "castrates" the sausage is read as symbolic

of her treatment of boys. In the animal comedy being a virgin is the same as being a

castratrix.

Responding to the animal comedy's construction of masculinity, Theissen

offers a reading of *Porky's* in which he aims to undercut the power of masculinity by

emphasising the moments in the narratives where masculinity is revealed to be

particularly fragile. Theissen points out that in *Porky's*, the boys' raging drive for sex

is threatened with castration at every turn: a black, male figure wielding a machete

chases the boys from Cherry Forever's house; Miss Balbricker angrily grabs Tommy's

penis in the shower scene; and Porky himself denies them access to his strippers.

Thiessen argues that it is moments such as these that expose "the myths and

obsessions that mark it [masculinity] as being couched in fear and overlaid with

anxiety" (71). He writes that the "masculine persona represented by *Porky's* . . . is

actually a dysfunctional masquerade – porcine, excessive, artificial, and inadequate"

(70). Thiessen finds particular significance in the closing scene, in which Pee Wee's

triumphant sexual encounter runs side by side with the film's credits. Thiessen

argues that "[t]he juxtaposition of the conclusion of the film with the accreditation of

its makers ruptures the suture process, a process by which the viewer is seamlessly

and uncritically integrated into the world of the film by the careful effacing of all

evidence of its constructedness" (72). For Thiessen, *Porky's* functions as a

"deconstruction of traditional (American) masculine ideology—an exposition, and

indeed, a subversion of the values it purports to espouse" (67).

     While the moments of fragility highlighted by Thiessen certainly exist in the

film, they do not contradict its overall function as a masculine wish-fulfilment

fantasy. While the boy's masculinity is shown to be inadequate at times, the boys'

drive for sexual conquest is still fulfilled, along with the other goals in the film: to

humiliate Balbricker and to get revenge against Porky. I would argue that the many

moments of frustration in the film only encourage the audience to root for the boys'

goals more enthusiastically, inciting even greater jubilance when victory is achieved.

Despite the boys' masculinity being repeatedly called into question, their struggle to

fulfil their supposedly masculine desires still dominates the film and all the

characters in it. The film then makes an even stronger case for the "natural" social

dominance of masculinity: that in spite of its inadequacies, it is still victorious.

The closing scene in which Pee Wee finally has sex, which plays alongside the

credits, can be read as an extension of that message. In this film that is so rigidly

phallocentric and so violent toward all of its female characters who play along

willingly, the structure of the conclusion functions merely to tie up the loose ends

that were a logical conclusion of the relentless force of narrative. The off-hand way in

which the film neatly but briefly concludes the narrative alongside the credits works

to confirm the relative values of masculinity and femininity. Although the boys set

out with the ultimate goal of getting Pee Wee laid, in the end their triumph over

Porky is the highest validation of their manhood. Contest between men is—in the

animal comedy—the ultimate battle to confirm masculinity. With that settled,

"getting laid" is an afterthought that is neatly surmised as the audience basks in the

boys' defeat of Porky. The audience is offered a double pleasure: rolling the credits

allows the audience a kind of release, signifying the resolution of the boys' battle with

Porky that ended in triumph, and on the other side of the screen the boys' newly

confirmed masculinity comes full circle as Pee Wee gets laid. The final scene works

as a kind of appendix to say, "oh, and by the way, of course Pee Wee got laid; it all works out well for the boys in the end".

Although the world in the sex romp film might be entirely unrealistic, a camp wish-fulfilment fantasy for hegemonic masculinity, it makes a particularly powerful statement in the debate about masculinity and femininity in the late-1970s and 1980s. The level of violence towards girls exceeds that of the gross-outs, with female characters completely marginalised and positioned as passive victims or unknowing dupes. The boys in the films are an aggressive "biological" front, whose relentless pursuit of sex creates a narrative that drives insistently forward, carrying the audience with them. The films implicate the audience in the pursuit, often placing them in a predatory masculine position. Masculine dominance, even violence, are framed as "natural" and are bolstered by the grounding of masculine sexual desire in the discourse of adolescence.

By depicting masculine sexuality according to the universalised, biological discourse of adolescence, however, the sex romp films' undermine the traditional construction of masculinity as individualist. Every boy is depicted as having the same masculine body: one that places them at the mercy of a raging adolescent libido. Swept up by their uncontrollable sexual desire, the boys act as a "pack" rather than individuals. Forming a community driven by urges that can't be controlled, the boys become a relatively undifferentiated assembly of sexual energy.

The problem discussed by Jeffords, of how to reconstruct masculinity "successfully" in response to feminism, is felt quite acutely in the animal comedy. The approach is to try to reinforce the omnipotence of masculinity by staging a return to the body. The animal comedy depicts masculinity as emerging directly and uncontrollably from biology, presenting groups of males as being united by their shared corporeal and sexual desire, which are a direct extension of their masculinity. While the animal comedies function like the delinquency and slasher films to address an internal cultural rift, the way in which the films reconstruct masculine power— through communities of almost-indistinguishable boys—complicates their capacity to simultaneously reconstruct masculinity as individualist. The films offer a particularly compelling statement against feminism and conservative discourses but they are also evidence that the slasher film and the women's movement more broadly had a profound impact on the teen film's deployment of masculine individualism. The animal comedy's construction of communitarian masculinity suggests that the teen film genre was, in the 1980s, grappling with the problem of how to depict masculinity in an era when individualism could no longer be used as its unique characteristic.

Chapter Five
Finding the "Real Me": Negotiating Femininity in the Makeover Film

The last two chapters of this thesis discussed cycles of films that reached the

height of their popularity during what Bernstein calls the teen film's "golden age":

the 1980s. Indeed, that decade was a period of frenzied production for the teen film,

the end of which was marked by a period of self-reflexivity typical after such a peak.[24]

The late 1980s was marked by a number of tongue-in-cheek teen films, such as *Bill &*

Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989), and also a number of deeply satiric ones—*Heathers* in

particular. These films depict a self-awareness of patterns in characterisation,

narrative and form, which indicates that by the end of the 1980s, the teen film was

well-established as a genre. The teen film then dispersed in a number of directions.

The ironic distance achieved by the end of the 1980s opened the door for the

development of a number of black comedies focussed on youth, like *Rushmore* (1998)

and *Election* (1999). A number of "realist" films were also released in the early-mid-

1990s dealing with issues like race and class in the high school, such as *Higher*

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[24] For a discussion of this tendency, see John G. Cawelti. He argues:

> [o]ne can almost make out a life cycle characteristic of genres as they
> move from an initial period of articulation and discovery, through a
> phase of conscious self-awareness on the part of both creators and
> audiences, to a time when the generic patterns have become so well-
> known that people become tired of their predictability. It is at this
> point that parodic and satiric treatments proliferate and new genres
> gradually arise (200).

Learning and *Dangerous Minds* (both 1995). The experimentation caused by the

genre's dispersal meant that the next clear cycle did not emerge until after 1995 in the

wake of the immensely popular *Clueless*; this was the makeover cycle.

As the name suggests, each of the films in this cycle has, at its core, a

makeover. In each film, a relatively unpopular girl is given the "opportunity" to be

made over in the image of the most popular girls in school and in the process gain

beauty, popularity and power. The goal of each makeover is transformation—both of

the girls' physical appearances and of their individual and social identities.

The makeover as a vehicle for individual and social transformation is certainly

not an idea born in this cycle of teen films. It has been explored in a number of

notable Hollywood films. *My Fair Lady* (1964) and *Pretty Woman* (1990) are two

obvious examples. In these films, working-class women are made over and trained in

the cultural practices of upper-class life by men with whom they eventually fall in

love. This enables the women to escape the supposed oppression of their working-

class existence. There are also precursors to the makeover cycle in the teen film

genre. Alissa Quart cites *The Breakfast Club*, writing that when Claire turns Alison

from an "androgynous ball of drama into a dull but pretty girl", *The Breakfast Club*

gave birth to the teen make-over movie (85). *Heathers* is another precursor, in which a

teenage girl rebels against the power of the central clique at her school, partly by

rebelling against its image. *Pretty in Pink* (1986) is another example and is in many

ways an "anti-makeover" movie. A working-class teenager, Andie (Molly Ringwald),

develops a relationship with Blane (Andrew McCarthy), a member of the upper-class,

popular group at her school. Class-based tensions are expressed explicitly in the film,

particularly by friends of Andie and Blane, who are cynical about their relationship.

Clothing takes on class-based meanings in that Andie's class is initially marked by

her thrift-shop, retro fashion sense. She eventually uses this to make a powerful

statement to her wealthy classmates about her refusal to aspire to upper-class

culture.[25] Its overt focus on class distinguishes *Pretty in Pink* from the later films of

the makeover cycle, in which class is not an overt concern, something that will be

discussed in this chapter.

The makeover cycle is fundamentally concerned with the limits and

possibilities that come with changing one's appearance. The films each chart a

makeover and in doing so, construct two different kinds of feminine identity—

"before" and "after"—exploring the tensions that exist between the two. "Before" the

makeover, the subject's identity is constructed as inherent and individual, emerging

from within. "After" the makeover, the subject's identity is constructed according to

socially-determined markers of status. These films are therefore interested in the

tension between individual identity and communitarian identity, using a makeover

to explicitly examine the process of changing between the two.

So far in this thesis, I have demonstrated that since the delinquency cycle, the

teen film has disrupted the traditional constructions of communitarian-as-feminine

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[25] *Carrie* (1976) could also be considered an important makeover-cum-slasher film in which the horrific effects
of makeover are depicted.

and individualism-as-masculine. In this chapter, I show that the makeover cycle does too. I also argue that the makeover cycle extends the teen film's exploration of individualism and communitarian participation by problematising the notion that these values are, in fact, opposed. The makeover cycle's examination of contemporary feminine identity exposes the difficulty of forging an identity that is entirely individualist in a consumer-oriented context, offering an important take on the reconciliatory dilemma as the teen film genre moves into the new millennium. As well as *Clueless*, which has already been mentioned, the films discussed here are *She's All That* (1999), *Never Been Kissed* (1999), *Jawbreaker* (1999) and *Mean Girls* (2004).[26]

Before…

The films of the makeover cycle have narratives that are relatively similar. The central character and narrator of *Clueless* is Cher (Alicia Silverstone), a rich, pretty high school girl from Beverly Hills. When a new girl, Tai (Brittany Murphy), starts at school, Cher and her best friend Dionne (Stacey Dash) decide to adopt her as a "project" in order to help her become less socially "clueless". They dress her in the right clothes, improve her speech and vocabulary and advise her on appropriate friends and love interests. *She's All That* also sees a socially maligned girl

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[26] Both *Clueless* and *Jawbreaker* (to varying degrees) take elements of their plot and themes from novels. *Clueless* is an adaptation of *Emma* by Jane Austen, while *Jawbreaker* borrows the character name "Vylette" and certain themes regarding gender and repression from *Vilette* by Charlotte Bronte. A number of writers have discussed the connections between *Clueless* and *Emma* (see, for example, Lesley Stern or Jane Mills), while none (as far as I am aware) have discussed the connections between *Jawbreaker* and *Vilette*. While examining these literary links would no doubt provide insight into the shifting nature of gender roles and representations of femininity in cinema, it is outside the scope of this thesis, the focus of which is frontier mythology and its relationship with youth on screen.

transformed into someone pretty and popular. Laney Boggs (Rachael Leigh Cook) becomes the target of a bet when the class president and star athlete, Zach (Freddie Prinze Jr.), is challenged by his friend Dean (Paul Walker) to turn her into the prom queen. Laney's appearance is completely made over and in the process, Zach ends up falling for her. *Jawbreaker* charts the events surrounding the accidental murder of a popular high school girl, Elizabeth Purr (Charlotte Roldan), by her three best friends, Courtney (Rose McGowan), Marcie (Julie Benz) and Julie (Rebecca Gayheart). At the command of Courtney, the three girls try to cover up their involvement, but they are caught in their attempts by a nerdy, unpopular girl called Fern Mayo (Judy Greer). In exchange for Fern's silence, the girls promise to make her over, offering her popularity and power. *Never Been Kissed* follows Josie Geller (Drew Barrymore), a youthful-looking journalist who is asked to return undercover to high school to write a story about teenage life. A nerd when she originally attended school, Josie is still hopelessly incapable of fitting in with the cool crowd. Josie's popular brother Rob (David Arquette) returns to school with her in order to help her befriend the cool kids. Soon she is part of the popular group and her life is completely transformed in the process. Finally, *Mean Girls* follows Cady Heron (Lindsay Lohan) in her first year of high school. After being home-schooled by her zoologist parents in Africa for her entire life, Cady begins school in America as a 16-year-old, entirely unfamiliar with the rules and regulations of classroom and social life. She initially strikes up a friendship with two outsiders: Janis (Lizzy Caplan), who is a gothic artist, and

Damien (Daniel Franzese), who is gay. Then at lunch one day, Cady is suddenly invited to sit with "The Plastics", the three prettiest and most popular girls at school. Janis convinces Cady to accept The Plastics' invitation in order to spy, and report back to her and Damian about all the things they say. This anthropological experiment goes awry when Cady is adopted as a Plastic and begins to look, sound and act exactly as they do.

From the outset, the makeover films establish two different kinds of feminine social identity: popular and unpopular. And for girls, one's position is a measure of the degree to which one can perform hegemonic femininity. The popular girls are introduced with reference to consumption and beauty, and little else. For example, in *Clueless*, Cher is introduced to us via scenes in which she is seen shopping, hanging out at the mall, preening in front of the mirror and choosing an outfit for school. In *Jawbreaker*, the members of the head clique are introduced as "the beautiful ones, the flawless four". In *Mean Girls*, the head Plastic, Regina George (Rachel McAdams), is introduced as having two Fendi purses and hair that is insured for $10,000. The popular girls' identities appear to be entirely comprised of their appearance, constructed on the surface of their bodies.

The films take care to emphasise the amount of activity involved in the construction and practice of these popular feminine identities. The surfaces of popular girls' bodies are the site of often frenzied work that actively creates, every day, their outward appearance. Clothes are selected, combined and accessorised;

bodies are shaped, waxed, tanned and painted. Dorothy E. Smith discusses this

process of construction as it relates to feminine identity when she writes that "[i]n the

context of the discourse of femininity, a distinctive relation to self arises . . . as object

of work, even of a craft" (48). She observes:

> [t]he texts of the discourse of femininity index a work process
> performed by women. Its character as work is not highly
> visible because it is not accomplished as such by being paid or
> being recognizably a hobby. Nonetheless, it is consciously
> planned, takes time, involves the use of tools and materials and
> the acquired skills of its practitioners (Smith 44).

The films work to reinforce this practice as an important aspect of popular feminine

girlhood. *Clueless*, *Jawbreaker*, *She's All That*, *Never Been Kissed* and *Mean Girls* all

contain scenes in which a girl or group of girls participate in getting dressed for

events as significant as the prom and as (seemingly) insignificant as a day at school.

These scenes typically take the form of montage, in which the laborious process can

be summarised in under a minute of screen time. In these dressing montages,

relatively discontinuous shots of selecting garments, putting them on, and doing

one's make-up are tied together with a pop soundtrack. This technique constructs

getting dressed as a time-consuming process for girls, but the upbeat music also

constructs it as an energising and enjoyable one. In showing the labour required to

construct the popular feminine image, the films acknowledge that this femininity is,

indeed, a practice, and not a natural state. Popular femininity is depicted as being

actively constructed, with identity constituted not by an "inherent" self but by

design, in order to achieve conformity to communally recognised ideals. Popular femininity therefore contradicts traditional "individualist" ideals.

The frequent use of the mirror in these films reinforces my assertion that popular feminine identity is constructed with regard to external, social markers. It is partly in front of the mirror that the popular girls practice their orientation to their own bodies as objects of work that must be controlled and mastered. This practice has been dubbed "body scrutiny" by Kathleen Sweeney, who argues that the critical inspection of the body is an important part of "the performance of the feminine" (10). One telling example in which the mirror and the activity of body scrutiny appear occurs in *Mean Girls* when Cady is first invited back to Regina's house after school. The Plastics stand together in front of a full-length mirror and take turns scrutinising the aspect of their bodies they dislike the most: skin, thighs and "man shoulders". When The Plastics turn to Cady, expecting her to join in with their body critiques, Cady is unsure how to participate, as she is untrained in the work of body scrutiny. She pauses and timidly offers "I have really bad breath in the morning". The Plastics cringe. Cady has clearly not learned and practiced the art of body scrutiny as the other girls have, and the scene reinforces that popular femininity is communitarian, a learned performance that takes its cues from certain social norms.

In contrast to the popular girls, the unpopular girls are seemingly "unaffected" by the socially imposed pressures of femininity. The unpopular girls wear clothing that is either comparatively masculine (Tai and Laney), matronly (Josie and Fern) or

non-descript (Cady). The unpopular girls do not appear to employ the same grooming practices as the popular girls, like tweezing. Nor do they demonstrate any knowledge of how to apply make-up, needing more skilled girls to either apply it for them or teach them how to do it. In *Never Been Kissed*, Josie does apply make-up to herself, but does so excessively and garishly, demonstrating her lack of skill. While the appearance of the popular girls depicts their identity as a performance, the appearance of the unpopular girls is used as an instrument to depict them as less superficial and more "authentic".

The outward appearances of the unpopular girls are also depicted differently from the appearances of the popular girls. Popular femininity, and the objects used to construct it, is depicted as concealing the popular girls' identities, constructing new, superficial identities that mask the girls' real selves. By contrast, the clothes of the unpopular girls are depicted as an extension of their real selves, revealing the essence of their identity rather than concealing it. After the unpopular girls' identities have initially been established with their clothing, other devices are used to confirm that the girls' appearances are an accurate reflection of their character. In *Clueless*, for example, when Cher and Dionne meet Tai in P.E. class, Tai is wearing loose, dirty jeans and a flannel shirt. She is contrasted with the rest of the class who all wear tight-fitting, black-and-white clothes. Tai's clothes are used to position her, as Cher states, as "clueless". Tai then demonstrates her social awkwardness when she mistakes a discussion about the free availability of "Coke" (as in Coca Cola) as a

discussion about cocaine. Tai's "cluelessness" is confirmed to extend much deeper than her dress sense. This reading is reinforced by the way in which the unpopular girls are captured by the camera. When we first see Tai in her jeans and flannel shirt, she is captured in a slow-moving panning shot that takes in her entire body from the feet up. The way this shot is constructed encourages the audience not just to look at her entire body (a simple medium shot would suffice) but to read her appearance, slowly and deliberately. The audience is invited to take in every detail from her shoes to her hair and encouraged to take a deeper meaning from it, seeing her appearance as metonymic of her identity.

In *Jawbreaker*, Fern is similarly constructed. As Elizabeth, Julie, Courtney and Marcie march down a school corridor in the opening shot wearing bright, revealing clothes, Fern emerges in the foreground wearing flat shoes, brown slacks and a brown cardigan. After Fern nervously enters the opening shot in front of the popular girls, she scurries to get out of their way and she drops her papers, revealing her awkward appearance to be a direct articulation of her physical awkwardness. Like the scene in *Clueless* involving Tai, this scene is shot in slow motion, inviting the audience to focus on Fern's appearance as being particularly critical for establishing her identity. The use of continuity in these scenes that introduce the unpopular, unfashionable girls suggests a unified subjectivity. This contrasts with the separate, discontinuous shots used in the popular girls' dressing montages, which suggest a fragmented subjectivity.

The differences between popular and unpopular feminine identity are again reinforced by the relative absence or de-emphasis of scenes depicting the unpopular, unfashionable girls in the process of getting dressed. Whereas the feminine appearances of the popular girls are revealed to be the product of effort and work, there is no such representation of work going into the appearances of the unpopular girls. Appearances that diverge from the hegemonically feminine, like Fern's, Tai's or Laney's, are not acknowledged to be the product of conscious activity. We do not see Janis in *Mean Girls* get dressed in her purple tuxedo with ruffled shirt for the prom, although we do see Regina as she dons her pink, size 6 dress. Fern is not shown to examine her reflection in the mirrors at school, although Marcie, Courtney and Julie certainly do. Laney's paint-spattered overalls are not at the centre of a musical montage in which she carefully selects them from her wardrobe and puts them on. For the unpopular girls, identity manifests seamlessly on the surface of the body in an appearance that is a direct, unselfconscious extension of personality rather than a product of conscious work. The popular, feminine girls' identities have been actively constructed and are therefore depicted as a facade. When we look at the unpopular girls we are supposedly seeing their "real" selves, but when we look at the popular girls, we are seeing a social construction. In the pre-makeover phase, the films therefore construct two kinds of identity as available for teenage girls. One is inherent and authentic, albeit unpopular, while the other is constructed and therefore inauthentic, but the pay-off is social success.

In depicting a tension between these two kinds of identity, the makeover films illustrate a paradox that exists in American conceptions of identity. The following quote from Hine illustrates this paradox:

> Erikson once observed that the freedom to change – the belief that one can suddenly become someone else – is a particularly American dimension of identity. There has probably never been a culture in which the quest for an individual identity has been as important, and thus as fraught with problems, as that of the United States. Americans believe that each individual is unique. We learn that any boy or girl in the country can grow up to be a billionaire, a rock idol, or president of the United States (Hine 41).

In this extract, Hine floats between two conceptions of identity. One is found—the result of a "quest" for one's own "unique" identity—and one is chosen from the infinite range of available social roles.

The paradox Hine describes has its origins in frontier mythology. The frontier allows for one's identity to be found, as the freedom of the wilderness allows individuals to finally assert or express an internal, essential yearning that was unrecognised when they were part of a community. At the same time, the frontier allows one's identity to be chosen, as the infinite possibilities of the wilderness allow individuals to adopt any identity they choose. The frontier, therefore, provides the ultimate freedom—of expression and choice. While a paradox does exist between these two kinds of identity, an individualist identity, either forged or liberated, is ultimately privileged over a communitarian identity or social role. In frontier mythology like the captivity narratives, for example, communitarian identity, or that

defined by one's social role, is constructed as a compromised or counterfeit identity. Prior to a trying wilderness experience, one's identity was "weak" or untested, with the resulting strength of individual will defined largely as a product of being exposed to the challenges of the frontier. One's "true" identity is forged or uncovered in the wilderness once the constraints and protections of community have been cast off.

While Hine's statement, above, emphasises the egalitarian nature of these American conceptions of self—that "any boy or girl" can choose their identity—individualist and communitarian identity are typically gendered in specific ways, as I have discussed in this thesis. While this tradition is problematised in the slasher and the animal comedy, when it comes to the theme of makeover and appearance, there are limits around how masculinity can be depicted. Masculine identity is depicted as stable, emanating from within. In *Revenge of the Nerds*, for example, the nerds stand up and assert their right to be their "nerdy" selves, free from persecution, rather than submit to a makeover that will turn them into jocks.

When boys are given a makeover in the teen film, the makeover doesn't function in the same way that it does for girls. For example, at the end of *Grease* (1978), Danny (John Travolta) and Sandy (Olivia Newton John) each make themselves over into the image that they believe the other wants; Danny dresses as a jock and Sandy dons a tight, sexy, black outfit. When Danny's friends see him they laugh. His outfit is structured as a comical masquerade, one that constructs a flimsy façade over

his "real" self, which still manages to shine through.[27] When they see Sandy,

however, they wolf whistle, impressed with her new image. She embraces all the

behaviours that wearing such an outfit entails, working hard to be sexually enticing.

When Danny sees Sandy has donned an image appropriate to him and his "greaser"

lifestyle, he quickly sheds his letterman sweater, abandoning what was a hopeless

charade to begin with. Sandy, however, remains a changed woman. The scene

depicts the notion of a fluid or changeable masculine identity as a source of humour.

When it comes to consumption and socially-determined markers of identity, actively

tinkering with identity through appearance—playing with one's communitarian

identity—is a narrative appropriate only to girls.

In the makeover cycle, identity constructed in relation to the peer

group/community is equated with hegemonic femininity and is formally reinforced

as a "performance". It is granted no authenticity, hence the significance of the name

of the popular clique in *Mean Girls*: The Plastics. In their construction of the

unpopular girls, however, the makeover films do appear to problematise the

traditional alignment of the female with communitarian values. Before their

makeovers, the unpopular girls have distinctive, unified, and inherent subjectivities.

The unpopular girls are initially depicted as having stable identities, emanating from

within, that are not defined by (but merely expressed by) their outward appearance.

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[27] Stifler's (Seann William Scott) transformation in *American Pie: the Wedding* functions similarly: his "new" self is clearly a costume, designed to elicit laughs.

Before the girls' makeovers, the films initially offer alternative depictions of girlhood in which female identities are not solely aligned with communitarian participation.

…and After

The differences between the popular and unpopular girls are then temporarily effaced in the films by the makeover. Although the makeovers themselves occur in different ways in each film, they consistently function as a device to "socialise" the unpopular individuals. In *Mean Girls* and in *Never Been Kissed*, Cady and Josie gradually adopt the looks and mannerisms of the popular cliques as a result of being imbedded in them. In *Jawbreaker*, *Clueless* and *She's All That*, a makeover is administered to the unpopular girls, transforming their appearances almost instantly. In each case, the makeover attempts to perform a conversion: transforming the outsiders into girls who can successfully project conventional femininity and training the girls whose identities were previously constructed as authentic in the art of conscious performance. In each case, the individualist identity is turned into a communitarian one.

In the scenes where the unpopular girls undergo their transformation and reveal their feminine, post-makeover selves, the films construct the girls' appearances as the product of activity. The makeover itself is, after all, the epitome of beauty work, which is represented in the three films that administer "instant" makeovers to their girls. In *She's All That*, for example, Zach's sister Mac is recruited to perform the

physical makeover on Laney while Zach's soccer team is simultaneously recruited to

clean her house so that she is free to go out to a party.[28] While Mac diligently works

on Laney's body—tweezing, styling hair and applying make-up—a team of boys

scrubs Laney's house from top to bottom. The makeover of Laney and the makeover

of the house are aligned, as the hard work of the boys is intercut with Mac's beauty

work in a musical montage. This use of montage, as mentioned earlier, constructs

feminine beauty work as a laborious, transformative and self-conscious process.

Laney's new identity is therefore depicted as being very different from her original

"authentic" self, which was seemingly more natural.

After much primping and preening and the occasional vocabulary lesson, the

girls are transformed into confident models of feminine beauty. As a result, Tai,

Laney, Josie, Fern and Cady are given the chance to change their status from

outsiders, losers and geeks to conventionally beautiful, popular girls. Via the

makeover the girls are also given the chance of a better social position. In order to

gain social power—in the high school, at least—one must craft one's outward

appearance in order to successfully perform femininity. In this way, the makeover

film normalises social outcasts (Quart 87). As Quart observes, if a character starts out

as disaffected and shunned "we can be assured their marginality is only

momentary—a quick costume change will seamlessly transform them into insiders"

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[28] The reference to Cinderella here is all too clear. In this case, Zach and "Mac"—notably, the name of a popular cosmetics brand—take on the roles of fairy godmothers in order to help Laney escape her oppressive existence and become a princess.

(81). When girls change their image in the makeover film, their social identities

change too.

The films depict this kind of social agency ambivalently, however. As

Elizabeth A. Ford and Deborah C. Mitchell have noted, a makeover is essentially

about power (68); in remodelling someone, or even oneself, to fit a particular image,

that image—and those who control it—are being granted the power to define what is

beautiful, popular and socially acceptable. In this case, it is the popular clique that

makes the rules. As soon as the unpopular girls are initiated into the cliques they

become aware of the guidelines for conduct that they must follow if they are going to

maintain their social status. In a number of the films, these rules are explicitly spelt

out. In *Mean Girls*, The Plastics tell Cady that on Wednesdays they all have to wear

pink, and that they can't wear jeans more than once a week. In *Jawbreaker*, the girls

tell Fern "we never, ever eat at lunch period". In *Clueless*, Tai is informed of who she

should and should not date. Many films go so far as to assert that the cliques'

internal social structures are not the product of friendship or a genuine like for one

another, for example, in *She's All That*, *Never Been Kissed* and *Mean Girls*. Rather, they

suggest that the cliques are the product of socially constructed systems of power

relations. *Heathers* self-reflexively acknowledges this aspect of popular femininity

when Veronica, discussing her friendship with the three girls who form the

"Heathers" clique, says "[i]t's like, they're people I work with, and our job is being

popular and shit". In this case Veronica demonstrates little emotional attachment to

her friends, in fact, she secretly dislikes them, and admits they share a friendship because they are all committed to the "job" of maintaining their popularity. What this suggests is that the makeover, rather than creating a new identity, actually involves the repression of one.

Indeed, girls in many of the films of the makeover cycle and its precursors feel that popularity entails a denial of one's own desires and resignation to unhappiness. These girls are not always the subjects of makeover either, but are often established members of the popular cliques. In *Heathers*, after Heather Number One (Kim Walker) takes part in a sexual encounter she did not want, but which was politically necessary, she stares at herself in a bathroom mirror and spits at her reflection with scorn. It is clear that she is disgusted with herself, having betrayed her own desires to fulfil her social role as a willing, sexual object. In *Mean Girls*, Gretchen continually expresses her dismay over the limitations placed on her life due to her involvement with The Plastics. But, as Cady says: "Gretchen knew it was better to be in The Plastics, hating life, than to not be in it at all." Claire in *The Breakfast Club* admits "I hate it! I hate having to go along with everything my friends say!" In these examples it is the popular girls themselves who admit that their feminine identities require the denial of their own desires. Popularity, and the performance of femininity that maintains it, is therefore constructed as a denial of the self.

Popular femininity is also represented as repressive in the way that the original personas of the transformed girls continually reassert themselves,

persistently reminding them of what they have unsuccessfully tried to abandon. The films suggest that the post-makeover images projected by the girls are disguises, covering up their real identities with more or less satisfactory results. Many of the girls express discomfort about their new looks. Tai tries to pull a mid-riff top down to cover her stomach, glancing at Cher with doubt. Laney descends the stairs elegantly to reveal her new look to Zach but she clumsily stumbles at the bottom. Cady falls into a bin when she attempts to strut down the hall with The Plastics. In each case, the seamlessness of a confident femininity is broken and the "original" character emerges, making the new look appear as costume. The made-over girl's appearance then becomes a form of masquerade. There is, then, a tension between a girl's identity at the beginning of the film and her identity after the makeover. Although the films explore feminine identity as a site of social agency, feminine identity is also depicted as requiring the repression of the girls' "real" selves.

This repression of the "real" self eventually reaches a crisis in each film, at which point the girls must either abandon their attempts to make themselves over or negotiate more fulfilling identities. In *Jawbreaker*, for example, Fern is initially transformed into "Vylette", Fern's confident, sexy and powerful alter ego. Vylette is thought to be a new student by the rest of the students at school and—with the help of Courtney—Vylette gains an immediate cult following. Vylette's popularity soon overshadows Courtney's, whose jealousy eventually drives her to reveal Vylette's "real" persona. Courtney plasters posters of Fern's yearbook photo all over the

school. Vylette is then confronted with images of herself as Fern, her pre-makeover self, forcing a crisis of identity in which she grapples with the unpleasant prospect of returning to her former life.

What this moment confronts Fern (and the audience) with is a complex question about what constitutes contemporary identity, in particular, youthful feminine identity. Fern is "magically" transformed into Vylette, gains an entirely new social status and remains completely unrecognised by all of her fellow students; this suggests that feminine identity may be infinitely changeable, constituted by nothing more than elements of outward appearance. However, the film also represents identity as something much deeper. Fern's new identity, Vylette, is depicted as inherently unstable because it was obtained through superficial changes to appearance. The unnaturalness of Fern's new position upsets the school's usual social order and the girls' plan inevitably unravels. After Vylette is revealed as a social queue-jumper, taking her place as a popular girl out of turn, the students react in anger and mob her. They leave her lying in the foetal position in the school hallway, dazed and covered in torn posters. Fern's makeover is thereby represented as a deception, a denial of her "real" identity that must be punished. As Julie's statement in the film suggests, "you can't hide the truth with a makeover".

Inevitably, the communitarian identity constructed through changes to appearance is represented as identity-in-crisis. It is here that the teen makeover films work differently from films like *My Fair Lady* and *Pretty Woman*, in which the central

characters eventually adapt successfully to their new personas. The subjects of

makeovers in the teen makeover cycle are never able to enact a clean break with their

former identities. Rather, the "new" personalities are to varying degrees depicted as

volatile and unable to be maintained. The identity crisis is notionally resolved when

the girls "return" to their original selves. In *Clueless*, Tai eventually goes out with the

"stoner" she first fell for, Travis. In *Jawbreaker*, Fern eventually works together with

Julie to expose Courtney's evil plan to frame an innocent man for Liz's murder. In

Never Been Kissed, Josie saves a fellow geek from being humiliated by the popular

girls at the prom, which spurs her to admit her deception. In *She's All That*, Laney

refuses to go along with Dean's sexual advances and fights back, blasting him with a

self-defence siren. And in *Mean Girls*, The Plastics disband after their backstabbing is

revealed to the entire school, and Cady decides to give up her Plastic ways.

At the end of the makeover films, it is often not just the subject of the

makeover who realises the falseness of a communitarian identity; other initially-

popular girls do too. The makeover subject's crisis of self typically corresponds with

a crisis in the clique, during which many of the popular members question their own

membership, and the cliques eventually disband or change their behaviour. In

Clueless, Tai's feelings for Travis are part of what inspires Cher to admit to her own

feelings for Josh, creating an environment in their friendship circle of acceptance

rather than conformity and constraint. In *She's All That*, the head of the clique is

eventually abandoned by the other girls, who finally see the extent of her

superficiality. In *Never Been Kissed*, Josie's admission about her real identity actually gains the respect and admiration of the popular girls, who turn up in the final scene to cheer her on as she meets the man she loves. In *Jawbreaker*, the school is finally freed from the tyranny of Courtney when she is exposed for covering up the death of Elizabeth Purr. And in *Mean Girls*, Regina George is hit by a bus, which forces her to consider her nasty behaviour. When she returns to school, she channels her anger into lacrosse. In each case, the implication is that the hierarchical structure of the cliques has been destroyed in favour of a revised social order in which individuals are more free to be "themselves".

A Return to the "Real Me"?

The scenes in which communitarian femininity is revealed to be a masquerade are markedly similar to the moment in *Grease* when Danny's makeover is abandoned as a charade. In this way, the makeover films could be read as an attempt to screen a certain mode of female subjectivity as individualist, rather than traditionally communitarian. Indeed, the message of the films is that girls betray their own desires in order to obtain social power and that one can "find" one's authentic self when one is free from communitarian, feminine expectations. The films then notionally "return" the subjects of makeover to their real, individualist selves.

The overarching message of the films—that the unpopular girls re-assert their "real" selves in order to find happiness—can be problematised by examining the

girls' ultimate identities. The "real" selves that these girls appear to "return" to are

constructed via a number of external, social markers that indicate a continued

engagement with and negotiation of social, communitarian identity. The scene from

The Breakfast Club in which Claire transforms Alison provides an example. Allison's

original appearance is "gothic", in that she has dark hair and heavy black make-up.

When Claire is finished with the makeover, Allison's hair is pulled back and she has

been transformed into a fresh-faced, clean-cut girl in white. Andrew (Emilio Estevez)

comments that he can see her face, and Claire says: "[y]ou look so much better

without all that black shit around your eyes". The implication is that the layers of

black have been removed, her face has been revealed, hidden before behind her hair,

and that we are finally witnessing Allison's "real" or "natural" beauty, the way she

looks underneath her gothic facade. However, in the makeover scene we see Claire

reshaping Allison's brows, applying fresh mascara and liner, applying lip gloss, and

re-styling her hair. Although Allison is made to look "natural", she is far from it.

Rather, her carefully crafted femininity is naturalised. In the makeover cycle, subjects

of the makeover end the film in a state than is anything but natural. Tai, Fern, Josie,

Laney and Cady end the films decidedly more coiffed than they were at the

beginning. The "real" identities that emerge at the close are a negotiation between

the girls' original "authentic" selves and the constructed social identities that sprang

from the makeovers. The girls end the films permanently altered by their

engagements with beauty culture and for each girl, their ultimate identities are partly

expressed via the communitarian system of feminine beauty.

The individualist nature of the girls' final identities is negotiated in a number

of other ways as well. One of the ways in which the girls supposedly assert their

"real" identities at the end of the films is via a romance: a social relationship. In

Clueless for example, Cher initially convinces Tai to pursue Elton (Jeremy Sisto)

instead of Travis, because she feels he is more suitable. When Elton aggressively

comes onto Cher only to then abandon her in "the valley", Cher realises her error,

although it is too late. Tai is devastated over the rejection and Cher finally realises

that in order to keep Tai as a friend she must accept Tai's feelings for Travis. Tai then

appears to reassert her own desires, which have been temporarily derailed by her

quest for popularity. Travis is the main symbol through which Tai asserts her own

individuality. In *Mean Girls*, Cady, in her pre-makeover state, falls for Aaron Samuels

(Jonathon Bennett), who is unfortunately the ex-boyfriend of Regina. Although

Aaron initially returns those feelings, he changes his mind as Cady turns into a

"clone" of The Plastics. When Cady eventually abandons her Plastic persona and

returns to her old self, Aaron also returns to her. Her union with Aaron is a symbol

that she has found "herself" again. In *She's All That*, Laney is the mother figure in her

household. She is completely self-sacrificing and is always looking after other

people. When she finally decides to go out with Zach, it is depicted as her going after

what she really wants—indeed, it is what she should want as a teenage girl. At the

end of the film, Laney's art teacher catches up with her to tell her that her latest painting is her best yet, and has been submitted to a number of art schools. Her teacher says she has spent four years trying to "open Laney up" and tells her that she shouldn't let go of whatever is responsible for her stirring work. It's clear with Laney's lingering gaze in Zach's direction that Zach is responsible. He has supposedly brought out Laney's real self. While consumption and beauty are aligned with the social/peer group and are problematic for an individualist identity, romantic love in the makeover film is constructed as private or personal and is therefore entirely fulfilling: an expression of the "self". Love and attraction are drives from within derived from one's "true" self, which means that the admission of feelings for a particular boy—and it is *always* a boy—is the main way a girl can express her own individualism.

It is not just the subjects of makeover who come to define their individualism through a social, heterosexual relationship. A number of the popular girls also negotiate identities at the end of the films that are partly defined by relationships with boys. Wald observes: "[w]hereas at the beginning of *Clueless* Cher's identity is defined almost entirely through her role as a consumer . . . gradually she learns to re-conceptualise her desires, realising that fulfilment lies not merely or only in the possession of material goods but in the possession of a boyfriend" (64). Cher "does not need to be 'convinced' to like Josh, but eventually comes to recognise romance as the object of her 'own' desire" (Wald 67). Like Laney in *She's All That*, Cher spends

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the film working to organise other people's desires. Her union with Josh is then

constructed as an expression of her own desire. In *Jawbreaker*, Julie unites with Zack

at the moment she abandons the central clique. As she realises that the clique does

not fulfil her desires, she finds a boy who can. And in *Mean Girls*, when the clique

eventually disbands, Gretchen is able to finally express her desire for the boy she has

longed for—but was forbidden from seeing—throughout the film. Love in the

makeover films is construed as occurring in spite of the social obstacles that stand in

its way. In this way, the heterosexual partnerships that form at the ends of the films

are constructed as a part of individual identity that exists in defiance of

communitarian norms. This represents a critical gender difference in narratives of

individualism as they occur in the teen film: while for a male, a love interest

represents the static, the domestic and the social, for a female, a love interest becomes

an expression of her own desire, an extension of individual identity.

All of these films conclude in the same way: at the prom or a similarly

romantic event, such as a wedding. This warrants further discussion, as the prom-

type closures provide an important point of culmination for the films' narratives of

femininity, social and individual identity and romance. Amy L. Best has discussed

the function of the prom as an important site in American culture in her work *Prom

Night: Youth, Schools, and Popular Culture*. Her discussion reinforces my analysis of

feminine identity as complex and contradictory; for Best, the prom is both an

opportunity to reinvent oneself and to be oneself. She writes that for many girls, the

prom is "an occasion to shed one's school identity and become someone else, even if only for one night" (18). Best has noted the way this narrative plays out in certain teen films. Citing *She's All That* and *Never Been Kissed*, Best observes:

> as the narratives unfold, the central female characters, both wallflowers, submit to a series of changes culminating in their emergence as beauty queens at the prom. Each wins the adulation of her peers, and best of all, each gets the man of her dreams. In these Hollywood productions, the process of getting ready for the prom is a privileged space in which bodies are magically reworked and identities completely refashioned (35).

For Best, the prom is, among other things, "a space of infinite possibility and self-(re)invention, a rich tapestry of spectacle and pageantry" (11) in which a new self can be created.

The prom is also a space of ideological "constraint" (Best 11). The prom as a moment of possible self-reinvention is a gendered construction: "this narrative is almost always told through the voice of a girl and the transformation that occurs is mapped fundamentally through her body" (Best 35). This reinforces the idea that a malleable identity is facilitated by social mechanisms, and therefore a narrative not available to boys. Further, Best discusses the prom as an event that functions to regulate the sexual, racial, and class behaviours of youth, and it seems to emerge most strongly as a critical social practice in particularly conservative periods in American history (Best 8-9). Best argues that the prom functions to elevate "traditional notions of heterosexual courtship and dreamy romance" (8). This enabled schools "to contain what seemed to be an urgent problem not only among

[the] nation's youth but for the future of democracy" (Best 8). Best goes on: "[b]y

enlisting youth to participate in middle-class rituals like the prom, schools were able

to advance a program that reined in students' emerging and increasingly public

sexualities. Idealising dating and romance, proms championed heterosexuality" (10).

The makeover films therefore function much like the prom-type events that are

situated at the climax of many of the narratives: cultural sites that privilege

heterosexual, white, middle-class models of consumption. Romance and biologically-

circumscribed gender roles are depicted as moments of self-expression for the

characters.

At the closures, the films appear to enact a reconciliation between the

traditional ideals that have been problematised elsewhere in the teen film genre. The

subjects of the makeovers articulate the incompatibility between individual identity

and communitarian constraints. They are invited to participate in social groupings

that offer particularly appealing rewards: friendship, popularity and beauty.

However, the repression of individual desire that is required to participate

permanently in these groups is unsustainable, and in each case the central girl

reasserts her own identity. Remaining faithful to individuality is therefore

constructed as the goal of the films' resolutions, but this ideal can only be realised

through the negotiation of social constructs. The girls then come to embody both

possibilities of individualism and community, in that they reinforce their

individualism via elements associated with community. This suggests that while the

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masculine delinquent body was once an ideal place for problematising the

contradictions between individualism/community in the teen genre, the feminine

body of the makeover might offer an ideal place to reconcile them.

The endings of the makeover films are far from convincing, however, and do

very little to assure the audience that social constraints and hierarchical structures

have been successfully negotiated. Particularly when the films are considered

alongside important precursors like *The Breakfast Club*, *Heathers* and *Pretty in Pink*, the

idea that individualism and community might have been neatly reconciled with some

make-up remover and a romantic sub-plot is quite unbelievable. At the end of *The*

Breakfast Club, for example, although the characters use their weekend detention

session to bond over their experiences of being positioned at various rungs on the

social ladder, there is an acknowledgement that little will have permanently changed

come Monday when they return to school. There is a sense of understanding that

they can never truly be friends and that each individual will go back to feeling

unfairly repressed by the school's social structures. This is openly acknowledged in

Heathers. In trying to advocate his killing of one of the Heathers, J.D. nonetheless

offers an incisive observation: "the only place different social types can truly get

along is in heaven". Though Veronica initially disagrees with him, she is finally

forced to concur. When J.D.'s reign of terror ends, rather than disbanding the

hierarchical structure altogether, Veronica inserts herself as head by usurping the red

scrunchie: the film's symbol of power. Hierarchy is maintained, but with the

inference that it might now be a little more inclusive. Veronica's first act of power is

to befriend the school's most notable social pariah: the fat girl in a wheelchair.

Finally, *Pretty in Pink* offers further evidence that a romance can only overcome so

much. Throughout the film, Andie works to assert her individual identity in the face

of discrimination from her wealthier, more popular classmates. She is eventually

accepted by Blaine, a male love interest, but this trajectory of social inclusion has

limits: there is no possibility that the popular girls will eventually befriend her.

The makeover cycle does little to overturn these representations in that the

social brutality depicted throughout the films cannot easily be reconciled by the

happy endings in which everyone suddenly appears to get along. In fact, there is a

sense in all the films that the attempt to reconcile the tensions between individual and

communitarian identity is not altogether genuine. *Clueless*, for example, tries hard

not to take itself seriously. The whole film and the closure carry with them such a

sense of lurid fun that it is impossible to take the overly dreamy conclusion literally.

Other films work similarly, with suitably non-committal, often schmaltzy endings.

Never Been Kissed and *She's All That*, for example, end in scenes that are eerily like

fairy tales. The unpopular girls' Prince Charmings come and sweep them off their

feet and the popular girls are won over as their new friends. In *Mean Girls*, Cady

wins a math tournament for the school and is then crowned "Spring Fling Queen"—a

pair of accolades that are particularly unlikely to be won by a single teen film

character. She selflessly breaks up her tiara and shares it with a number of girls, both

popular and unpopular, to symbolise the new regime of egalitarianism that has supposedly been created. In each of the films, the ethereal prom-like setting, the idealistic closure and the culmination in romance give the audience a sense that it is witnessing a fantasy. So while the films do appear to attempt a reconciliation of individualism and community via femininity, they are tinged with doubt about their capacity to do so.

It is clear that a number of the questions set loose in earlier teen film cycles have remained as important problems in the teen film genre. The makeover films use feminine identity to depict the difficulty of reconciling individualism and community in a consumer-driven world. While communitarian participation in the makeover films is the gateway to social power and success it entails the repression of individualism. The central girl appears to reinstate her individualism at the end of the films, but it involves a degree of communitarian participation. While this might be read as a reconciliation, the films depict this supposed resolution as the stuff of fantasy.

More troubling than the makeover cycle's failure to reconcile individualism/community is the new question it raises about the notional divide between individualism and communitarian participation in American culture. In the delinquency cycle, the rebel figure depicts the trauma associated with being torn between two ultimately opposing forces when his individual desires clash painfully with the pressures of communitarian participation. At the closure of the delinquency

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films, the rebel figure, unlike the outlaw hero, fails to reconcile the tensions. In the makeover film, individualism and communitarian participation are not as clearly diametrically opposed. The issue the films address is that there is a fundamental disagreement between one's individual identity and one's communitarian identity and each has the capacity to betray or conceal the other. The problem then is that it remains unclear who really holds the ultimate power to define an individual's "identity" in the contemporary social world—the individual or the community. The pervasiveness of commodity culture is such that even a completely unselfconscious, "inherent" identity is expressed on the surface of the body by consumer products that are defined by socio-economic mechanisms beyond individual control. The films make it impossible to imagine how an individualist identity might be successfully constituted without the involvement of certain communitarian values, such as those derived from commodity culture. The question remains about whether identity is internal and individual, external and communitarian, or an uncomfortable amalgamation of the two. Given that the figure of the unfettered, unentangled individual is central to American mythology, I anticipate that this is a question to which future teen cycles will return.

Themes about individualism/community aside for one moment, the makeover cycle represents a shift in ideas about consumption and the body when compared to its precursors. Although the films do not position issues of class as central (in the same way as *Pretty Woman* and *My Fair Lady*), the makeovers take place within

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middle- or upper-class societies and always function to orient the girls toward a mode of consumption that remains unquestioned. This contrasts with earlier teen films from the 1980s in which conspicuous consumption was problematised. Quart has observed this shift in teen films produced since the early 1990s: "[t]een blockbusters—among them *Clueless*, *Bring it On*, *She's All That*, *Legally Blonde*, and *Varsity Blues*—had become the stories of insiders: sports stars, beauties, rich kids, and cheerleaders. These kids live in the blondest, richest suburbs, suburbs without seasons" (Quart 78). She observes that "[o]nce, the in-crowd were ice princesses and authoritarian despots: the girls in 1989's *Heathers* or the malevolent pranksters who think drenching a freak in pig's blood is funny, pace *Carrie*" (Quart 80). Part of the ruling cliques' villainy is their brand consciousness: in *Heathers* "Veronica curses them as 'Swatch dogs and Diet Coke heads'" (Quart 81). The Heathers' nastiness is an extension of their valorisation of consumer culture. In the subsequent 1990s makeover films, while the "despotism" of the central cliques is certainly critiqued, their commitment to consumption is considered separately. The makeover films draw a distinction between despotism, which is bad, and conspicuous consumption, which is unproblematic, even good. These films therefore lack the economic critique of earlier films like *Heathers* or *Pretty in Pink*, in which consumption is approached with deep suspicion.

The films' construction of the feminine body also remains largely unquestioned. While the theme of "makeover" implies that clothing and make-up

might be the most important aspects of feminine identity, the body itself is a critical foundation. Although the extreme changes to hair, wardrobe and beauty practice imply that anything is possible in the realm of makeover—that anyone can be turned into a beauty queen—the girls at the centre of makeover transformations start out with bodies that basically conform to dominant conceptions of beauty. Having the "right" body is absolutely critical if a makeover is going to be successful; being fat or ugly are deal breakers. In *She's All That*, Laney removes her overalls at the beach to reveal her slender and shapely body underneath. Dean suddenly realises that although Laney was previously unpopular, her body beauty gives her the right characteristics to be a popular girl after all. In *Clueless*, Tai's makeover is in part achieved by her learning to do aerobics to tone her behind. In *Mean Girls*, the first conversation Cady has with The Plastics is over lunch, during which Regina asks Cady for advice on the nutritional content of the cafeteria food, saying she wants to lose three pounds. Later, Cady and Janis exploit Regina's diet consciousness. In order to try to "de-throne" her, they trick her into eating high calorie weight-gain bars. Regina's popularity begins to flag. This is connected with her growing body when an overweight girl calls her "fatass". What these scenes indicate is that in the makeover film, the shape of a girls' body will ultimately determine her social limits and possibilities.

The makeover films do little to challenge the dominant tropes of femininity; in these films, the girls negotiate their identity within the spheres of consumption,

beauty and romance. However, the makeover cycle demonstrates that the teen film

genre continues to examine contemporary uncertainties about the fundamental

American ideals of individualism and communitarian participation and their shifting

relationships with gender. In addition, an interesting new problem emerges: the two

values that have consistently been constructed as inherently contradictory

throughout the teen film cycles discussed here are, in this cycle's explorations of

contemporary feminine identity, not so clearly oppositional. It seems therefore, that

the teen film will continue to address and re-address these fundamental questions—

and new ones that arise—in each new cycle.

Conclusion: There Will Always be a Sequel

There is, at present, no foreseeable conclusion to the ways in which the American teen film mobilises, revisits and reworks ideas about youth. As a "signifier of change and transition" (Grossberg 176), youth is a symbolic site in which foundational American ideologies can be perpetually re-examined and renewed. Accordingly, the terms in which the teen film negotiates these ideologies must be renewed in each generation. The recent trend for revisiting iconic cycles, like the slasher films and the animal comedies, indicates that the questions and themes raised during their initial emergence remain important ones in American culture. Though each cycle addressed in this thesis eventually petered out, often when a "watershed" film provided a particularly definitive representation of the tensions of the period, new political eras reopen old wounds in new ways, and remakes or remodellings of the original cycles ensue.

The rebel figure has been revived in *The Breakfast Club* and *Heathers*. Made in the 1980s, these two films offer commentaries on how the status of the rebel, and the ideological tensions he depicts, have shifted 30 years after the 1950s delinquency cycle. *The Breakfast Club* features John Bender (Judd Nelson). Like the earlier rebel figures, Bender is disaffected and resistant to authority. He does express conflicting feelings of alienation and belonging, but the other four characters in the central group do too. This group includes feminine characters who also model disillusion. *The*

Breakfast Club therefore contests the masculinisation of the individualism/community conflict once embodied by the male rebel. Also unlike the early rebel heroes, Bender's conflict is not privileged and he is not positioned as the voice of a generation. Rather, he is merely one member of a generation of disillusioned youth. In *Heathers*, the rebel is J.D. (Christian Slater), an openly satirical play on "juvenile delinquent". J.D. is disaffected, resistant to authority and vehemently against the conformity of the central clique of girls at school: the Heathers. While J.D. certainly helps to drive the action in the film, it is J.D.'s girlfriend Veronica (Winona Ryder) who is the protagonist and the one with whom the audience is encouraged to identify. By the end of the film, J.D. has been cast as insane in his plot to murder the Heathers. Veronica tells him: "[y]ou think you're a rebel? You're not a rebel! You're a fucking psycho!" J.D., the rebel cliché, is literally blown up at the end of the film, suggesting that by 1989, the alienated, masculinised rebel articulates an antiquated notion of what rebellion and youth are.

The slasher film has been reincarnated in recent years in films like *Scream* (1996), *I Know what you Did Last Summer* (1997) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (a 2003 remake of the original). In many ways, these films have continued to explore the kind of self-sufficient femininity I discussed in Chapter Three. Julie (Jennifer Love Hewitt) is the Final Girl from *I Know what you Did Last Summer*, who is depicted similarly to the earlier Final Girls. Sidney (Neve Campbell) is the Final Girl from *Scream*, who represents an attempt to inscribe the Final Girl with even more

assertiveness. The Final Girl in the 2003 version of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Erin (Jessica Biel), represents an interesting development, however: during her escape from the horrific town she returns in order to rescue a baby. Her will to survive thereby becomes linked to a maternal instinct, which somewhat complicates the individualist depictions of the earlier slasher films.

The animal comedy has re-emerged in recent years with the hugely successful *American Pie* series (1999-2003) and its revisions to the early cycle discussed here indicate some attempt to refigure masculinity as both biological and individualist. In the first instalment, the boys engage in a pact similar to many of those from the films from the earlier cycle; they agree that they will all "get laid" before they graduate. As Kevin (Thomas Ian Nicholas) suggests, sexual conquest is linked to the boys' masculinity: "[t]his is our manhood at stake . . . no longer will our penises remain flaccid and unused." The first sexual experience in *American Pie* is, as in the early cycle, a voyeuristic one, though it is one that is "modernised" to account for technological advances; Jim sets up a webcam so he and his friends can watch a beautiful foreign-exchange student get changed in Jim's bedroom. Masculinity is thereby characterised by the same sexual uncontrollability and power that marked the earlier cycle. Although the structuring device of a pact is the same, the boys in the central group are much more clearly defined as individual characters and distinguished by personalities that extend well beyond superficial differences in appearance. By asserting each boy's individuality, the films therefore go some way to

"solving" the problem encountered by the first animal comedy cycle of aligning a powerful, biologically-derived masculinity with community.

There is an interesting shift in the depiction of the boys' identities in *American Pie*, however, which demonstrates that perhaps some of the questions raised in the makeover cycle about feminine identity might also be under consideration with regard to masculine identity. The initial pact to get laid before graduation becomes a point of contention amongst the boys, with a number of them ultimately rebelling against it. Jim and Oz (Chris Klein), in particular, get sick of the pressure to perform and make a decision to have sex for the first time on their own terms. The film therefore problematises the single-mindedness of hegemonic masculinity and opts out of reinforcing the masculine fraternity. What is novel about this film is that for Jim and Oz, individualism is expressed via a romantic relationship with a girl: Michelle (Alyson Hannigan) and Heather (Mena Suvari) respectively. These girls do not function as mere bodies on which masculine power is asserted, as they might have done in earlier animal comedies. Instead, they are drawn in great detail and their characters are granted value and agency independent of the boys they eventually pair with. This use of romance or a sexual relationship to assert and express individual desire is a plot device mainly reserved for female characters in the teen film. However, in *American Pie*, this device aids in the construction of masculine identity. This shift could be read as an acknowledgement of the problem encountered in the makeover cycle, about how to determine the meaning of

"individualism" in the new millennium. Certainly, it indicates that some degree of communitarian participation, common in films about girls, is now being negotiated in new ways in films about boys. What is important here is that each film that revisits older themes and cycles does not simply rehash the same narrative patterns, but clearly adjusts the terms of the original to construct a narrative that is appropriate for the moment in which it is produced.

What this thesis has examined is how values of individualism and communitarian participation, once notionally resolved by the existence of the American frontier, have been central to the teen film's narratives from the genre's formative stages. Each chapter explored how these values are depicted in each cycle and how they shift in meaning in three particular historical periods. Each chapter demonstrates that gender is fundamentally implicated in how these values are represented in the teen film and, indeed, that the relative political positions of masculinity and femininity often affect how these values are gendered on screen.

The first cycle of teen films, the delinquency films, depict the inherent contradiction between individualism and community and symbolise those values with masculinity and femininity respectively. This method of representation reinforces Classical Hollywood genre films in which individualism is typically masculine. It also renders the masculine "rebel" as the quintessential image of alienated, conflicted youth.

The slasher film also genders this opposition but it overturns the cinematic model of the delinquency cycle. It challenges the notion that individualist and communitarian values are rendered comprehensible on screen through a conventional alignment of individualism with masculinity and community with femininity. Instead, the slasher film depicts community as horrific, and aligns it with the family, patriarchy and traditional masculinity. Individualism remains heroic, but is aligned with youthful femininity. The slasher film destabilises both masculinity and the seemingly-inseparable connection between masculinity and individualism.

The backlash to this attack on traditional masculinity was swift in the teen film; the animal comedy works to reclaim masculinity as powerful and heroic. In doing this, the animal comedy appears to prioritise masculinity over masculine individualism as the thing requiring the most urgent defense, and so has its male characters band together in fraternities to strengthen their masculine power. As a result, the association of masculinity and individualism in the teen film becomes even more fragile.

The makeover cycle represents a logical extension of the questions raised in the teen film regarding the notional divide between individualism and community and its relationship with gender. The makeovers enact changes to feminine identity—from individualist to communitarian—and in doing so, they ultimately acknowledge the impossibility of reconciling the two, and the contemporary difficulty of constructing an individualist identity.

With this thesis, I seek to challenge the dominant readings of the teen film in the critical literature, which assert the teen film is fundamentally about and for youth. I argue that teen film criticism has been somewhat stifled by this approach and I offer an alternative way of analysing American teen film. Here, I examine the depiction of the reconciliatory dilemma in the teen film in several particularly conspicuous cycles of films that have been widely consumed and commonly discussed in the critical field. It is my contention that focussing on the teen film's depiction of the reconciliatory dilemma allows theorists to abandon the previously unsuccessful attempt to unearth "youth" in the teen film, and instead examine how and why the idea of "youth" is positioned in each historical era.

In light of the assertions made in this thesis, a number of opportunities exist to develop the field of teen film criticism. Most significantly, this thesis prompts theorists to move away from readings of the teen film that privilege youth as overtly rebellious and oppositional and instead examine the ways the teen film negotiates the tension between alienation and belonging, or individualism and communitarian participation, in relatively unspectacular ways. This approach would allow for the study of teen films that have previously been unfairly denied entry into the teen film category due to their failure to align to the rebellion model of youth, like the "Beach Party" films.

Examining the reconciliatory dilemma in the teen film also provides an opportunity to explore the significance of singular, "watershed" films in the teen

genre that do not neatly align with a cycle, such as *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986). It may be that these films are cited as particularly important by theorists due to their capacity to express the ideological tensions of their era. By extension, an auteur study of John Hughes would certainly be worthwhile. As a writer, director and/or producer, John Hughes was responsible for many of the most popular and critically acclaimed teen films of the 1980s: *Sixteen Candles*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Weird Science* (1985), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Pretty in Pink*.[29] A study of the reconciliatory dilemma in his films might give further insight into the tensions surrounding individualism/community and masculinity/femininity that were circulating in the 1980s in America, which was a particular important era for teen films.

A focus on the reconciliatory dilemma also allows for a more rigorous interrogation of the notional boundary separating teen and youth film in America. In Chapter Two, for example, I argued that adult-oriented, "youth" delinquency films from the 1950s adhere to a pattern that aligns with Ray's "reconciliatory pattern", while teen delinquency films depict a reconciliatory dilemma. It would be useful to study American youth films released from the 1960s-2000s in order to determine if they continue to reconcile the tension between individualism and community or if the distinction between teen and youth film in America has been somewhat effaced over time. In addition, my contention that the American teen film is structured by the

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[29] Hughes was a writer on all of these films and the director of all but *Pretty in Pink*.

reconciliatory dilemma could be "tested" in other cinematic contexts where I would not expect the same tensions to arise in the same ways. For example, a study comparing American teen and youth film to British teen and youth film—utilising the reconciliatory dilemma—might uncover some important differences or similarities between the two that have gone unexamined due to the dominant critical focus on youth.

I have based much of my discussion on the work of Ray and suggested that frontier mythology remains, in America, the primary set of structuring tensions in which cinematic narratives examine the most contemporary of cultural anxieties. I have argued that the teen film continues to problematise the reconciliation of individualism and community in a way Ray suggests pertains mainly to a particularly experimental period of Hollywood cinema (the 1950s-early 1970s). Ray's examination of Hollywood cinema only extends to the 1980s and for me, the insights in this thesis prompt a re-examination of the reconciliatory pattern in Hollywood film from 1980 through to today. Though the teen film may be unique in its failure to reconcile individualism and communitarian participation, in that its focus is youth, a frontier space, the uncertainties expressed by each cycle are a reflection of broader cultural concerns that are no doubt expressed in other films. A comparative study would be useful in order to determine whether the teen film's particular depictions of the reconciliatory dilemma and its relationship with gender emerge in the same way in other genres that are not about youth.

I opened this thesis with an extract from Martin in which he offered a vague and somewhat romanticised definition of youth and the teen film. In this thesis I have interrogated this and other essentialist conceptions of youth. Building on the work of Grossberg and Giroux, who endeavour to politicize representations of youth, I have worked to expose the ways in which youth is deployed, often strategically, to examine cultural uncertainties and ideological conflicts of American parent culture that cannot be safely voiced elsewhere. My analytical approach turns away from the tradition of approaching youth represented by critics like Martin, and presupposes that theorists abandon the search for any "transhistoric" essence of youth in the teen film.

This thesis opens up another avenue for teen film research in that it suggests that every new cultural era will elicit new teen film cycles that approach the reconciliatory dilemma and gender in new ways. Any representation of "teen" in film is necessarily contingent upon the cultural and historical context in which it is produced, and examining the precise conditions of each iteration presents the critic with many fruitful possibilities. The idea of youth, as a malleable signifier, means that in the teen film genre—and for teen film analysts—there will always be a sequel.

Filmography

American Pie. Dir. Paul Weitz. Universal, 1999.

American Pie: the Wedding. Dir. Jesse Dylan. Universal, 2003.

Animal House. Dir. John Landis. MCA/Universal, 1978.

Beach Blanket Bingo. Dir. William Asher. AIP, 1965.

Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure. Dir. Stephen Herek. Onion, 1989.

Blackboard Jungle. Dir. Richard Brooks. MGM, 1955.

The Blob. Dir. Irvin S. Yeaworth Jr. Paramount, 1958.

Blue Denim. Dir. Philip Dunne. Twentieth Century Fox, 1959.

Bonnie and Clyde. Dir. Arthur Penn. Warner Brothers/Seven Arts, 1967.

The Breakfast Club. Dir. John Hughes. Universal, 1985.

Casablanca. Dir. Michael Curtiz. Warner Brothers, 1942.

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