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# Are You a Bad Girl?: The Evolution of Female Sexuality in Post-War Hollywood Cinema

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ARE YOU A BAD GIRL?:  
THE EVOLUTION OF FEMALE SEXUALITY IN THE POST-WAR HOLLYWOOD  
CINEMA

by

KIMBERLY CHRISTINE PIERCE

B.A., University of Colorado, 2009

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Are You a Bad Girl: The Evolution of Female Sexuality in Post-War Hollywood Cinema  
written by Kimberly Pierce  
has been approved for the Department of Art and Art History

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we  
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards  
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

Pierce, Kimberly Christine (M.A., Art and Art History)

Are You A Bad Girl: The Evolution of Female Sexuality in Post-War Hollywood Cinema

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Melinda Barlow

### **Abstract**

The 1950s are commonly regarded as a conservative and repressive era through the period's entertainment, as reflected in situation comedies like *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. However, the post-war era was not as chaste as it appeared on television. In the summer of 1953, Dr. Alfred Kinsey released *Sexual Behavior of the Human Female*, and in December of that year *Playboy Magazine* hit newsstands. Ten years later Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that played an important role in setting the second wave of American feminism into motion. Friedan's research followed housewives from all backgrounds through the 1950s: some married right out of high school, many graduated from college before settling down, and others had completed graduate work. Friedan exposed what seemed to be a universal lack of fulfillment among the women.

The topic of gender and sexuality in classic Hollywood is defined by the work of Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," an essay which outlines her theory of the "male gaze." According to Mulvey, the Hollywood narrative structure aligns viewers with the perspective of the male characters and pigeon holes the female characters as figures of erotic interest. While the foundational nature of Mulvey's work is evident, I believe that the representation of gaze in Hollywood cinema, and thus male and female desire, became more complex throughout this period.

In the decade separating Kinsey's report and *Playboy Magazine* from *The Feminine Mystique*, American society underwent substantial changes relating to female sexuality. An examination of films discussed in this thesis from *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) to *Love with the Proper Stranger* (Robert Mulligan, 1963), reveals how the status of women in America evolved. The second wave of American feminism did not begin in full force until after 1963, but through these films female characters begin to emerge from the narrative periphery and by the time *Where the Boys Are* (Henry Levin) was released in 1960, a literal "female gaze" enters the narrative structure of Hollywood films, granting the female characters more agency, and the power of the gaze over their male counterparts.

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## Introduction

Betty Friedan released her landmark work *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, exposing what she termed “the problem with no name,” which plagued housewives throughout the post-war, baby boom era. The book was, and still is, heralded as a work vitally important to the development of the second wave of American feminism. However, the feminist movement did not begin all at once. Rather, it had been slowly evolving over the previous decade.

The repression of female sexuality was not a new concept, with sociological roots going back as far as Adam and Eve. However, the problem can be directly traced to the Victorian era, a century before *The Feminine Mystique*. In her essay, “Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The Maternal in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film, 1910-1940,” E. Ann Kaplan examines this repression as resulting from “The Cult of True Womanhood” and the importance of a woman’s cultural role as “Mother.” Kaplan writes,

For Rosseau, it is only because the early education of man is in woman’s hands that her education is important. The girl’s biological processes shape her to be a mother...The very survival of the human race depends on the woman’s function in cementing the family....<sup>1</sup>

In her discussion of “The Cult of True Womanhood,” Kaplan explains piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness were highly valued feminine traits<sup>2</sup>. These societal values would have been fairly fresh in the conservative, devoutly religious communities which played an important part in establishing the Production Code Administration in 1934, which allowed these conservative Victorian ideals to remain prevalent in Hollywood cinema.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaplan, E. Ann. “Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The Maternal in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film, 1910-1940.”

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 116.



1953 was a hallmark year for gender and sexuality in American culture. While this is a decade before *The Feminine Mystique* was published, it represents the beginning of the sexual transition that precipitated the second wave of American feminism in the mid-late 1960s. In the summer of that year, Dr. Alfred Kinsey released his study *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953). Commenting on the significance of Kinsey's research in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (1986), Richard Dyer writes, "The very publication of a sex report on women, and with an attendant publicity far in excess of that surrounding the male report in 1948, focused the 'question' of female sexuality..."<sup>3</sup> In December of 1953, the first issue of Hugh Hefner's *Playboy Magazine* hit newsstands, featuring nude photos of Marilyn Monroe as the first centerfold. Dyer goes on to remark upon the magazine's views on sexuality:

Guiltless, natural, not prurient--these were precisely part of the attitude towards sexuality that *Playboy* was pushing. *Playboy's* 'philosophy' ...combined two reigning ideas of the twentieth century concerning sexuality. The first is what Michel Foucault has called 'the repressive hypothesis', namely, the idea that sexuality has 'been rigorously subjugated...during the age of hypocritical, bustling and responsible bourgeoisie' (Foucault, 1980, p.8)...only repression itself turns the sex drive malignant....<sup>4</sup>

The Kinsey Report and the establishment of *Playboy*, as well as other societal developments that occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s, brought the question of female sexuality to the forefront in American society. These publications both proposed that the ordinary American woman could be sexual without being labeled "evil," and even more revolutionary, that she enjoyed and needed sex as much as a man did.

I would argue that the women Hugh Hefner photographed demonstrate the growing acceptance of female sexuality by allowing women who were like the girl-next-door to be sexual

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<sup>3</sup> Dyer, Richard. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Macmillan Press, 1986) 29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*,. 31.

figures. Thus, the magazine moved toward dispelling the accepted belief that being sexual classified a woman as “bad.” The models pictured throughout the magazines’ early years are not “bad girls,” like the sexual femmes fatales and spider women depicted in films noir. Rather, they are representative of mainstream American women, though a glamorized, polished ideal.<sup>5</sup>

Through such images, *Playboy* helped transform the image of the normal American woman into a sexual being.<sup>6</sup> The models photographed between 1954 and 1959 are shown in everyday poses expressing their normalcy rather than exoticism. October 1955 centerfold Jean Moorehead, for example, is pictured in a half-slip wearing a pair of mary jane shoes, and going through her closet. A desk and various school pennants decorate the background. Rusty Fisher, in the April 1956 issue, is shown hanging a picture, a hammer casually slung in her jeans pocket. These are but two examples that demonstrate that *Playboy Magazine* centerfolds were not supposed to be

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<sup>5</sup> *Playboy Magazine* was marketed to the American bachelor, and the nude centerfold was provided for the gazing male audience. As a result, many of the early centerfolds are staged to show a man’s presence within the frame. Thus, the photographs are giving the impression that the women are being sexual for the pleasure of their unseen male companion. While I do argue that the mainstream American woman was finally allowed to be sexual, it is a sexuality to satisfy the male gaze. For example: the November 1955 centerfold Barbara Cameron is posed getting out of the bathtub with a towel wrapped over her lower body. A man’s tie hangs over the bathroom mirror. A year later, the November 1956 centerfold Betty Blue is photographed topless with a sheet tied around her lower body. A man’s arm reaches into the frame to light her cigarette. Thus, while *Playboy* is responsible for the growing acceptance of a mainstream female sexuality, the magazine was still marketed to satisfy the gazing male audience.

<sup>6</sup> The AMC drama *Mad Men* provides a contemporary interpretation of this pre *Feminine Mystique* period. The series features a number of female characters: Peggy Olsen (Elizabeth Moss), Joan Holloway (Christina Hendricks) and Betty Draper (January Jones). Each is representative of femininity in the post-war era. Each woman is shown to be sexual in her own way. Peggy is a young, independent working woman who would be a primary target for Helen Gurley Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl*. Throughout the series we watch Peggy have a number of affairs, all seemingly casual. Joan Holloway represents an extreme sexuality, thanks to her curvaceous figure. She has a continual affair with her boss Roger Sterling (John Slattery) throughout the run of the show, and it has been stated that she has had an abortion on more than one occasion. Finally, Betty Draper is representative of the women Friedan studied in *The Feminine Mystique*. She is young and college educated, but finds herself trapped in her suburban home with her children, and a husband she rarely sees. Her sexuality is one of repressed desire, which manifests itself in her insecurities, as well as in rare personal moments as in where viewers observe Betty masturbate with the aid of the dryer. The series adeptly displays the different concepts of female sexuality during this post-war era.

seen as unobtainable, or dangerous, sexual objects. Rather, they are the girls next door, ones you might know.

The unabashed sexuality associated with *Playboy* contradicts the perceived moral cleanliness that commonly thought to define American popular culture of the 1950s. Contemporary images of the post-war era have been, and continue to be, delineated by situation comedies like *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver* and *The Donna Reed Show*. In these shows, the idealized vision of reality is one from which all forms of sexual behavior have been removed. In their place, there is an excessively clean and sanitary sexuality where even married couples sleep in twin beds. Thus, the possibility for any sexual relationship between wedded couples is removed. If both partners even sit on the same bed, according to the Production Code, one is required to keep a foot on the floor at all times. It is this desexualized image that is held up as the cultural ideal in the 1950s and early 1960s. However, this period is also one during which *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* and *Playboy Magazine* were in circulation, and there was a rapid liberalization of sexuality occurring within American culture.

*Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* was authored by Kinsey and his team at the University of Indiana and was the follow-up to their earlier study, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948). Before Kinsey's report it was commonly believed that women were not libidinous beings, and that sex was something a woman simply tolerated for her husband's enjoyment, and for purposes of procreation. Kinsey proposed that a woman actually enjoyed sex, and his research demonstrated that women masturbated, as well as engaged in premarital and extramarital sex. The ideas that were suggested in Kinsey's study of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* take a progressive, academic approach to the question of female sexuality.

During this period in film history, the strict Madonna/Whore dichotomy, which was a common motif in Hollywood cinema, was beginning to blur, and female characters could no longer be classified simply as “good” or “bad.” The censorship of the Hollywood Production Code nonetheless mandated that sexual behavior exhibited outside the confines of marriage be punished. The regulation of the Code is seen throughout Hollywood cinema, often visible in the melodramas of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. In this thesis, I argue that the “Pregnancy Melodrama,” a term originated by Susan Douglas in *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with Mass Media* (1994), demonstrates a muddling of the good girl/bad girl dichotomy. In this group of films, the mandated punishment of the pregnant leading lady no longer applies. None of the movies in this genre punish their respective female protagonists; rather these films are notable for their happy endings. Each of the young women lives “happily ever after,” despite her sexual indiscretions. Furthermore, the narratives construct a progressive environment, which, by the end credits is accepting and forgiving of the out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Regardless of the couples’, or their parents’, anxiety about the pregnancy, ultimately the expectant parents are embraced, rather than alienated for their mistakes. The Pregnancy Melodrama was a Hollywood sub-genre created in response to the growing societal trend of teenage pregnancy during the mid-late 1950s, and the films within it create a setting which does not punish the characters for their sexuality, thus helping to change Production Code standards.

To further appreciate this societal evolution, it is useful to look at the star personas of the performers involved, as through the bodies of their work the expectations of mainstream audiences become clear. By examining the careers of actress/singer Connie Francis and Natalie Wood prior to and through the release of *Where the Boys Are* and *Love with the Proper Stranger*,

we see the growing existence of not only an active female viewpoint, but also the increasing presence and acceptance of female sexuality. The singing and acting career of Connie Francis reveals the prominence of an independent, active female voice in the post-war entertainment industry. Before Francis' acting break-out in *Where the Boys Are*, she was a pop singer, and in songs like "Lipstick on Your Collar" and "Stupid Cupid" she portrayed a positive, self-reliant example of femininity that was far removed from the music of fellow "girl group" musicians like Lesley Gore. Actress Natalie Wood was a seasoned veteran in Hollywood by the time she turned twenty. In a number of Wood's films throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, *Marjorie Morningstar* (Irving Rapper, 1958), *Splendor in the Grass* (Elia Kazan, 1961) and *Love with the Proper Stranger*, she plays a young woman struggling to define herself as an adult and sexual being in the face of a society that is quick to repress her sexuality. At this time in her own life, Natalie Wood was fighting with a similar dilemma, because as an actress who had grown up in front of the American public, she was at this point in her career attempting to get audiences and studio bosses to see her as a young woman, not the child that had previously defined her star persona. Richard Dyer defines the concept of star persona in *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*:

The star phenomenon consists of everything that is publicly available about stars. A film star's image is not just his or her films, but the promotion of those films and of the star through pinups, public appearances, studio hand-outs...as well as interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star's doings and 'private' life ....(it) is also what people say or write about him or her...<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dyer, Richard *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Macmillan 1986).

The examination of a performer's star persona allows for a more complex and detailed analysis of not only the film or actor in question, but also of the period through audience and media reactions to their work.

In *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema* (1973), Laura Mulvey describes what she terms "the male gaze" of Hollywood cinema, and she goes on to explore how it affects the depiction of women on screen. Mulvey writes,

...Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium....A woman performs within the narrative; the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude....<sup>8</sup>

In post-war cinema, the "male gaze" is shockingly prevalent. In *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955), for example, displays notable fragmentation of the body of "bad" girl Lois Hammond (Margaret Hayes). A number of shots specifically frame Hammond's chest and torso, while leaving her face off screen. This treatment turns her character into a faceless erotic object on which the male characters repeatedly turn their gaze. In my research, I use Mulvey as a springboard for an analysis of the developing female perspective in post-war cinema. It is my hope to pick up where her work left off and examine what I see as a gradual appearance of a "female gaze" that counteracts the "male gaze." In films like *Where the Boys Are*, there are visual moments that actually contradict Mulvey's idea of an all-encompassing "male gaze." Indeed, the movie adopts the literal gaze of female characters Angie and Tuggle at various points throughout the narrative in interesting and provocative ways. When I use the phrase "female perspective," I am examining the increase in and growing importance of female characters within post-war

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<sup>8</sup> Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. (IN: Indiana University Press) 1989.

Hollywood cinema.<sup>9</sup> Movies in this period were beginning to invest more time and effort in establishing female characters capable of influencing the narrative.

*Sex and the Single Girl* (1962) by Helen Gurley Brown also helped overturn more traditional attitudes toward female sexuality. While *The Feminine Mystique* shed a light on the problems of the baby boom and its effects on women, Friedan focuses solely on post-college women within the domestic sphere. She followed a group of women who were primarily college educated but who had left any career prospects in favor of quiet lives as homemakers. In her study of these women, Friedan picks up on a tone of defeat and disenfranchisement manifested among them. *Sex and the Single Girl*, on the other hand, was marketed to single, working women. Gurley Brown describes the lives of active women who are financially and socially independent. They make their own living, and are not afraid to engage in free and casual sex. While the book creates a picture of active femininity, there are portions that encourage women to enjoy an excessively promiscuous sexuality. Gurley Brown does not discourage her readers from conducting extramarital affairs with married men, for example, writing “It seems to me the solution is not to rule out married men but to keep them as pets. While they are “using” you to varnish their egos, you ‘use’ them to add spice to your life.... One married man is dangerous. A potpourri can be fun....”<sup>10</sup> This quote brings to mind images of the femme fatale using her

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<sup>9</sup> Hollywood cinema had been featuring important female protagonists in films like *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944), *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946) and *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940). These works feature three beautiful, charismatic leading ladies in the lead roles: Gene Tierney in *Laura*, Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* and Joan Fontaine in *Rebecca*. What distinguishes these movies from *Where the Boys Are*, is the older work’s reliance on a masculine perspective. Each film spotlights the female characters through the masculine gaze of the primary male protagonists: Mark (Dana Andrews) and Waldo (Clifton Webb) in *Laura*, Johnny (Glenn Ford) in *Gilda* and Maxim (Laurence Olivier) in *Rebecca*. While in *Where the Boys Are*, there is no such powerful, dominating male gaze provided, thus allowing the female characters to influence the narrative and at times dominate the gaze.

<sup>10</sup> Gurley Brown, Helen. *Sex and the Single Girl* (New York: A Giant Cardinal, 1963).

sexuality to get what she wants out of a man for pleasures sake. The endorsement of this manipulative sexuality has hampered what I believe to be the important message of *Sex and the Single Girl*. This book depicts society two years after the approval of the birth control pill; the medication's influence on the increasingly casual nature of sex becomes important to the evolution of female sexuality. The effects of the pill helped overturn earlier societal repression of a woman's desire for, and enjoyment of, casual sex without the constraints of a relationship. Released in such close conjunction to each other, *The Feminine Mystique* and *Sex and the Single Girl*, with their drastically different foci, provide a cross-section of new attitudes and experiences of various groups of women in the early 1960s. *The Feminine Mystique* describes the societal roots out of which second wave feminism emerged, while *Sex and the Single Girl* brushes the surface of the feminist movement in its encouragement of women to be active and financially independent. However, Gurley Brown's ideas of acceptable sexuality are overly promiscuous, at times conjuring images of the femme fatale and spider woman that are the very archetypes the feminist movement was trying to distance itself from. In this, *Sex and the Single Girl* can be seen as an early starting point of the second wave of American feminism, but many changes still needed to happen.

Throughout this thesis, references to *Sex and the Single Girl* and *The Feminine Mystique* are supplemented with information from primary news sources, each of which grants insight into the prevalent thoughts and feelings about the changing status of women in American culture. The *New York Times* review of *Love with the Proper Stranger* is a relevant example of how analysis of a film can change over time. When viewed from a contemporary perspective, the narrative's treatment of illegitimate pregnancy and abortion stands out as an important topic for discussion.



However, Bosley Crowther's review looks at the film as a romantic comedy, largely ignoring its more controversial plot-points. A study of historical sources also proves important in my examination of abortion and reproductive freedom in the second chapter. *New York Times* articles provide the bulk of my evidence for my study of two news events, the Sherri Finkbine abortion, as well as the Barbara LoFrumento murder. Recently, these cases have become talking points for both the pro-life and pro-choice movement, and historical newspaper articles provide information on these events, free from the bias of contemporary politics. *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* articles also proved to be helpful in my research on the post-war baby boom. These not only gave interesting statistics on the scope of the phenomenon, but also reveal that scholars and journalists at the time were aware of the negative effects the baby boom had on women. The presentation of primary sources allows my research to examine and appreciate the post-war period from a cultural and sociological perspective, rather than simply a cinematic one.

Finally, Susan Douglas' book *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with Mass Media* has been incredibly influential on my research. Douglas presents one of the most comprehensive examinations of issues related to female sexuality and adolescent culture during the post-war era, providing in-depth research on everything from sitcom suburbia, to films like *Where the Boys Are*, to Beatlemania and Gloria Steinham. Particularly important is Douglas' analysis of what she terms the "Pregnancy Melodrama," which I examine in the pages that follow in great detail. Like Douglas, I also explore the evolution occurring in gender and sexuality on screen, especially as it relates to the growing teen culture of 1950s America.

As the middle of the 1950s approached, Hollywood began to capitalize on the exploding teenage population and the entertainment they wanted. Quickly, pictures targeted to the growing

adolescent market began to hit movie screens. Much of the evolution occurring in gender and sexuality is evident in these teen films. The “Pregnancy Melodramas” focus on the topic of teenage sexuality. Each spotlight a young, adolescent couple struggling with the consequences of illegitimate pregnancy. As a result of this emphasis on teenage characters, many of these movies, like *A Summer Place*, are representative of the teen film genre.

The first chapter, What Could Be More Interpersonal Than Backseat Bingo: *Where the Boys Are* and Mainstreaming Sex in the Teenage Market, examines the topic of adolescent female sexuality in the teen film genre, which was undergoing tremendous evolution during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Films like *Blackboard Jungle*, *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) and *Where the Boys Are*, demonstrate the changing treatment of gender and sexuality within the teen pic narrative. The earliest of the three films, *Blackboard Jungle*, may be geared towards a teenage audience, but the plot displays little, if any, understanding of the teenage market, or the female audience within it. By the release of *Rebel Without a Cause*, there is a likable and identifiable depiction of teenagers emerging in Hollywood separating itself from earlier characterizations of juvenile delinquency. In the character of Judy, (Natalie Wood) the film crafts a conflicted, but relatable female character who is slowly beginning to rise from the periphery into a primary narrative focus. Later, with *Where the Boys Are*, filmmakers were beginning to understand the importance of female audiences, and in turn a female perspective begins to distinguish itself in the teen film genre. *Where the Boys Are* revolves around four female protagonists, and while there are male leads, their status is that of love interests rather than important influences on the narrative. These works are representative of the evolution of the

teen film from its initial emergence to the early 1960s, and how it portrayed the changing views of gender and sexuality in American culture.

The second chapter, That's What Love is Bells and Banjos Playing: The Pregnancy Melodrama, *Love with the Proper Stranger*, Natalie Wood and the Evolution of Female Reproductive Freedom looks at the "Pregnancy Melodrama." The sub-genre is composed of three films: *A Summer Place* (Delmer Davies, 1959), *Susan Slade* (Delmer Davies, 1961) and *Love with the Proper Stranger*. An important topic of discussion is the treatment of abortion in *Love with the Proper Stranger*. Abortion is still a contentious topic in contemporary society, and the Hollywood Production Code expressly forbade the mere mention of the procedure. There was intense debate surrounding the procedure in the early years of the 1960s, and my argument examines the extent of the growing debate. Each of the films in this chapter explores the topic of illegitimate pregnancy from a primarily female perspective. Each features a teenaged leading lady struggling with the pressures of an illegitimate pregnancy, and as a group they show how society was beginning to accept this depiction of adolescent, female sexuality.

Through the course of my examination of post-war Hollywood cinema, it is my aim to demonstrate that the onset of second wave American feminism did not begin all at once with the publishing of *The Feminine Mystique*. The Kinsey report and the founding of *Playboy Magazine* in 1953 allowed the question of female sexuality to enter popular culture, creating an inherent tension when looked at in conjunction with the conservative politics of the baby boom era. In the decade before *The Feminine Mystique*, Hollywood had been exploring and gradually integrating not only films with a female perspective, but also a growing acceptance of female sexuality. The Hollywood cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s demonstrates the evolution of female

sexuality that was occurring during this period in American history. While female characters had been spotlighted in the past, as the 1950s transformed into the 1960s, the films began to gradually shed the masculine point-of-view which had dominated the narrative development and the cinematic perspective.

## CHAPTER 1

### What Could Be More Interpersonal Than Backseat Bingo:

#### *Where the Boys Are* and Mainstreaming Sex in the Teenage Market

The post-war era has been described in historical and cultural studies as a stagnant and repressive period. However, the years following the onset of rock and roll and before the Kennedy assassination are best seen as a transitional time in American history. A gradual shift in values led to a tension that was evident in Hollywood cinema of the late studio system. *Where the Boys Are* (Henry Levin, 1961) is a film that typifies this transformative period. The narrative displays many progressive elements that are representative of a society on the cusp of change, a number of them relating to the sexual and gender politics of the feature. *Where the Boys Are* is an early work of teen cinema that stars four known actresses in primary leading roles. Also, a number of scenes throughout the film demonstrate a reversal of the male gaze, the theory pioneered by film scholar Laura Mulvey, that has long been associated with the classical Hollywood era. Despite these progressive strides, the narrative of *Where the Boys Are* contains many of the recurring conservative motifs of this period: a story line valuing the formation of the monogamous and heterosexual couple, the punishment of the sexually “marked” woman, and a pronounced fear of sexuality expressed by virtually all the main characters. It is the tug-of-war between these elements that establishes *Where the Boys Are* as a work of transitional cinema. The common depiction of post-war culture as innocent and pure was merely a popularized ideal. In fact, the 1950s and early 1960s were dominated by tensions and contradictions which were responsible for the perceived sexual repression of the period. An examination of *Where the Boys*

*Are* reveals that the perceived shift in morals that occurred in the late 1960s developed more gradually throughout the previous decade in a slow cultural evolution.

The social transformation of the 1950s is best explored through a study of the growing presence of teenage culture in society. Coming into public consciousness throughout the decade, teenagers were regarded with confusion and ambivalence, despite the fact that they were a growing market among advertisers. *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) were two mainstream Hollywood works that depicted a rise in juvenile delinquency that seemingly coincided with the burgeoning Rock and Roll movement. In the mid-50's teenagers were frequently portrayed as monstrous others: highly sexual, often disrespectful and engaging in criminal behavior. By the beginning of the 1960s, fears had gradually calmed and Hollywood began releasing films for adolescents, rather than about them. In *Where the Boys Are*, audiences were given a realistic portrayal of college students, female students at that, who were allowed to explore their growing sexual urges. Sex was no longer something dirty on the periphery of mainstream society: it had entered popular culture.

### **Historical Background**

By 1960, when *Where the Boys Are* was released in theaters, teenagers--an unexplored demographic ten years earlier--had become one of the most powerful and influential groups targeted by advertisers. Thanks to the baby boom, a tidal wave of adolescents came of age during the late 1950s and 1960s. Russell Lynes, the managing editor of *Harpers Magazine*, released an article on June 28, 1959 in the *New York Times*, discussing the teenage population explosion. He

cites telling statistics: “...the number of children crossing the 13-year-old threshold will rise by nearly 40 per cent. By 1965 there will be a 35 per cent increase in the 14-17 age group.”<sup>11</sup> The peak of the baby boom coincides with the rapid evolution occurring in popular culture during the 1950s and 1960s, including the rise of rock and roll that saw teenagers flocking to see Elvis Presley. In his book *The Fifties* (1993), David Halberstam writes about this new musical phenomenon, noting that “A new young generation of Americans was breaking away from the habits of its parents and defining itself by its music...This generation was armed with both money and the new inexpensive appliances with which to listen to it.”<sup>12</sup> For the first time, music and films were being marketed directly to teenagers, and with the rapid advances in advertising, Hollywood was set for permanent change. In a decade of economic stability, the middle-class emerged as a powerful force, and teenagers found themselves with enough disposable income to partake in the media of their choosing. The purchasing power granted to adolescents led to the explosion of entertainment specifically geared to their age group. As the decade progressed, Hollywood cinema began to explore the societal pressures on teens, many of which were caused by the culture around them and the rapid advances occurring within it.

*Where the Boys Are* was released theatrically in December of 1960. In May of that year, the birth control pill was approved for release by the Federal Drug Administration. The scientific development of the contraceptive pill was widely recorded throughout the year in magazines and newspapers across the country. In his autobiography *Don't Mind If I Do* (2009), actor George Hamilton, one of the stars of *Where the Boys Are*, states that the film shot “in the brutal, torpid

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<sup>11</sup> Russell Lynes “Teen-Agers Mirror Their Parents” *New York Times*. 28 Jun 1959.

<sup>12</sup> Halberstam, David. *The Fifties* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993) 473.

heat of summer... August.”<sup>13</sup> There are a number of newspaper articles showing renewed interest in the birth control pill during that month. On August 4, 1960 it was announced that Planned Parenthood approved the pill and agreed to distribute it in their many clinics.<sup>14</sup> The new medication was a popular topic throughout the summer months, and due to the wide coverage throughout the growing media industry, developments became common knowledge and not simply relegated to the medical community.

The birth control pill allowed women a sense of reproductive freedom they lacked prior to the 1960s. It removed the lingering fear of pregnancy, and allowed a woman to enjoy sex for pleasure, and not simply for the purposes of reproduction. Prior to 1960, the only serious method of contraception that allowed women any control of their bodies was the diaphragm. Birth control was a topic that had been held in a stalemate between the rapidly changing ideas in favor of preventing unwanted pregnancies, and the conservative views of the past. Father Edwin F. Healy sums up the conservative arguments in his textbook *Marriage Guidance* (1958), writing “Artificial birth control is of its very nature evil, for it consists in performing a natural act and at the same time attempting to destroy the natural effect of the act.”<sup>15</sup> On November 18, 1962, the *New York Times* published an article by Harold M. Schmeck, Jr., entitled “Birth Control Taboos Are Easing” in which he describes alternative birth control:

The next most widely used method is the diaphragm.... One estimate for current use of this method at any time is slightly less than 25 percent.... The third method in order of utilization is the rhythm method--the only method sanctioned by the

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<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, George. *Don't Mind if I Do* (New York: Touchstone, 2008) 143.

<sup>14</sup> “Parenthood Unit Ok's Contraceptive Pill” *The Chicago Defender* August 13 1960.

<sup>15</sup> Healy, Edwin F. *Marriage Guidance* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1958) 163.



Roman Catholic Church. This is estimated at 21 percent of current use....<sup>16</sup>

The rhythm method involves the tracking of the female ovulation cycle, and avoiding intercourse during unsafe periods when conception is most likely. However, this provided a woman little control over her own body, equating to little more than crossing one's fingers to avoid pregnancy. The invention of the contraceptive pill improved female reproductive freedom, taking intercourse from an act of procreation to one a woman could enjoy without the fear of pregnancy.

The birth control pill was invented during the era of the studio system's collapse. With the decline of the studios, the Hollywood Production Code did not inspire the fear it once had, and films like *Where the Boys Are* began to directly challenge the dwindling strength of its cultural values. Legally binding in 1934, the Code took a conservative stance on sexual relations: "(b) Excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures are not to be shown. (c) In general, passion should be treated in such manner not to stimulate the lower and baser emotions." The Code also forbade the attractive presentation of adultery and illicit sex in lieu of the sanctity of marriage.<sup>17</sup> By the beginning of the 1960s, however, the Production Code began to lose its power and in 1968, eight years after *Where the Boys Are* was released, the strict censorship it imposed was replaced by the MPAA rating system. The narrative of *Where the Boys Are* demonstrates the evolution of ideas promoting free sexuality, and an overall loosening of sexual values that was beginning to occur in society. The film's focus on teenagers allows *Where the Boys Are* to explore questions of gender and sexuality as it relates to romantic relationships. The adolescent perspective leads to an exploration of dating and courtship that is not looked at in films which are geared toward adults. An examination of these practices, demonstrates how far

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<sup>16</sup> Harold M. Schmeck, Jr. "Birth Control Taboos Are Easing" New York Times. 18 Nov. 1962.

<sup>17</sup> "The Production Code of 1930" (<http://www.und.edu/instruct/cjacobs/ProductionCode.htm>).

America was moving from the social norms of the earlier generations, established and represented by the thirty year old Production Code.

### **Going Steady And The Effects On Teenage Sexuality**

In the years following World War II, the American publishing market was flooded with relationship and marriage manuals, each instructing inquiring teenage minds on the art of securing the perfect mate into a stable and productive marriage. This plethora of primary sources gives fascinating insights into the social climate of courtship and dating in the post-war period, and how it was marketed toward teenagers. This documentation exposed the disconnect between the practices described, and those engaged in by previous generations. Due to the increased presence of romantic interaction, the burgeoning teen film genre provides a particularly in-depth study of adolescent social and sexual expectations during the post-war period.

A trend that had been growing in prominence among teenagers was ‘going steady.’ Going steady was different from random dating, which had been the system common among previous generations. In his study entitled *Courtship and Marriage* (1957), E.E. LeMasters defines this generational shift, as follows: “In the dating system reported by these parents for the late 1920’s and the 1930’s, a girl’s popularity was based on how many boyfriends she had...the success of the evening was based on how many different fellows were on her dance program....”<sup>18</sup>

LeMasters then goes on to apply this situation in the description of going steady, “At dances today, couples going steady often, or perhaps usually, dance all evening together, joining their friends between dances. If they exchange dances, this is apt to be the exception rather than the

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<sup>18</sup> LeMasters, E.E. *Courtship and Marriage*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957) 121.

rule.”<sup>19</sup> This penchant for going steady was a cause of controversy throughout the post-war era. A *New York Times* article dated February 9, 1957, recounts the story of four students at a Roman Catholic high school, who were expelled for steady dating. The article states, “Those who have spoken against going steady have said it well may be an occasion for sin, particularly among those too young to marry in the immediate future.... [it] may lead to marriage between the immature....”<sup>20</sup> Father Edwin F. Healy wrote further on the topic, “This practice places an unwholesome restriction on his and on her suitable partner in marriage.... Other boys will lose interest in that young lady, and this may prevent her from finding one who would be more desirable...”<sup>21</sup> However, defenders of the practice argued that going steady gave teenagers a sense of security. A *New York Times* article by Jane Whitebread, delves into the psychological theories behind the trend’s sudden popularity:

The recurrent threats of annihilating war, concern with the H-bomb tests and the possible effects of fall-out may...touch them more closely than they do with the rest of our worried world. To me it is quite understandable that a steady relationship would seem more meaningful to them....<sup>22</sup>

Whitebread’s psychological reading of going steady as a quest for stability, in a world petrified of nuclear war, is a fascinating one. Sociological evidence from the period describes how previous generations engaged in courtship rituals that emphasized random dating. However, teenagers in the generation following the Second World War avoided this embrace of randomness in favor of steady, monogamous relationships. In this way, the quest for stability in the face of

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<sup>19</sup> LeMasters, E.E. *Courtship and Marriage*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957) 121.

<sup>20</sup> Parke, Richard H. “4 Catholic High School Students Are Dismissed for Steady Dating” *New York Times*. 9 February 1957. Pg. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Healy, Edwin F. *Marriage Guidance* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1958) 163.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Whitebread “The Case for Going Steady” *New York Times*. 14 Jul 1957. Pg. 166.

nuclear war, affected not only adolescent dating rituals, but continued through engagement and later marriage.

It is well documented that the average age of marriage plummeted during this period, and Sidonie Gruenberg discusses this trend in her 1955 article, “Why They Are Marrying Younger?” She presents statistics demonstrating the drop in age at the time of marriage for both sexes: “In 1900, fewer than half the young women between 20 and 24 years were or had been married; by 1940 a little more than half the girls of that age group were married. Now more than 70 percent are married.”<sup>23</sup> This article was written in 1955, ten years after D-Day. Thus, the increase in the frequency of marriage among teens coincided directly with the baby boom, and not simply the end of World War II. When considering the rush to marry and start families, not only was the accepted societal standard being manufactured and upheld, but post-war couples were searching for stability in the face of a potentially uncertain future.

1950s media depicted a clean, lily-white small-town lifestyle as the accepted cultural norm. All the families were upper-middle class, successful and had two respectful children. Sex appeared to not exist in the image of suburbia presented to the American public in sitcoms like *Leave it to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best* and *The Donna Reed Show*. When the sacred climate of the bedroom was entered, the couple always had twin beds, and the parents seemed to share nothing that could be construed as romantic affection. The widespread interpretation of the 1950s is that it was an asexual period, resembling the environment created in the television shows of the era. However, this avoidance of sexuality only served to heighten the contradictions evident

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<sup>23</sup> Sidonie Gruenberg, “Why They Are Marrying Younger?” *New York Times* Jan 30, 1955.

in society. While Americans were force fed these safe and sanitary romantic ideas, a more suggestive sexuality began to enter the American way of life.

These chaste images crumble when examining culture at large, and especially if one reads Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953). In the almost sixty years since the publication of this book, a number of studies have disproved many of Kinsey's findings. However, the importance of his work lies in the drastic change it effected in post-war America. In his report, Kinsey provides statistics upholding his belief that 1950s society was not as prudish as portrayed in the media. Kinsey comments on this fact:

Because of this public condemnation of pre-martial coitus, one might believe that such contacts would be rare among American females and males. But this is only the overt culture, the things that people openly profess to believe and to do. Our previous report (1948) on the male has indicated how far publicly expressed attitudes may depart from the realities of behavior....<sup>24</sup>

Kinsey goes on, noting "Nearly fifty percent of the females in our sample had coitus before they were married... A considerable portion of the premarital coitus had been had in the year or two immediately preceding marriage."<sup>25</sup> According to his findings, premarital coitus did not bear the stigma that it once had, especially for couples involved in a serious relationship signified by pinning and later engagement.

Pinning was the next step for couples contemplating engagement. LeMasters describes pinning, "[as] a courtship status that is best described as 'engaged to be engaged.' As such, it is designed for couples too involved for mere going steady...and yet not ready for a formal

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<sup>24</sup> Kinsey, Alfred. *Sexual Behavior and the Human Female*. (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1953 ) 285.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*,286.

engagement....”<sup>26</sup> In fact, the line between engagement and pinning was very faint. LeMasters says regarding this, “[Pinning] often carries the same necking and petting privileges as engagement.”<sup>27</sup> Pinning is typically described as an important element of collegiate culture. However, it seems to become increasingly prominent among high school students by the early 1960s. *Bye Bye Birdie* (George Sidney, 1962), for example, revolves around high school students Kim McAfee (Ann-Margret) and Hugo Peabody (Bobby Rydell). Kim says early in the film that Hugo pinned her “On the back seat of that lovely yellow school bus.” It is said throughout the narrative that Kim is sixteen years old, probably a sophomore or junior in high school. After a fight, Hugo says to Mr. McAfee (Paul Lynde), “Your daughter is the former future Mrs. Hugo Peabody!” This quote seems to corroborate the definition of pinning as a form of pre-engagement. The social trend of pinning and steady dating gained popularity during the post-war period, and much of the research on the mating habits of the era blames pinning for the declining marital age during the 1950s.

Even though *Where the Boys Are* preaches the values of sex without attachment, it is still a product of its cultural surroundings. Despite the film’s protagonists’ stated views on premarital sex, the narrative ends with the three main characters in steady relationships, likely pinned, to their respective boyfriends. Unlike *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, both of which are structured around a masculine perspective, the female point-of-view employed in *Where the Boys Are* focuses specifically on the question of gender, especially as it relates to sexual relations. The plot makes an interesting use of steady dating and pinning, which was tremendously controversial in the late 1950s and the early 1960s.

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<sup>26</sup> LeMasters, E.E. *Courtship and Marriage*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957) 143

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

## 1950s Teen Cinema

Teen cinema is not a static genre, and throughout the 1950s and 1960s it was rapidly changing. Teenage culture of the 1950s is associated primarily with juvenile delinquency.

*Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, both classic films still popular in recent years, demonstrate the quick evolution occurring within the teen film during the post-war era. In 1960, *Where the Boys Are* took many of the same elements of the earlier films (sex, drugs and juvenile delinquency) and examined them through a lens previously unexplored in classic Hollywood, a female perspective.

In the middle of the decade, films were being produced about teenagers rather than for them, and for much of the 1950s they were a tremendous focus for Hollywood due to their perceived juvenile delinquency. The film that best exemplifies this is *Blackboard Jungle*. The narrative follows English teacher Richard Dadier (Glenn Ford) in his first year at an inner city New York vocational high school. **In this setting, the story is invested in not only an examination of class, but more importantly, race. The societal roots of rock and roll were heavily rooted in African American culture. However, the important racial element was quickly ignored by Hollywood, with filmmakers choosing to create the lily white environment which is used in many of these films like *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Where the Boys Are*. *Blackboard Jungle* is one of the few movies to directly work with and acknowledge this racial element.** Early in the first act, Jim Murdock (Louis Calhern) comments on the working class environment of the school, “They hire fools like us with college degrees to sit on that garbage can...so women, for a few hours a day, can walk around the city without

getting attacked....” The teenagers in the movie are observed as a group, rather than individually. The two best able to distinguish themselves are Artie (Vic Morrow), and Gregory (Sidney Potier). We find out very little about either boy personally. However, the audience becomes intimately acquainted with Dadier’s home life: his small apartment and his pregnant wife Anne (Anne Francis). The visual construction throughout the work supports the development of Dadier over his students. During the many classroom scenes the film’s perspective is skewed towards Dadier’s point-of-view of his class. The room is framed in a wide shot from Dadier’s perspective at the front of the class near the blackboard, showing the boys being disorderly and disrespectful as he attempts to lecture. Two boys dance in one corner, and only one of the many students appears to be listening. Gregory, who is sitting near the back of the room, listens to Dadier intently. It is Dadier who the narrative follows, while the domestic life of his underprivileged pupils is left unexplored. The teenagers are always observed at school, and are viewed as caged, hostile animals meant to be tamed and civilized by mainstream adult culture.

In *Blackboard Jungle* the boys seem to be trapped in a state of perpetual childhood. Women are almost completely absent, as the movie’s focus is on a same-sex juvenile bond between the characters. There are only two prominent female characters, Anne and the sexually promiscuous teacher Lois Hammond (Margaret Hayes). When sex is present in the narrative, it is used as a weapon. Miss. Hammond suffers an attempted rape at the hands of her students, while Anne is also threatened with rape. Any sexual relationship between Dadier and his wife is nonexistent. While they are a married couple and do have a sexual relationship, Anne’s pregnancy has seemingly overshadowed any intimate feelings existing between them. It is in the first ten minutes that we learn Anne is four months pregnant, and the conception has been an



incredibly difficult process. Dadier's actions towards his wife suggest his need to protect her, likely due to the difficulty of the pregnancy and the value of the unborn child. In their initial scene together they enjoy a fancy dinner alone. Even in this intimate moment their physical contact is minimal. At one point during the meal, Dadier takes extreme care to place Anne's jacket over her shoulders, tucking it around her neck. As they leave the restaurant, their only embrace is his protective arm around her shoulder. Later, a potentially sexual moment is spoiled when Dadier asks Anne if she has taken her various medications. Dadier has placed his wife on a symbolic pedestal, he is overprotective of her, seeming almost paternal.

Anne Dadier is contrasted with Lois Hammond, who is immediately turned into a sexual object upon her introduction in the narrative. She is the first teacher called to collect her students, and her walk to the stage is handled in a number of extreme close-ups, during which her body is subject to unmistakable fragmentation. The first shot in the sequence frames her from shoulder to thigh as she walks down the aisle. The faces of the boys are clearly visible as is Dadier, the camera positioned just over his left shoulder. The next shot displays her from the thigh down as she climbs to the stage in her tight skirt; the camera slowly tilts upward over her body eventually showing all of it. Throughout the sequence, the soundtrack is dominated by the aroused wolf whistles of the teenagers, serving further to sexualize Ms. Hammond. Any progressive ideas on sex and gender are absent from the film, and the largely male feature provides virtually no women with whom female viewers might identify. As a result, Anne Dadier and Lois Hammond fall into a very strict Madonna/Whore dichotomy.

The subject of Anne's pregnancy is a confusing one within the narrative, as it opens up a number of opinions the film expresses regarding female sexuality. If Anne's pregnancy were not

addressed directly, it would be impossible to discover. There is no visual evidence of her condition in the context of the narrative, especially when examining the costuming of actress Anne Francis. Her outfits do not fit the typical maternity wear of the period. In fact, her clothing indicates that she is not showing at all. Her pregnancy serves not as a happy event for the couple, or a symbol of their sexual union; rather, it is a source of insecurity for Anne. Several scenes develop her feelings regarding her condition. She says to her husband early in the film, for example, "It's just that I don't wanna let you down again, that's all....I don't know what happened the last time.... You don't mind my being this way?" We see Anne in the scene in a medium close-up. The camera looks straight at her while positioned just over Dadier's left shoulder. He is shown primarily in profile, and the use of this angle implies the narrative is adopting his perspective; this is true in his interactions with his wife and his students as well.

The film, at first glance, seems hardly geared towards a teenage audience. Its' job is to analyze the social problem of juvenile delinquency. *Blackboard Jungle* was directed by Richard Brooks, who gained much of his notoriety during the post-war era, specializing in social problem films. He is best remembered for writing films like *Key Largo* (John Huston, 1948), *Brute Force* (Jules Dassin, 1947), *The Brick Foxhole* (1945) which served as the basis for *Crossfire* (Edward Dmytryk, 1947) and an uncredited role in writing *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946). Keeping with the social problem trend, *Blackboard Jungle* opens with the following sternly worded title card:

We, in the United States are fortunate to have a school system that is a tribute to our communities and to our faith in American youth. Today we are concerned with juvenile delinquency--its causes--and its effects. We are especially concerned when this delinquency boils over into our schools. The scenes and incidents depicted here are fictional. However,

we believe the public awareness is a first step toward a remedy for any problem. It is in this spirit and with this faith that BLACKBOARD JUNGLE is produced.<sup>28</sup>

The tone of this warning appears to direct the film towards an older adult audience. This introduction is more reminiscent of a 1930s gangster film like *Public Enemy* (William Wellman, 1931) than a movie that would appeal to teenagers. The language carefully emphasizes the importance of maintaining a stable community, home and future generation. However, as the sequence concludes, the mood switches from the heavy handed tone of the intro to a drastically different credit sequence, which is written on a blackboard as Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock Around the Clock" plays throughout.<sup>29</sup> The inclusion of this early rock and roll hit automatically directs the film toward a teenage market. In 1955, rock and roll was still a growing musical movement, with adolescents making up the primary listening audience.

Much of the press coverage surrounding the premier of *Blackboard Jungle* focuses on a number of riots connected to showings of the film. On May 21, 1955, the *New York Times* wrote about the aftermath of a public disturbance on the Princeton University campus following a screening,

The mild outburst was touched off when the song 'Rock Around the Clock'....blared from hi-fi sets on campus. A throng of students poured from the dormitories.... They milled around the street in a good natured mood, blocked traffic, turned on a fire hydrant and set off a false alarm....<sup>30</sup>

This is only one example of rioting which is often connected with *Blackboard Jungle*'s use of "Rock Around the Clock." The article goes on to report that there were no injuries or property

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<sup>28</sup> Doherty, Thomas, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950's* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988) 134.

<sup>29</sup> This was widely reported to be the first use of a Rock and Roll song in American film. The song was reportedly used after filmmaker Richard Brooks heard Glenn Ford's young son Peter listening to the record.

<sup>30</sup> "Princeton Suspends 4" *New York Times*. 21 May 1955. 37.

damage in the incident. Yet, teenagers exclusion from mainstream culture is evident in the coverage of the disturbance, as there are no accounts coming from the students. Rather, the article takes its information from local law enforcement, as well as Princeton University officials. The tension in the relationship between the teachers and students in *Blackboard Jungle* seems to be applicable to mainstream society when studying the press coverage of the riots. The teenagers have no voice of their own, and are defined by the outside perspective of the media.

With its interesting use of rock and roll, *Blackboard Jungle* is an early example of cinema geared towards an adolescent audience. When looked at in conjunction with *Rebel Without a Cause* and later *Where the Boys Are*, a sequence is created that demonstrates the progression occurring in gender and sexuality in teen culture. While *Blackboard Jungle* is an early example skewed towards an adult male perspective; *Rebel Without a Cause* is a film that aligns with the point of view of the teenagers in the narrative. *Where the Boys Are* is a later entry that incorporates the elements of *Rebel Without a Cause*, but not only does it take on a teenage perspective, but the identification centers on the primary female characters.

One of the earliest films which seems to be specifically targeting teenagers as an audience, rather than examining them as a social phenomenon, is Nicholas Ray's classic *Rebel Without a Cause*. The narrative follows three teenagers: Jim Stark (James Dean), Judy (Natalie Wood) and Plato Crawford (Sal Mineo). While the plot still expresses the fear of juvenile delinquency seen in *Blackboard Jungle*, the difference lies in the its' perspective. Unlike *Blackboard Jungle*, which examines the teenage characters from an adult point-of-view, *Rebel Without a Cause* establishes the adolescents as the primary narrative focus. The parents are shown as out of touch outsiders, and it is they who are as the main source of the teens'

frustration. This is made clear when examining Judy's family life. Her Father (William Hopper) is very hostile towards his daughter, attacking her for kissing him, he says to her: "What's the matter with you? You're getting too old for that stuff kiddo. I thought you'd stopped that long ago.... Girls your age don't do things like that!" While the sequence does not employ any one character's perspective, the wide shot of the family dining room focuses on Judy and her Father as the primary figures within the frame. The dynamic between them is dominated by Judy, who remains standing up throughout the scene, while the rest of the family sits down to dinner. When she flees the house in anger, her parents are stunned and reassure themselves that her behavior is just a phase. *Rebel Without a Cause* assumes the point of view of the teenage characters while diminishing the roles of the adults to passive observers.

In his book *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950's* (1989), Thomas Doherty writes: "Stark and his alternative 'family' (surrogate wife Judy...and surrogate son Plato) lead an autonomous existence; the adult world is peripheral. Father Jim Backus has no idea what his son does outside the home...."<sup>31</sup> *Rebel Without a Cause* seems to be making this point throughout the film, especially with the relationship between Jim and his Father, Frank. As Jim attempts to make a decision regarding his participation in the chicken run, he comes home and finds his Father scrubbing the floor in a frilly apron. Throughout the progression of the scene, we watch Jim's entrance into the house. It is Jim who is the focus of the scene; he holds all the power in the visual composition. The dialogue is covered in two primary, alternating shots. The first is a medium close up of Jim, with his father in the lower half of the frame. The second is a wider shot of Frank. The importance of this set-up lies in the bannister

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<sup>31</sup> Doherty, Thomas, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950's* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988) 107.

dominating the shot. The thick wooden bars of the staircase cut the set in half, seemingly imprisoning Mr. Stark in this feminized subservient role. The adults in the film are each dealing with their own issues: Frank is trapped in the feminized domestic role which has apparently been forced on him by his aggressive and shrewish wife Carol (Ann Doran). Jim's problem with his Father stems from Frank's perceived lack of masculinity. At this point in the narrative, Jim is searching for a role model from whom to seek advice. His Father is supposed to fulfill this role, as an older masculine figure who can understand Jim and guide him. However, Frank is feminized from his costuming in the filly apron (a traditionally female garment) to his staging on his hands and knees scrubbing the floor (a traditionally female duty). This produces a sense of masculinity in crisis, which played an important role in the gender interactions of the 1950s, and is a root source of Jim's internal conflict in *Rebel Without a Cause*. It is this tension that isolates Jim from his parents: they do not understand him, and in turn he cannot understand them.

The spectators are encouraged to side with Jim, Judy and Plato, not with their unlikable parents. The scene where the teen's bond is strongest occurs in the abandoned Hollywood mansion. In a rare moment of play, Judy and Jim act as a married couple touring the house with Plato as their realtor. The scene is filmed in an incredibly close and intimate manner, much of it depicted in medium close up. The teenagers are the focus of the scene. The tight nature of the shots prevents viewers from gaining an appreciation of the setting around them, instead allowing them to become familiar with the characters faces, which dominate much of the frame. Much of the scene's lighting emanates from a candelabra Plato is holding. The choice of such close and intimate lighting so near to the actors casts a striking, but soft light on their faces while the rest

of the set is kept very much in shadow. When asked playfully by Plato if they have children, Jim and Judy react in complete and utter disgust, speaking of how annoying and needy children are:

PLATO: We really don't encourage them. They're so noisy and troublesome. Don't you agree?

JUDY: Yes. And so terribly annoying when they cry. I don't know what to do when they cry.

JIM: Drown them like puppies.

Most importantly, Dean delivers this line in an impersonation of Mr. Magoo, the blind cartoon miser voiced by Jim Backus, who not coincidentally is the actor portraying Jim's Father. This is how the teenagers perceive the feelings of the adults around them. *Rebel Without a Cause* begins to explore the idea of sympathetic and non-delinquent teenagers, who are not creatures to be civilized and tamed, but are a demographic in their own right with their own desires and struggles. *Where the Boys Are*, released five years after *Rebel Without a Cause*, not only assumes the perspective of the adolescent main characters, but showcases four female characters who prior to this point had largely remained in supporting and romantic roles in Hollywood cinema.

### ***Where The Boys Are***

*Where the Boys Are* spotlights four midwestern coeds, Merritt (Delores Hart), Tuggle (Paula Prentiss), Angie (Connie Francis) and Melanie (Yvette Mimeux), as they escape their snowy campus for Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. While there, each woman encounters the opposite sex and is forced to confront her views on relationships, intercourse and marriage. The film is an early entry into the beach film sub-genre of teen pics which became a staple in Hollywood during the early 1960s. While *Where the Boys Are* is a glitzy late studio era production, it provides a more realistic portrayal of collegiate sexual mores of the period than many of the

movies that came afterward. *Where the Boys Are* stands as an effective entry into the teen film genre, creating a sequence that when compared with *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle*, carefully examines post-war sexuality as it relates to collegiate culture. The film stands out as a work of transitional cinema, while it is beginning to ask questions about the accepted sexual norms, it is still notably imprinted by the beliefs of post-war, baby boom America.

Examining *Where the Boys Are* through a lens of teenage and adult identification, it presents a strikingly positive relationship between the generations. Early in the first act, character actor Chill Wills, who plays the Ft. Lauderdale Police Captain, gives a speech to the local police force:

Gentlemen, the city of Fort Lauderdale is once again under fire from the North. We've survived it before and I reckon we're gonna survive it again. To you newly installed officers who've never seen action in the war against higher education I'd like to give you a little rundown on what to expect. Expect anything. Anything and everything because that's what you're going to get. Fort Lauderdale is not the only community to be invaded at this time. In Palm Springs and in Newport, on the beaches of the Mid-Atlantic to the snows of Colorado, the students of America are gathering to celebrate the rites of spring. And if you'll pardon the pun, they have that right. They're our future voters, citizens of our country and they are our responsibility. But how the hell to handle them, that is a different matter. Now these kids didn't come down here to break the law. They'll break it, sure. That's not their main objective. And remember, too, that they are our guests. So I want every man on the force to try his best, his level best to try to avoid arresting anyone....

This scene serves as an introduction to the story, and establishes the adult perspective at the outset of the film. His speech serves the same purpose as the introduction that opens *Blackboard Jungle*; however there is an important distinction between the two. In *Where the Boys Are* the relationship between the adults and teens is far more positive than in *Blackboard Jungle*. *Where the Boys Are* also acknowledges the reality of delinquency. However, the Police Captain's speech conveys an underlying tone of acceptance and understanding. He stresses that potentially lawbreaking teenagers are citizens, adults, and future voters; as such they are worthy and



deserving of respect. This calm, respectful tone is maintained throughout the film even during the police calls which detail the crazy exploits of the college students. They are acknowledged as members of mainstream American culture, while in *Blackboard Jungle*, the title card observes the teenagers from the perspective of adult American society which isolates and alienates them.

### The Previously Unexplored Female Perspective

*Where the Boys Are* presents viewers with four individual female protagonists as potential figures of identification, a fact that sets it apart from earlier films marketed towards teenage audiences. In *Blackboard Jungle* there are no female students in the school; the only women in the narrative are teachers and wives. In *Rebel Without a Cause*, Judy exists primarily as a romantic interest for Jim, her narrative importance taking a back seat to his. A mere five years later, *Where the Boys Are* reverses this male dominated trend. While there are male characters in the film, their function is merely to enhance the romantic narrative. Melanie's love interests, Franklin (Rory Harrity) and Dill (John Brennan), are practically interchangeable, identifiable only by the fact that they reportedly attend Yale. As viewers we are not supposed to become invested in the boys, but in the girls. Each is a likable character, and therefore, an easy figure for female identification. The four leading ladies each provide a character for different cross sections of the female audience with whom to identify. Through Merritt, Tuggle, Melanie and Angie, the narrative examines four separate responses to the sexual exploration they are forced to undergo during their spring break in Florida. Angie and Merritt are representative of the new direction of sexuality that would become associated with the freedoms of the second wave of American feminism. On the other hand, Tuggle and Melanie personify the older perspective from which

feminism emerged. They are characteristic of 1950s morals: valuing marriage and stability as the ultimate goal in choosing to align with, and examine the female characters, rather than fetishize and gaze at them, *Where the Boys Are* establishes itself as a unique, important work for the burgeoning feminist movement.

“Should a Girl, or Should She Not Play House Before Marriage... My Opinion is Yes”

Merritt Andrews is established as the primary protagonist in *Where the Boys Are*, and her character is representative of the changing collegiate social climate during the early 1960s. In the first act, Merritt breaks down the chaste romantic ideas which permeated in society during the post-war period, instead favoring a freer sexuality. While the views of her upbringing are imprinted on her, Merritt is shown asking questions, many of which are seen as unacceptable by the older generation. The relationship between Merritt and Ryder (George Hamilton) further underscores the transitional nature of the film. There is a noted equality between the couple which demonstrates the importance of the female perspective, both in the narrative and American culture. The development of their relationship allows Merritt to take an active, productive role in the partnership. She does not sit back and take a passive role to Ryder. In the handling of this subject matter, the filmmakers are marking these questions of sex without commitment as ones of primary importance.

Through Merritt the narrative establishes a subtle rebellion against the perceived puritanical reputation of the post-war era. This trend begins early in the film when Merritt is openly outspoken in her “Courtship and Marriage” class, expressing her belief that: “We’re supposed to be intelligent. So why don’t we get down to the giant jackpot issue? Like should a

girl or should she not under any circumstances play house before marriage... My opinion is yes.”

The scene is constructed in alternating medium long shots of Merritt and Doctor Ronch (Amy Douglass). As Merritt stands at her desk looking towards the chalkboard, she covers the full height of the screen and is positioned in the first quarter of the frame. The other students, their attention focused completely on Merritt, take up the bottom half of the frame. The color palate of the costuming allows Merritt to stand out further. She wears a black dress with a white collar and barely visible red trim. She is the only character in the scene costumed in such a dark color. The other women wear much lighter, more vibrant colors, there are various shades of red, white, green and blue. The importance of Merritt’s statement lies in the use of the term “playing house.” In *Sex and the College Girl* (1963), journalist Gael Greene defines the cultural idea of playing house in favorable terms: “‘Playing house’ or ‘going all the way... is no longer universally regarded as cheap, desperate, promiscuous, loose, or ‘strictly for girls who can’t get a man any other way’.”<sup>32</sup> Merritt supports and defends premarital intercourse, which is a monumental fact considering her status as the protagonist of the film. The scene demonstrates particular cultural relevance when Merritt begins to cite Dr. Kinsey. Dr. Ronch quickly jumps in with a hostile, “We are not discussing Doctor Kinsey!” Dr. Ronch does not subscribe to the views on sexuality which had been popularized by Kinsey a few years earlier, and are in turn defended by Merritt. Through her character, the filmmakers have established a transitional leading lady, emblematic of the growing rebellion against the strict established social norms represented by her elderly professor. In the construction of the dialogue, Merritt takes the issue of sex and exposes the debate separating the generations:

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<sup>32</sup> Greene, Gael, *Sex and the Single Girl* (NY: The Dial Press, 1964) 36.

Frankly, I thought the text was a little old-fashioned. It didn't have much to do with modern college life as far as I could see....In this day and age, if a girl doesn't become a little emotionally involved on the first date, it's going to be her last, with that man anyhow....

In her exchange with Dr. Ronch, Merritt openly defies the beliefs held by earlier generations.

Like any transition the change is not swift and immediate, but with Merritt it is gradual, forcing her to grow and change throughout the narrative, which as viewers we get to witness through the course of her relationship with Ryder.

Merritt is not the only character who expresses progressive opinions regarding premarital intercourse. As she and Ryder become acquainted, he describes his views of sex, saying "Sex is no longer a matter of morals, that idea went out with the raccoon coats. Sex is...part of personal relations... It's a pleasant friendly thing like shaking hands or making sure you catch a person's name when you're introduced...." Ryder is held up as the film's main love interest while being contrasted against Franklin and Dill, Melanie's questionable suitors. In his speech, Ryder erases all the emotional baggage accompanying sex, promoting it instead as something as casual and laid back as shaking hands. The frank expression of Ryder's views reveals the drastic liberalization that was occurring in societal views on sexuality. The mores of previous generations touted proper and acceptable intercourse as a sacred and unspoken act between heterosexual married couples. *Where the Boys Are* demonstrates that the status quo was rapidly changing, and a more relaxed attitude was emerging.

Before the girls leave for break, Merritt is shown having trouble in her classes. It is also established that the Dean of the University feels she is not working up to her potential. Yet, at this point her quick intellect has already been shown through Merritt's exchange with Dr. Ronch. Later in the film, when Ryder asks her IQ, Merritt's response is very telling: "Don't tell anyone,

but it's high, 138." Upon learning this, he states that his is 140. However, as she becomes further acquainted with Ryder, Merritt does nothing to hide her intellect as they discuss the different kinds of men she has dated throughout her college career. Merritt notes that she is well aware of the dating rituals of collegiate culture, she then describes how various groups of boys have gone about courting her. She says,

I've divided boys into three types: the sweepers, the strokers...(who are) usually accompanied by soft words, soft lighting, and soft music. If a girl gets too interested in the drama Act 3 is over before she even knows the curtain is up.... The subtles: the ones with the subtle approaches. They have a lot of different techniques discussions of erotic literature, Freud, *The Coming of Age in Samoa*....

During this discussion with Ryder, Merritt demonstrates that she is aware of the courting techniques men use and that she is not apt to be sucked into the "drama," as she terms it. Ryder quickly discovers this. After he asks her IQ, he then looks off camera, stating "This is going to be a long siege." In this statement, Ryder is acknowledging that Merritt is an intelligent, well-read woman, who will not likely yield to the same seduction practices which worked on other girls he dated. In her interactions with Ryder, Merritt becomes his intellectual equal and this allows them to openly explore these questions of premarital sexuality.

In a further examination of this equality, the cinematic structure of their scenes together does not seem to favor either character. As Ryder and Merritt first discuss the perks of sex, much of the important dialogue is delivered in a medium shot and a single take. When the sequence employs a shot reverse shot composition, the scene follows an ordered pattern. Merritt and Ryder are shown in reverse shot twice, before the scene is broken by a wider shot. This maintains an order to the action which prevents either character from establishing a substantial dominance within the visual composition. As the female character, Merritt is lit brightly to show off her

youthful attractiveness. While Ryder is fetishized in his own way through the shadows cast on his face, accentuating his dark and mysterious good looks. Merritt is made the focus of the scene through the costuming employed by designer Kitty Manger. Throughout the initial scene of courtship, Ryder is clothed in a black polo shirt and swim trunks, while Merritt has placed a tan skirt over her silver one piece bathing suit.

The particulars of the costuming are important considering the lighting of the set. The sitting room of Ryder's yacht is a very dark space; the lighting is minimal, and the wall is constructed in a very dark mahogany. Much of the sequence appears to employ natural lighting, the only visible source being a small lamp in the corner. A majority of the lamplight illuminates Merritt on the sofa in the center of the set. Ryder's black shirt does not stand out in the already dim room, and to further emphasize the lack of contrast he is filmed against an open window displaying the dark night sky. In his medium close-up Ryder is barely distinguishable from the background behind him, giving him the appearance of a floating head. In a later courtship sequence, the costuming has switched, as has the characters' dominance, Merritt is clothed in a dark cardigan and Ryder in a white dinner jacket. This particular scene is delivered in a straight forward manner; from beginning to conclusion the dialogue is delivered in a single take, the only movement occurs as the camera tracks in from a wide shot to a medium shot. Merritt and Ryder neck on a deck chair; he is physically on top of her, and still seems to subtly trap her once she sits up. Throughout the sequence, unlike in the earlier courtship scene, it is Ryder who dominates the frame visually. Again, they are photographed in a very dark setting so the costuming really establishes the dominance of the characters. The contrast between these two scenes, each fairly similar in structure and subject matter, demonstrates the equality that the film maintains between

Ryder and Merritt. Both sequences observe the couple flirting with the idea of a relationship. In the first scene, the structure openly favors Merritt through careful costuming and lighting. While in the second, the same methods are used to allow Ryder to stand out. In *Where the Boys Are*, where women are so vital to the narrative, the filmmakers seem to be taking a very progressive stance in depicting the lead romantic couple in such even and equal terms. Neither Ryder nor Merritt establish a regular dominance within any of their romantic scenes, and both characters share a similar fetishization of the gaze.

Glendon Swarthout's novel *Where the Boys Are* (1958), which serves as the basis for the film, takes a very direct, and up front perspective towards premarital relations among teenagers. Merritt recounts her previous sexual experiences, announcing "Incidentally, I was not a virgin. My treasures, alas, had already been rifled... Nor did I spend a sleepless night covered with guilt, shame and confusion. If parents think their daughters can attain young womanhood in 1958 in a state of pristinity they are really out to lunch."<sup>33</sup> Merritt speaks of sex in a very direct manner. The tone Swarthout employs hints that she has no regrets regarding the loss of her virginity, and Merritt even acknowledges premarital sex among young women as a common and accepted act. In the film, Merritt repeatedly speaks in favor of premarital relations, but we never hear of her sexual experiences. In fact, near the end of the final act when Merritt and Ryder are on the verge of consummating their relationship, her cool and enlightened veneer shatters: "I'm not frightened! And I'm not being coy. It's just that I've never done anything like that before." Reading this line in the context of the narrative, it seems to be out of place when examining her character development. Thus, Merritt becomes nothing more than an opinionated college student,

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<sup>33</sup> Swarthout, Glendon, *Where the Boys Are* (New York: Random House, 1960) 39.

all talk and no action when faced with sex. At this moment in the film, Merritt has already been physical with Ryder on a number of occasions; is it conceivable that she would panic during this particular intimate moment? This is a point when the filmmakers appear to be yielding to the pressures of the conservative remnants of the 1950s; given that Merritt, as she is written in the novel, seems very sophisticated and savvy relating to sexual matters.

Through the character of Merritt the film offers a transitional protagonist. The narrative places the most controversial subject matter in the hands of Merritt and Ryder. Throughout their dialogue, the narrative provides a critique of the perceived puritanical culture of the post-war era, and in its place presents ideas of open sexuality which are more reminiscent of those held in the later half of the 1960s. Meanwhile, through the characterization of Angie, the film further explores modern femininity. While Angie is interested and desiring of male companionship, it is not her sole purpose of existence. She is independent, outspoken and is not afraid to ogle and pursue a man in whom she is interested.

### Connie Francis, The Girl Groups and the Reversal of the Gaze

At first glance, Angie seems to be the least important of the four girls in the narrative. She is the final character introduced, almost an afterthought, on the car trip to Fort Lauderdale. However, throughout the film Angie is set apart as a tremendously important character, especially when examining the cultural environment surrounding the narrative. Angie is not a passive female character waiting to be found by the boys. She is an active pursuer, who is able to subvert the traditionally male gaze for her own purposes of fetishizing the male characters. The power Angie is given within the plot correlates to the growing importance of the female



perspective within Hollywood cinema. Throughout Connie Francis' music career, her chief occupation before her break-out role in *Where the Boys Are*, Francis had routinely assumed a similar brassy and independent persona which is a substantial part of her role in the film.

Angie is the captain of the girls' hockey team, and her status as an athlete makes her appear less feminine than the other female characters. Throughout the film she yearns for romance, she says to Merritt, "Doesn't it ever bother you?... The lack of male companionship?" While Angie repeatedly expresses a desire for "male companionship," unlike Melanie she never talks of marriage. Due to her supposed masculine identity as an athlete, Angie struggles in the field of romance. Despite her difficulties, Angie is the most active when dealing with potential romantic interests. Angie is the one who must work to make her romance a success, and even simply to get Basil (Frank Gorshin) to look at her.

Angie is the aggressor and fully in the driver's seat during her romantic exploits. On the drive down to Ft. Lauderdale, Angie is the first to state that they are going on Spring Break for romantic and sexual reasons, saying "Last year, there were only 20,000 kids down here. Why don't we all admit it.... We're going to Lauderdale for one reason: to meet boys." She is the first to address the question of romance; prior to this scene Merritt, Tuggle and Melanie each talk about going on vacation to study, relax and tan. Boys do not enter the discussion until Angie mentions them. While Merritt, Tuggle and Melanie are pursued by their love interests, Angie pursues Basil. In her classic work of cinema studies "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," (1973) Laura Mulvey theorizes how in classical Hollywood cinema women are fetishized as objects of pleasure simply to be looked at: "The determining male gaze projects its

fantasy onto the female figure....”<sup>34</sup> In her role as Angie, Connie Francis turns this theory on its head. Throughout the film, it is Angie who gazes at the male characters, projecting her fantasies of male companionship on them. Angie’s control of the gaze necessitates the evolution of Basil into a myopic musician; he cannot see her, therefore he cannot turn the gaze on her. He wears abnormally large and incredibly thick glasses, and unless he removes them, his eyes are virtually invisible behind the large, distorted frames. In his condition, it is impossible for him to do the looking. In fact, Basil finally discovers his feelings for her through listening. Angie, knowing his passion for jazz, makes use of her singing talents. Her song, “Turn on the Sunshine” is the only musical number in the actual film. Thus, Basil and Angie are able to develop their relationship through song, not through the gaze.

Angie is placed in the position of the gazer even before her meeting Basil. In a number of sequences Angie sits on the beach with the other girls, checking out the men around her. When the film first introduces Ryder, it is through a low-angle shot, which is a close approximation of Angie’s point of view. He is first seen walking along the beach as Angie watches him, clearly attracted to him. For much of his approach, Ryder is not aware of the women ogling him. At one point he stops and smiles, but it is unclear who he is looking at as the camera does not adopt his gaze. The inclusion of such shots is unusual in the classical Hollywood era. There has been so much written about the “male gaze,” yet Angie appears to have appropriated it for herself, creating a “female gaze.” Ryder, whose status as the young, attractive, white male protagonist would typically grant him tremendous narrative agency, is placed into the role traditionally occupied by the female. His chiseled body is fetishized by the gazing women. In another instance

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<sup>34</sup> Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema.” In *Visual and Other Pleasures*, by Laura Mulvey Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989. 19.

of the “female gaze,” as the girls prepare to leave for their dates, Angie and later Tuggle look out the window of their second floor hotel room onto an unknowing Ryder, who is waiting on the pool deck below. Their view out the window is recreated in a wide, high angle shot, gazing down on Ryder who rests against a deck chair. The shot’s perspective is clearly established as Ryder is framed neatly between the two window shutters. Like the earlier example involving Angie, he is oblivious to the women watching him. This moment in the film appears to be reminiscent of the classic “Woman in the Window” shot. The “woman in the window” is a motif that is repeated throughout the post-war genres of film noir and melodrama. This particular shot often represents a woman’s passivity within the narrative, and is also a very clear literalization of the “male gaze.” The woman who is captured in the window is framed by it, becoming little more than a picture for gazing at by the male characters. In *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944) the woman in the window is captured as a painting. The plot revolves around Laura Hunt (Gene Tierney), who at the beginning of the film has reportedly been murdered. For the first half of the narrative, she is present through a stunning, yet haunting portrait. Detective Mark McPherson (Dana Andrews) becomes obsessed with the work of art, his fascination leading Waldo Lydecker (Clifton Webb) to say “...You’d better watch out McPherson, or you’ll finish up in a psychiatric ward. I doubt they’ve ever had a patient who fell in love with a corpse.” In its form as a painting, the likeness of Laura is rendered completely passive. As a portrait it is capable of receiving the fantasies and projections of the viewing male, in this case Det. McPherson, yet she is denied the ability to return the gaze. The films’ treatment of Ryder is a complete reversal of this common motif. For once, it is not the woman who is rendered passive, but the leading male protagonist. The reversal of the traditionally “male gaze” demonstrates a growing awareness of female characters in

Hollywood and a budding recognition of their point-of-view. Throughout the early 1960s, the entertainment industry appeared to be gaining an awareness of their female viewers. Films like *Where the Boys Are* become increasingly structured around the perspective of female characters, and at this time in the music industry female artists, like *Where the Boys Are* actress Connie Francis, were developing a fan following. With these “girl groups,” a female point-of-view was gradually entering the recording business.

The girl group era is an interesting time in music history, lasting from the drafting of Elvis in 1959 until the British invasion in 1964. In his essay entitled “The Girl Groups,” Greil Marcus writes: “The style flourished between 1958 and 1965.... The form reaches its height with the Spector groups--the Crystals, the Rhonettes, and Darlene Love backed by the Crystals....”<sup>35</sup> So much of the writing on the girl groups focuses on the romance contained within their music, Marcus continues: “...It was a celebration of The Boy. The Boy is the central mythic figure in the lyrics of girl-group rock. He is shadowy: the boy who’ll love walking in the rain, the fine fine boy...He is irresistible and almost never macho. He is sensitive....”<sup>36</sup> However, a number of songs break from this marriage minded pattern, instead portraying an active and progressive female heroine. In her book *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with Mass Media* (1994), Susan Douglas spends an entire chapter delving into the influence and providing analysis of girl group music, exposing how multilayered it actually was:

Was being cautious too safe? Girl group music acknowledged--even celebrated--our confusion and ambivalence. Some of us wanted to be good girls, some of us wanted to be bad. But most of us wanted to get away with being both[,] and girl group music let us try

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<sup>35</sup> Marcus, Greil. “The Girl Groups.” In *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll* edited by Anthony DeCurtis and James Henke with Holly George Warren. Original Editor: Jim Miller. New York: Random House, 1992. 189.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

on and act out a host of identities, from transitional, obedient girlfriend to brassy, independent rebel....<sup>37</sup>

Till this point, rock and roll had been a genre dominated by men. However, the pop driven sound of the late 1950s and early 1960s seemed to allow for more women to enter the music industry.

One of the first girl groups to make substantial headway into the recording business was the Shirelles. In 1960 they scored a number one hit with the song “Will You Love Me Tomorrow.”

Douglas writes:

...It was the first time a girl group, and one composed of four black teenagers, had cracked the number one slot.... They were singing about whether or not to go all the way and wondering whether the boyfriend, so seemingly full of heartfelt, earnest love in the night, would prove to be an opportunistic, manipulative lying cad after he got his way....<sup>38</sup>

The song realistically portrays the sexual climate and its relationship to teenagers during the early 1960s. The lyrics describe a girl’s concerns in the face of having sex with her boyfriend.

The singer asks: “Will you still love me tomorrow?” There seems to be a very real concern that the sexual encounter is not one of love, rather one of passion and hormones: “Is this a lasting treasure or just a moment’s pleasure....I’d like to know that your love is love I can be sure of....”

This song is a particularly memorable one, as it delves into the power of the female voice in the girl group music era. It goes against the common belief that girl group music was entirely about romance and as Marcus stated, a celebration of the boy. Singers like Connie Francis released music that crafted a progressive image of femininity which showed girls it was not all about the boy, rather it could be about them.

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<sup>37</sup> Douglas, Susan *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with Mass Media*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994) 88.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

*Where the Boys Are* was Connie Francis' feature film debut. Before 1960, she was chiefly known as a recording artist. It is noteworthy that Connie Francis, in many of her songs, presents an active and independent female voice. The song that best depicts this is "Lipstick on Your Collar," which Francis released in 1958. The singer is a high school girl, who discovers her boyfriend has been cheating on her, with her best friend no less. When the unnamed boyfriend is called on his indiscretion, he lies to her, "...You said it belonged to me, made me stop and think. Then I noticed yours was red, mine was baby pink...." The narrative in the song concludes with her character breaking up with the unfaithful boyfriend, "...Lipstick on your collar said you were untrue. Bet your bottom dollar you and I are through, cause lipstick on your collar told a tale on you...." This song fits nicely into the early years of the girl group era; yet, the structure and tone is decidedly progressive when comparing it with the songs being released by other girl group artists during this period. This brassy and independent spirit which was conveyed in Francis' early songs contributes to the construction and development of her character in *Where the Boys Are*.

Connie Francis' performance provides immense depth and influence to the development of the character of Angie. While Merritt spends much of the film expressing controversial viewpoints, through Angie the narrative acts out progressive elements that make it unique to the early 1960s, and representative of the transitioning period. However, there are a number of aspects that are characteristic of the more conservative 1950s. Melanie Toleman, for example, is a literal characterization of the tensions of post-war culture. While Merritt and Angie are symbolic of the progressive evolution of feminism during this period, Melanie is representative of what feminism rebelled against. While Merritt and Angie ask questions regarding appropriate

sexual behavior, Melanie is in a blind quest for love that leads her to experiment with deviant behavior she does not understand.

“I’ve Been Dining and I’ve Been Dancing... And I’ve Been Drinking!”

Melanie Toleman is a difficult character to interpret within the film’s narrative. From the beginning her ultimate goal is marriage, but unlike Tuggle, who shares this aim, Melanie is blinded by the romantic concept of love at first sight. In her quest to find a husband she is willing to stoop to behaviors (drunkenness, drug use, and sex) which literally and metaphorically isolate her from the other girls. In her fate at the end of the film (a drugged up potential rape at the hands of Franklin) the filmmakers appear to be making an example of Melanie. Because *Where the Boys Are* is beginning to explore casual sexuality, it cannot be argued that Melanie is raped merely because she likely has sex. Rather, her “downfall” results from many different factors throughout the narrative. Her plot-line in Fort Lauderdale is made up of a number of visual and cinematic clues through which the conclusions regarding her behavior can be drawn.

Melanie begins as a stereotypical goody goody; she is an image of society’s ideal woman in 1960. Throughout the film she constantly moons about marriage, “A girl from school came down here last year, and she met a boy from Columbia, a senior. They knew each other one week, and the next thing, they were married.” While she is obsessed with love at first sight, Melanie is incredibly naive regarding sexual interaction. Merritt exposes Melanie’s ignorance with her response to the above speech: “You’ve got your calendar a little wrong. She met this boy here in March, and they got married in October two jumps ahead of the obstetrician....” For

Melanie and thousands of young girls like her, marriage was the ultimate goal. Education was simply a means to an end, a diamond ring and a suburban bi-level.

Melanie's downfall begins early in the first act, even before her romantic entanglements. Before the girls arrive in Fort Lauderdale, we learn that Melanie is lying to her parents. She tells Angie, "...Just for safe, in case you ever meet my folks, I spent spring vacation at your house, right?" Melanie even goes to the trouble of writing a number of letters to her parents, covering her tracks, to tell them about her fictional spring break in Chicago and even has a friend mail the letters from there. Melanie is very aware of what she perceives to be bad behavior and how her parents will react. This explains her fear of her parents discovering her trip to Ft. Lauderdale. As the narrative progresses, her behavior becomes more extreme with the introduction of romance. After a date with Franklin she drunkenly raves, "I've been dining and I've been dancing! And I've been drinking!" As she delivers this line, she stops and whispers "I've been drinking," seemingly recognizing the deviancy in her behavior. Earlier in this scene, as Melanie dances up the stairs of their hotel we watch her return through the window, taking the perspective of Tuggle and Merritt. Both girls have also been on dates and are home and in their pajamas. Much later in the narrative, after another date with Franklin, Melanie appears to be under the influence of drugs. They pull up to their hotel in Franklin's car, and both are clearly lethargic with glazed eyes. While drug use is not stated directly, it is strongly implied from the context of the sequence. The film takes enormous care to portray these various elements of Melanie's behavior, the treatment of her drunkenness is literal and straightforward and the depiction of potential drug use is deliberate. The combination of these scenes establish the importance of Melanie's deviant behavior in the context of the narrative.



It is never explicitly stated if Melanie has had sex with Franklin or Dil. In the clearest hint we are given, Melanie and Dil are seen emerging out of a hotel doorway. This moment has a notably different tone. The scene is performed in one take. In the previous sequence, Tuggle calls an end to her date with TV (Jim Hutton) after an uncomfortable discussion of sex. The camera fluidly tilts down from Tuggle as she enters her room, and finds Dil and Melanie emerging from another hotel room. As they enter the frame a sad, heavy saxophone begins to play over the action. They kiss before Melanie looks around saying, "Dil, you'd never say anything? Tell anyone?" Dill says nothing and kisses her on the head, she then goes upstairs to her room ending the scene. This is a very cryptic moment. From the dialogue, it can be inferred that Melanie and Dill have engaged in an illicit behavior that she would rather not discuss. Later, after Melanie's drunken night she becomes agitated during a conversation with Merritt saying, "No matter what happened, I'm in love with Franklin... What are you trying to do make me feel like a (tramp)... Don't spoil it for me please." Melanie's dialogue references Merritt's speech on playing house before marriage at the beginning of the film. Again, the topic of premarital intercourse is not referenced literally in the scene. However, Melanie's focus is on this "It," which she seems to value highly. While she may not be physically living with either boy, it can be insinuated from the content of the narrative that they have been intimate. The attention placed on Melanie demonstrates that her moral "fall" begins upon her arrival in Ft. Lauderdale. However, it is never directly stated how far Melanie has fallen. Within her narrative the matter of sex is never addressed, rather she repeatedly speaks of a cryptic "It" with Dill and later Merritt. Spectators are forced to assume that Melanie has had sex before her suggested rape in the third act. Her

romantic relationships are complicated and convoluted; she is the one main character who becomes involved with two men. This fact seems to further contribute to her eventual downfall.

In her time in Ft. Lauderdale, Melanie becomes entangled with two boys, Dill and Franklin, who are introduced upon the girls arrival at the hotel. Melanie hurries into the room excited, saying “Merritt! Guess what. Just below us, Ivy Leaguers, three of them.... Their door was open and I heard them talking. You know, that accent. I think they’re Yalies. Maybe even Harvards!” By the beginning of their first full day, Melanie is on friendly terms with the boys. Two of them grab Melanie and throw her into the pool. The casual nature of their behavior leads Tuggle to comment, “She certainly makes friends fast.” As Melanie hurries over to talk to Merritt and Tuggle, the scene cuts to a wide shot of the boys who flip a coin, likely for Melanie. The boy who we later discover to be Dill, wins and the other leaves. It is Dill who Melanie dates until the morning after they appear to have sex. She then begins seeing Franklin after Dill is supposedly called away to help his Father on business. The boys are barely distinguishable. Franklin and Dill are roughly the same height, they have similar hair cuts and with as little as is known about their backgrounds, they could very well be the same character. Melanie does not date both boys at the same time, and she is not using them. However, it is they who are taking advantage of her, which ultimately leads to her downfall and punishment in the third act.

The narrative carefully distances itself from Melanie’s story. She is quickly forced into the periphery once the girls arrive in Ft. Lauderdale. When Melanie begins to see Dill, their relationship moves off camera, and the focus of the narrative shifts to the other three girls and their boyfriends. Merritt comments on this, saying to Melanie: “You are always so alone, we never see you anymore.” Melanie is often not included in the film’s social scenes and much of

the time when she enters the story line, it is at the expense of the other characters, whose narratives must stop to follow Melanie.

The movie begins to visually isolate Melanie a mere half hour into the film, before much of her narrative has begun. At this point, Melanie has just started seeing Dill. As the girls wake-up after their first full day in Ft. Lauderdale, their hotel room is shown in a wide shot. There are girls sleeping on the floor, girls sleeping in chairs and Merritt is asleep on the bed. Melanie is completely isolated within the frame; she sits on a chair pushed to the far right corner of the room. Furthermore, she is sitting in a very juvenile manner--her knees pulled up against her chest--making her even smaller within the shot. As the scene continues, the filmmakers further explore this isolation through the shot composition. The primary wide shot is of the hotel room coming from the perspective of the other girls looking at Melanie. The camera is positioned just behind Merritt and the other characters, looking at Melanie deep in the background.

What becomes strikingly clear in the treatment of Melanie is the tension present within post-war culture. While society had been advancing rapidly with what could be discussed, there were still a number of imposed restraints on acceptable content. Throughout Melanie's narrative, there are numerous points where the narrative seems to be indirectly addressing some of the "illicit" behaviors in which she is participating. However, due to the film's subtle treatment of these events, many of the conclusions, which can be drawn from the events presented on screen, are merely inferential. By contrast, there is nothing to be inferred about Tuggle's behavior. She is anxious to get married, focusing more on settling down in a stable relationship than finishing her education. It is this element which makes her a character with whom we can identify in early 1960s society. *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is filled with young girls just like her.

“Five Foot Ten and a Half, Without Stockings”

Tuggle is the most literal representation of female culture in the early 1960s. Her character is in a constant state of confusion over the proper expectations of a lady versus the reality of collegiate culture. Her character is shaped by immense insecurities, which appear to fuel her desire to marry and have children. It is in her quest to settle down that she experiences the sexual contradictions which color this era of American culture: does a woman become “damaged goods” after sexual relations with a man even though it is he who is often requesting it?

As her relationship with TV becomes increasingly physical, Tuggle works hard to break the mood. In one scene, they stretch out on a deck chair looking at the stars. The sequence employs a medium close-up, with the couple centered in the frame. Again, the film does not seem to be aligning with either Tuggle or TV’s perspective. The shot is simply looking down on them. As TV rolls over to kiss her, she sits straight up exclaiming “Look! A double shooting star!” Later in the same scene, an undeterred TV asks if Tuggle is a good or a bad girl. She nervously dances around the topic, saying she does not want to “disillusion or disappoint” him. After further pressing the issue, she ponders her answer before giving a very unsure “mmm-hmm.” The numerous insecurities that Tuggle expresses serve to humanize her and allow female spectators to identify with her as a character.

Tuggle’s reluctance to answer TV’s good girl or bad girl question reflects the confusion surrounding sexual relationships during this period. Her reaction implies that she is unsure how to classify sexual behavior. Is it a good thing to be a virgin, or will her virginity disappoint him?

On the other hand, what becomes of a girl with a certain number of sexual partners? The literature of the post-war period preaches chastity as the only acceptable option for women. A man would not want to marry a girl who has too much sexual experience, yet men were always pressuring a girl into sex. A so-called “decent” girl is expected to say no, no matter how many times the boy may beg. This fact is bound to complicate the topic of sex for both genders.

Despite her discomfort about the topic of sexual interactions, Tuggle demonstrates substantial desperation in her romance with TV. A mere half-hour into the film she says to Angie and Merritt, “If you mean has he measured me for a ring, no. If you mean, if he ever suggests it, I’d think a long time...like about 20 minutes before flinging myself on his chest.” The narrative spans a short period, beginning in the days leading up to and the week of Spring Break. Tuggle tells the girls her intentions the beginning of their first full day in Ft. Lauderdale, a day after meeting TV. Moments later, after Angie asks Tuggle if she would quit school to get married, Tuggle replies, “Women like me weren’t built to be educated. We were made to have children. That’s my ambition: to be a walking, talking baby factory. Legal of course, and with union labor.” In this line of dialogue, Tuggle strives for what she considers an uncomplicated life of domesticity as a mother and wife, rather than the continuation of her current education.

The characterization of Tuggle takes on further realism when looking at her in connection with *The Feminine Mystique*. Throughout Betty Friedan’s study, she presents dozens of women who had once been in Tuggle’s position. Many of these women had college degrees, some even had completed graduate work, but they left their research and careers for a future as a housewife. Friedan describes women who are often happily married with lovely children, but they are still unfulfilled. Tuggle appears to be one of Friedan’s housewives in training. In the book, Friedan

provides a quote from another of these women depicting the apparent conflict between education and the domestic sphere,

....I even thought I might want to go on to graduate school or law school and really use my mind. Suddenly, I was afraid of what would happen. I wanted to live a rich full life. I want to marry, have children, have a nice house. Suddenly I felt, what am I beating my brains out for....I don't read eight books and still feel like reading the ninth. I stop and go to the movies. The other way was harder, and more exciting. I don't know why I stopped. Maybe I just lost courage.<sup>39</sup>

This young woman Friedan wrote about expresses similar fears to those of Tuggle and demonstrates these anxieties were common ones plaguing college coeds throughout the post-war era, and one of the ultimate causes of the baby boom. In the rush to marry and have children, women had issues balancing an education with their perceived domestic duties as homemakers. *Where the Boys Are*, released three years before *The Feminine Mystique* shows the social environment which led young women to leave their education and careers for lives of domesticity.

Tuggle's desperation and insecurity is further explored with the introduction of Lola "the Sea Nymph" (Barbara Nichols). She enters the narrative over an hour into the film when she is performing at a bar the characters visit. Her interesting onscreen appearance lasts roughly ten minutes. Despite her small role, Nichols was a big enough star that she received fifth billing underneath Delores Hart, George Hamilton, Yvette Mimieux and Jim Hutton. Nichols was a poor man's Marilyn Monroe and a drunken TV seems very taken with her platinum blonde hair and ample curves. Lola is representative of celebrity and sexuality, which fascinates him. Tuggle, TV and Lola relax on the beach and viewers watch as Tuggle struggles to distinguish herself against the more dramatic Lola. As Lola and TV lie in the sand in a tight medium shot, he stares at her in

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<sup>39</sup> Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. (NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997) 234.

complete fascination. Lola says, “I was married once. In Detroit where I was playing. He said he was a big tool-and-die man. I was only 19...I’ve seen the seamy side of life my little one. It hasn’t been beer and roses by a long shot...” Tuggle is isolated from them, she sits under a nearby bank of trees looking in on the cozy scene. Finally, Tuggle chimes in awkwardly, “I was in show-biz myself once... It was up at school, the day they made me honorary colonel of the ROTC.” Lola’s main purpose in the narrative is to create tension between Tuggle and TV. Tuggle’s insecurities are played upon in the shadow of the dramatic, buxom blonde Lola.

Tuggle presents a multifaceted image of the evolving culture of the post-war era. Throughout the film she constantly struggles with the issue of sex, and research has shown that women in this period were incredibly conflicted about the rapidly changing morals. Much of her dialogue demonstrates that Tuggle has been imprinted by the values of her childhood, but she is aware of and struggles with the changing ideas to which she is exposed. The internalization of these values fuels the desperation she feels to marry TV. As the narrative progresses, the contradictions and struggles of the changing mores of the period are evident in the fact that *Where the Boys Are* does end up valuing the monogamous relationship ideals over the sex before marriage values touted by Merritt and Ryder.

In *Where the Boys Are*, there is evidence of a monogamous mentality in three of the main relationships. The tropical, Spring Break setting lends itself easily to a frivolous, random dating attitude. Yet Merritt, Tuggle and Angie each flock to a single steady boyfriend. In the narrative the main romantic relationships are steady, committed and monogamous. The contradiction between the accepted social norm of monogamy, and the growing trend of casual sex highlights the tensions brewing in American culture. The country was trapped in an awkward transition

between the perceived conservatism of the Eisenhower 1950s, and the budding liberalism which took hold in the middle of the 1960s.

However, unlike previous films, *Where the Boys Are* does not pretend that the adolescent quest for a mate is an entirely clean and chaste one. The film openly acknowledges that premarital sex was very common among teenage relationships. It also demonstrates the stigma that had followed premarital relations was lessening, leading to a liberal attitude more accepting of sex. It is this fact which contributes to the transitional nature the narrative. *Where the Boys Are* seems unwilling to classify premarital sexual relations as something completely evil and immoral.

Historically, *Where the Boys Are* presents a direct opposition to the portion of the Hollywood Production Code condemning premarital sex, presenting it instead as an acceptable act. At this time in Hollywood history, the Production Code was losing the influence it had held over the movie studios, and many films were beginning to push against the regulations which had held firm since the censorship body officially came to power in 1934. This perspective begins at the outset of *Where the Boys Are* when Merritt openly defends a man and a woman playing house before marriage. Ryder later displays a similar attitude, describing sex as something casual and informal. These viewpoints are made attractive by the simple fact that they are expressed by the main romantic couple. Merritt and Ryder are supposed to live happily ever after; therefore, their point of view is one that is upheld throughout the film.

*Where the Boys Are* is representative of the burgeoning sexual revolution about to occur in American society. Hollywood was gradually beginning to capitalize on the wave of teenagers coming of age, and they were quickly becoming a target audience for films, rather than simply a



subject for them. Teen cinema had been evolving since the 1950s, and the changes become evident when examining the perspectives of the various films covered in this chapter. *Where the Boys Are* not only adopts the point-of-view of the likable teenage characters, but the female protagonists as well. This is a significant leap forward demonstrating the growing independence of women in American society in the years leading up to the second wave of American feminism. *Where the Boys Are* thus shows that women were no longer relegated to passive roles in the periphery of American culture, their position was growing and evolving.

## CHAPTER 2

### That's What Love Is, Bells and Banjos Playing:

#### The Pregnancy Melodrama, *Love with the Proper Stranger*, Natalie Wood and the Evolution of Female Reproductive Freedom

In the early years of the 1960s a number of advances occurred which, when looked at in conjunction with works like *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962), lead to the onset of the second wave of American feminism. In May of 1960 the contraceptive pill was approved for distribution, and in that same year, the “scandalous” bikini rocketed to popularity.<sup>40</sup> With these two events, the growing acknowledgement of female sexuality within American society becomes evident. The bikini displayed the female body, embracing the curves which had long been deemed inappropriate to show.<sup>41</sup> With the birth control pill came an acceptance of female sexuality, allowing women to indulge their sexual urges and enjoy intercourse as something for pleasure rather than simply a method of procreation.

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<sup>40</sup> In the AMC drama *Mad Men*, the episode “Maidenform” delves into the bikini and provides a contemporary interpretation of the societal fears relating to the skimpy swim wear. In the episode, Betty Draper (January Jones) buys a bikini at a Labor Day auction. When he first sees her, her husband Don (Jon Hamm) pulls her out of the kitchen, where she is feeding the children, saying “You asked me if I like it, I don’t....I’m talking about a fifteen year old lifeguard, I’m talking about a bunch of tennis pros, not to mention all those loafing millionaires taking the summer off. You wanna be ogled.... It’s desperate.” This moment in the show demonstrates the sexuality inherently associated with the bikini, and how inappropriate it was considered for a married woman woman with children in Betty’s position to display this sexuality.

<sup>41</sup> In her book, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*, Elaine Tyler May describes the explosive sexuality associated with the bikini: “The wartime emergency, calling for fashion adaptations that would conserve fabric, gave rise to the two-piece bathing suit that also appeared dangerous. The *Wall Street Journal* noted ominously that “the saving has been effected in the region of the midriff...The difficulties and dangers of the situation are obvious.” In the post-war era, female sexuality continued to represent a destructive and disruptive force. A photograph of Hollywood sex symbol Rita Hayworth was actually attached to the hydrogen bomb dropped on the Bikini Islands. The island provided the name for the abbreviated swimsuit the female “bombshells” would wear. The designer of the revealing suit chose the name “bikini” four days after the bomb was dropped to suggest the swim wear’s explosive potential.”

In the film *Blue Denim* (Phillip Dunne, 1956), Hollywood began to explore the topic of teenage pregnancy. The movie is considered the initial entry into a cycle of works which explored the taboo subject throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. Susan Douglas, in her book *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with Mass Media* (1994), analyzes this unofficial series of films giving it the name, 'The Pregnancy Melodrama' and she cites *A Summer Place* (Delmer Davies, 1959), *Susan Slade* (Delmer Davies, 1961) and *Love with the Proper Stranger* (Robert Mulligan, 1963) as three common entries into the sub-genre. Although the depiction of illegitimate pregnancy was already dangerous in the eyes of the Production Code, each of these movies create a sequence which explores the growing acceptance of adolescent sexuality in the post-war era through a female perspective.

The final film of the three, *Love with the Proper Stranger*, is the most strikingly progressive. It is a small, independent production which came out of the partnership of Robert Mulligan and producer Alan Pakula. Through common visual and narrative motifs, *Love with the Proper Stranger* is representative of a wave of maverick, "New Wave" cinema emerging around the world and changing audience expectations of film. Despite its classification as a romantic comedy, typically a conservative and formulaic genre, *Love with the Proper Stranger* explores not only the serious topic of illegitimate pregnancy, but also abortion. Its' depiction of this contentious subject reveals the dangers which a woman faced in pursuit of an abortion in the years before Roe vs. Wade. Coming a decade before that landmark legislation of 1973, *Love with the Proper Stranger* shows the gritty realism of illegal abortion in the post-war era.

Actress Natalie Wood, the star of *Love with the Proper Stranger*, brought to the film an established star persona from her almost twenty years in Hollywood. Throughout any lengthy

screen career, an actor develops an identity, typically stemming from preconceived audience and industry expectations resulting from typecasting and their publicity. In his book *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, Richard Dyer writes on the concept of star personas: “Stars are made for profit. In terms of the market, stars are part of the way films are sold. The star’s presence in a film is a promise of a certain kind of thing that you would see if you went to see the film....”<sup>42</sup> Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Wood rebelled against the good-girl, childlike persona manufactured for her by the studios. Even before she played pregnant Macy’s shop girl Angie Rossini in *Love with the Proper Stranger*, Wood forced her way into roles showcasing her as a young woman coming to terms with her budding sexuality. Films like *Rebel without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), *Marjorie Morningstar* (Irving Rapper, 1958), *Splendor in the Grass* (Elia Kazan, 1961), and *Love with the Proper Stranger* are specific examples of this evolution occurring in her career. Wood portrayed women who could be sexual, and still remain “good girls.” Her characters represent a blurring of the traditional Madonna/Whore dichotomy which dominated American cinema before this point. The transformation of Wood’s star persona parallels the changes which the ‘Pregnancy Melodramas’ depicted in American culture.

The development of the ‘Pregnancy Melodrama’ in Hollywood cinema provides an insight into the transition occurring in post-war American society relating to female sexuality. As the films progress from *A Summer Place* to *Love with the Proper Stranger*, the treatment of premarital intercourse and the resulting pregnancy changes as the conservative remnants of the 1950s shift into the progressiveness of the 1960s. Throughout this period, there were a number of historical events which contributed to the evolving state of sexuality in American culture.

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<sup>42</sup> Dyer, Richard. *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* London: Macmillan Press, 1986.

## Historical Background

1963 is often said to be the end of the supposed “innocent” years in the United States. The Kennedy assassination in November has been blamed for beginning the transformation and by February 1964, rock and roll began in full force, permanently changing the American social climate. It is at this time that second wave American feminism began to take root, with many crediting the release of *The Feminine Mystique* with setting the movement in motion. However, a year earlier Helen Gurley Brown’s landmark book *Sex and the Single Girl* was published. Marketed primarily to single, working women, it offered liberating views on sexuality which were not a topic of discussion in Friedan’s survey of the unfulfilled American housewife.

*Sex and the Single Girl* addresses ideas relating to free and acceptable sexuality among single women, which were unlike any being promoted in America at this time. The concepts Gurley Brown conveyed did not encourage women to stay at home and assume a passive role. Rather, she makes her views in favor of active female sexuality quite clear in the opening chapter, writing

Theoretically a “nice” single woman has no sex life. What nonsense! She has a better sex life than most of her married friends. She need never be bored with one man per lifetime. Her choice of partners is endless and they seek her...Her married friends refer to her pursuers as wolves, but actually many of them turn out to be lambs--to be shorn and worn by her.<sup>43</sup>

A number of elements stand out in this passage. The first is the empowerment Gurley Brown grants to the single woman. She describes an active woman who enjoys casual sex, while not necessarily desiring of romantic relationships. In fact, Brown is not opposed to single women forming relationships with married men. In her eyes, a woman should be free to go out and have sex. Brown is not simply endorsing sex, but is endorsing casual sex. In her biography of Helen

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<sup>43</sup> Brown, Helen Gurley. *Sex and the Single Girl*. ( New York: A Giant Cardinal, 1963) 4.

Gurley Brown, *Bad Girls Go Everywhere* (2009), Jennifer Scanlon writes: “[Helen Gurley Brown] exposed the reality that many unmarried American women liked men, money, work, and sex and wanted to feel good about rather than ashamed of the life choices they made or contemplated....”<sup>44</sup> These views differed from the conservative sexual attitudes idealized by American society which held sex as a monogamous act between a married couple.

This new and progressive viewpoint turned out to be a wildly successful one. Scanlon also writes, “In three weeks it [*Sex and the Single Girl*] sold more than two million copies. By July it had reached the *New York Times* bestseller list, entering at number eleven and moving up to number six....”<sup>45</sup> The book was popular because more women were deciding to pursue a career, often at the expense of marriage. In her book *Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century* (1998), journalist Betsy Israel expands on this, writing: “More women, it seemed, earned their own money, and because there was more readily available housing, they did not have to live with relatives if they chose not to....most shocking of all, 1.4 million of these women had never wed.”<sup>46</sup> The work of Helen Gurley Brown in *Sex and the Single Girl* had a finger on the pulse of the millions of working women entering society. Unlike their June Cleaver-like counterparts, the women Gurley Brown wrote for had careers, earned a living and in many instances, had multifaceted sex lives.

The approval of the birth control pill in 1960, as well as the publishing of *Sex and the Single Girl*, created an environment in which casual sex was more acceptable than in years

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<sup>44</sup> Scanlon, Jennifer. *Bad Girls Go Everywhere*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 58.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.,. 58.

<sup>46</sup> Israel, Betsy. *Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century*. (New York: York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998) 209.

before. The contraceptive pill went a long way to minimizing the risk of pregnancy associated with sex, while *Sex and the Single Girl* turned the casual sexual encounter--even with married men--into an activity in which young women could participate without fear of an unwanted pregnancy. However, with this gravitation toward freer sexuality, mistakes did happen. *Love with the Proper Stranger* examines this sexual freedom and its' consequences. Angie (Natalie Wood) is a young, single woman who becomes pregnant during a one night stand with Rocky (Steve McQueen). Angie is an example of a woman who would have been a primary target audience for *Sex and the Single Girl*, and her unplanned pregnancy at the beginning of the film demonstrates that she, at some level, subscribed to the ideas of casual sex promoted by Helen Gurley Brown. However, no birth control is one hundred percent effective, and these behaviors do come with consequences. *Love with the Proper Stranger's* depiction of abortion is particularly unique, contentious and realistic in post-war society. While abortion was not a legal procedure until 1973, it is well documented through primary sources that women were risking, and losing, their lives in the exercise their reproductive and sexual freedom.

Abortion, an important facet of a woman's reproductive rights, is a topic that has been strongly repressed for decades. In the years before *Roe vs. Wade*, women were forced into dangerous, back-alley abortions much like the scenario depicted in *Love with the Proper Stranger*. In *Sex and the College Girl* (1964) Gael Green describes the situations many pregnant women were forced into during the post-war period:

...The questionable qualifications of the beauty operators, manicurists, amateur midwives, phony and actual doctors involved...Riskiest is the self-induced abortion, Dr. Guttmacher points out. "Hat pins, knitting needles, splinters of slippery elm, a sharpened goose quill...." Several girls spoke of a drug supposed to trigger abortion...<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Green, Gael. *Sex and the College Girl*. (NY: The Dial Press), 1964. 218.

The illegality of abortion did not stop women from choosing it as an option to avoid unwanted pregnancy.<sup>48</sup> As a result of this harsh reality, newspapers in the late 1950s and early 1960s are littered with stories reporting the resulting tragedies of back-alley abortions gone wrong.

One of the cases that garnered the most headlines occurred in the summer months of 1962. In a *New York Times* article dated June 7, 1962 it was written that "...a Queens physician was being sought for questioning in the disappearance of a 19-year-old girl...The girl's parents said she had gone to the physician for an abortion...."<sup>49</sup> The next day, the *New York Times* reported the discovery of her dismembered body in the sewers near the Abortioneer's house. The girl was 19 year old coed Barbara Lofrumento, a student at New Rochelle College. The article went on, saying "She was taken to Dr. Lothringer's office...at 2:30 A.M. Sunday after she had been found to be four months pregnant...."<sup>50</sup> This is only one of a number of cases of murder tied to back alley abortions throughout the years before *Roe v. Wade*.

Interestingly, a mere month after Lofrumento's murder, the *New York Times* reported, "A young Phoenix mother who fears that she is going to have a deformed baby because she took a drug filed suit today for a declaratory judgement against the legality of Arizona's law forbidding abortions."<sup>51</sup> The story received daily news coverage throughout the months of July and August.

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<sup>48</sup> *Revolutionary Road* (Richard Yates, 1961) follows the fictional story of a young couple, Frank and April Wheeler struggling under the weight of the societal expectations of post-war American society. The novel is extremely frank regarding abortion during this period, detailing carefully April's unsuccessful attempt at a home abortion which leads to her death. The scene is played out in graphic detail: "She had been very careful about the blood. Except for a tidy trail of drops leading out to the telephone and back, it had all been confined to the bathroom, and even there it had mostly been flushed away. Two heavy towels, soaked crimson, lay lumped in the tub close to the drain....On the floor of the linen closet he found the syringe in its pot of cold water; she had probably put it here to hide it fro the ambulance crew..." (444).

<sup>49</sup> "Queens Doctor Is Sought In Case of Missing Girl" *New York Times* 7 June 1962. 23.

<sup>50</sup> Kihss, Peter. "Physician Sought in Death of Girl" *New York Times* June 8 1962. Pg. 32.

<sup>51</sup> "Abortion Suit is Filed." *New York Times*, July 26, 1962.



It was learned that the woman, Mrs. Sherri Finkbine, had taken a tranquilizer called Thalidomide and that the drug, which was widely speculated to cause birth defects when taken by pregnant women, had affected her own unborn child. In early August, after fighting the U.S. legal system, Finkbine was able to secure an abortion in Sweden, where it could be performed legally. The *New York Times* reported on August 19, 1962 that she had undergone the procedure successfully.<sup>52</sup> However, even after it was completed, the media reverberated with stories reflecting the controversial nature of the case. The *New York Times* published an article stating the Vatican's position on abortion: "Motives brought forward to justify it do not escape the falsity and captiousness of pretexts. There is no doubt that the victim was a human being...It was killed as through it were an assailant against whom legitimate defense is more than justified...."<sup>53</sup> The Finkbine story was a daily staple in the *New York Times* during the summer of 1962, and its societal importance lies in the fact that it demonstrated that abortion could be legitimately justified for health reasons, both for the baby and the mother, and not simply as a method of birth control.

A few months earlier, the American public had also been exposed to abortion. This time, it was not through the newspapers, rather it was piped right into the living room through the television. In April of 1962, a C.B.S legal drama *The Defenders*, aired an episode: "...About a physician who is arrested for performing illegal abortions...."<sup>54</sup> *The Defenders* aired from 1961

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<sup>52</sup> "Mrs. Finkbine Undergoes Abortion in Sweden." *New York Times*, August 19, 1962.

<sup>53</sup> "Vatican Sees Crime in Finkbine Abortion." *New York Times* August 20, 1962.

<sup>54</sup> Adams, Val. "TV Sponsors Drop Newhart's Show." *New York Times*, April 26, 1962.

until 1965, and starred E.G. Marshall and future *Brady Bunch* dad Robert Reed.<sup>55</sup> The *New York Times* reported in the days leading up to the air date that sponsors of the show were bailing out to avoid being connected to the scandalous narrative: “All three advertisers that usually sponsor ‘The Defenders’ withdrew their sponsorship from the program about abortion. The network found a substitute, The Speidel Corporation.”<sup>56</sup> Despite all the outrage, the show still went on to run another three years. According to the Museum of Broadcast Communications, the episode was well received, citing a CBS executive: “Audience response to the program was 90% positive.... Everybody survived, and that was the beginning of *The Defenders* dealing with issues that really mattered....”<sup>57</sup> This episode of *The Defenders* began to establish abortion as a relevant social issue, and it demonstrated that despite its taboo nature, it was a growing subject for debate in the early 1960s. The growing discussion of abortion is a timely one. Despite the advances made in birth control, often it was difficult for young and unmarried woman to obtain contraceptives. As a result, teenage couples who were engaging in sexual relationships were doing so with little to no protection. At this time, there was also an evident increase in the percentage of teenage and illegitimate pregnancies, likely fueling the increased debate of the morality and ethics of abortion.

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<sup>55</sup> In the second season of AMC drama *Mad Men*, episode 3 entitled “The Benefactor” closely examines the days leading up to the airing of *The Defenders* episode. The show delves into the industry reaction to the controversial narrative, a CBS executive says, “I just lost Leverly Brothers and Kimberly Clarke from one of my biggest shows.... Okay, try this on, *The Defenders*, top twenty show, E.G. Marshall, Bob Reed lawyers, but they really care. So the writers turn in this script about a cannibal....the Director eats up all this time refusing to do it....and surprise the writers have only one other script ready, something we threw away last year because they used the word abortion 30 times in 51 minutes.... They show one, opening scene...I miss the blacklist....” The narrative follows Sterling Cooper in their quest to find a (fictional) sponsor for the floundering episode.

<sup>56</sup> Adams, Val. “TV Sponsors Drop Newhart’s Show.” *New York Times*, April 26, 1962.

<sup>57</sup> The Museum of Broadcast Communications. “The Defenders” (<http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=defendersth>).

The social problem of teenage pregnancy is one that received a tremendous amount of newspaper coverage throughout the later half of the 1950s. A *New York Times* article dated May 29, 1959, cites statistics by the Federal Children's Bureau chief Katherine Brownell Oettinger:

‘In 1957...some 81,000 children were born out of wedlock to teen-age mothers, and increase of 5.2 percent from the 77,000 such children in 1956....By 1962, if the rate of births out of wedlock to teen-agers remains the same between 110,000 and 120,000 babies will be born out of wedlock to teen-age girls....<sup>58</sup>

There are a number of pieces which corroborate this finding with similar statistics. An article published by the *Los Angeles Times* in October of 1963 states,

Authorities tell us that in recent years the rate of illegitimacy has doubled. In 1960, there were 91,700 illegitimate children born to teen-age girls; 48,300 of them in school. The rate of out-of-wedlock pregnancies was highest, not among teen-agers...but among women between 20 and 30 years of age.<sup>59</sup>

This report also mentions the rise in illegitimate pregnancies among women between the ages of 20 and 30, a phenomenon which adds further realism to Angie's pregnancy in *Love with the Proper Stranger*, and to an examination of the increasingly casual nature of sex during this transitional period. The issue of teenage pregnancy is one that post-war society was well aware of, and clearly documented, in the contemporary reporting of the era. Considering the detailed increase in adolescent pregnancies, it can be inferred that teenagers were engaging in premarital sexual relationships, thus destroying the societal expectation that teens remained in a state of virginity until marriage.

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<sup>58</sup> "A Rise is Reported in Unwed Mothers" *New York Times* May 29, 1959 7.

<sup>59</sup> "Problems of Unwed Parents Disturbing" *Los Angeles Times* October 24, 1963 B14.

While images of a clean and chaste society among American teenagers was crumbling, it was incredibly difficult for young, single women to obtain birth control. In 1958 the *New York Times* described the restrictions placed on a woman's ability to receive contraceptives:

The Department of Hospitals specified yesterday that two physicians would have to certify the need before birth control therapy could be given....written consent of the woman involved, and if possible her husband is also required....and the patient should be 'advised to consult with her spiritual adviser' and family.<sup>60</sup>

These requirements, which were instituted two years before the official approval of the birth control pill, demonstrate the hostility and ignorance towards contraceptives in general, not simply the birth control pill. In *Sex and the College Girl*, Gael Green goes on to describe how this fueled sexual ignorance among college coeds in the early 1960s:

... "I mean you can't get pregnant unless you make love during your period." "You should hear the kind of questions these supposedly knowledgeable girls ask," a Sarah Lawrence girl said. "Like 'Can you get pregnant from a toilet seat?' ....It might seem incredible that college girls should be so ill-informed. Educators had hoped marriage and family courses, introduced in the thirties, might provide students with the sex education so often disastrously lacking....<sup>61</sup>

A woman uninformed about contraception becomes increasingly vulnerable when this lack of information is combined with misguided assumptions about the biological nature of sexual intercourse, and this period was dangerously lacking in the sexual education teenagers needed.

The *New York Times* article goes on to quote Dr. Alan F. Guttmacher, the chairman of the medical committee of Planned Parenthood, saying "[It] will create in the minds of decent and well-meaning patients the thought that they are doing something wrong if they accept contraception."<sup>62</sup> The strict societal regulations on birth control made it difficult for adult women

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<sup>60</sup> "Birth Control Rule Says 2 Physicians Must Certify Need" *New York Times* September 23, 1958.

<sup>61</sup> Greene, Gael. *Sex and the College Girl* New York: The Dial Press, 1964. 191.

<sup>62</sup> "Birth Control Rule Says 2 Physicians Must Certify Need" *New York Times* September 23, 1958 1.

to obtain it, and thus made it virtually impossible for teenage girls (who could be involved in steady, monogamous and sexually active relationships) to gain the protection they needed to avoid an out-of-wedlock pregnancy.

The topic of illegitimate pregnancies, predominantly those among teenage girls, was growing in importance throughout the post-war era. The narrative of *Love with the Proper Stranger*, as well as that of films like *A Summer Place* and *Susan Slade*, provide an examination of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and adolescent sexuality through a female perspective, one new to the era. Despite *Love with the Proper Stranger*'s stated generic classification as a romantic comedy, it explores the issues facing a woman dealing with an unplanned pregnancy including the different options available to her.

*Love with the Proper Stranger* was released on Christmas Day 1963, and starred Natalie Wood and Steve McQueen. The film was the brain child of independent producer Alan Pakula, screenwriter Arnold Schulman and director Robert Mulligan. In his biography of Alan Pakula, Jared Brown writes on *Love with the Proper Stranger*, "For a film of that time, it was regarded as somewhat daring. Rocky and Angie's casual affair, Angie's pregnancy, and particularly the scene with the abortionist were all unconventional material for American movies."<sup>63</sup> However, Brown goes on to provide a quote from Pakula denying the work's daring nature: "I don't think that either Bob [Mulligan] or myself saw it as a daring or advanced picture, although it's true that most films at the time didn't mention things like abortion--least of all a film that was essentially a romantic comedy...."<sup>64</sup> This quote sets up the contrast inherent in the narrative of *Love with the Proper Stranger*. The story-line contains a number of progressive elements, namely the treatment

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<sup>63</sup> Brown, Jared. *Alan J. Pakula: His Films and His Life* (New York: Back Stage Books, 2005) 62.

<sup>64</sup> Brown, Jared. *Alan J. Pakula: His Films and His Life* (New York: Back Stage Books, 2005) 62.

of abortion within the plot, as well as the casual nature of the main romantic coupling. However, its credibility is often attacked given the film's classification as a romantic comedy. *Love with the Proper Stranger* is not the first feature to openly deal with the topic of unplanned, illegitimate pregnancies. Rather, it is one of a number of works coming out of the Hollywood studio system which address the growing problem.

### **The Pregnancy Melodrama**

The films comprising what Susan Douglas termed the 'Pregnancy Melodrama' were a fairly common sub-genre in Hollywood from the mid-1950s onward. Douglas describes it, writing that it was "a cross between the women's film and the youth film, the pregnancy melodrama placed premarital sex between young people at the center of its...narrative. At the heart of these films was the battle between American puritanism...and the new morality..."<sup>65</sup> Each focus on a young girl who, except for Angie in *Love with the Proper Stranger*, is underaged and is forced to deal with an unplanned, illegitimate pregnancy. The boy, played by Troy Donahue in two of the four films, is optional as the narrative perspective tends to align with the plucky young heroine (played by Carol Lynley in *Blue Denim*, by Sandra Dee in *A Summer Place*, by Connie Stevens in *Susan Slade* and by Natalie Wood in *Love with the Proper Stranger*). The 'Pregnancy Melodrama' is specific to the post-war, baby boom period in terms of cultural context. The rise in teenage pregnancies had been discussed in the news media, and this sub-genre seems to have been Hollywood's direct response to the social trend. In 1959 Warner Brother's released *A Summer Place*, based on the book of the same name by Sloan Wilson. The

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<sup>65</sup> Douglas, Susan. *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1994) 75.

extremely popular film was one of the earliest to depict the topic of teenage pregnancy in a more positive light, beginning the process of Hollywood's break from the more conservative treatment of the subject in the past.

*A Summer Place* is an effective starting point for the 'Pregnancy Melodrama' because of the changes the sub-genre was beginning to have on the status on female sexuality within American society. While the film still demonstrates conservative elements of earlier works, namely the insistence that the young parents must end up in a serious relationship, as well as the evident ambivalence they initially face from society around them. The evolution of adolescent sexuality and its' acceptance became more apparent in *A Summer Place* than in previous works of melodrama spotlighting single mothers.

In *A Summer Place*, young lovers Johnny (Troy Donahue) and Molly (Sandra Dee) meet at a wealthy northeastern vacation resort. Johnny is the son of Bart and Sylvia Hunter (Arthur Kennedy and Dorothy McGuire), the blue collar owners of the resort while Molly is the daughter of millionaires Ken and Helen Jorgenson (Richard Egan and Constance Ford). The film follows as Ken and Sylvia remember, and eventually rekindle their feelings for each other from when they dated as teenagers. At the same time, the movie develops the growing romantic desire accompanying the beginning of Johnny and Molly's relationship.

The film parallels the renewed romance of Ken and Sylvia with the new, hormone driven relationship of Johnny and Molly.<sup>66</sup> The narrative is equally invested in the perspective of the adults, as well as that of the teenagers. This structure allows the adult lovers to identify with the

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<sup>66</sup> According to sources, Troy Donahue was twenty-two at the time of filming and most state that Sandra Dee was sixteen. However, Dee's son Dodd Darin states in his book *Dream Lovers: The Shattered Lives of Bobby Darin and Sandra Dee* that the year of her birth was actually 1944, which would make Dee fourteen at the time of filming (and sixteen at her marriage to Bobby Darin). Sources are rife with inconsistencies, and not one seems to agree on Sandra Dee's actual age.

struggles of Johnny and Molly. Ken and Sylvia dated at the same age at which their children became involved. They are well aware of the teens' growing desires:

SYLVIA: ...Then they went for a walk on the beach. What's wrong with that? It's not easy for them. They're both so intense and in love. Anyone can see that.

KEN: So were we at their age.

SYLVIA: And we didn't settle for a walk on the beach.... The trouble with most parents is that they attribute their own guilty memories to their young. Like father, like son. Like mother, like daughter.

KEN: But that's not true. Molly's completely unlike Helen. And Johnny's not like Bart. They've got us in them. And that's why I can't sleep.

This scene is handled in a straight forward manner, focusing on Ken who is sitting up in his twin bed and Sylvia who is sitting on his bed facing him. The shots are broken down into short, alternating close-ups as they speak. The importance is in their dialogue, their relationship shows that these feelings of passion are not relegated simply to the younger generation. Ken and Sylvia were in Johnny and Molly's position; as a result they understand everything the young couple is feeling.

Despite the connection Ken and Sylvia seemingly have with their children, Johnny and Molly feel isolated and alone in their teenage angst. As a result, there is a tremendous focus on their budding sexual feelings, and their relevant confusion regarding what they perceive as "appropriate" sexuality:

MOLLY: ...I'm afraid.

JOHNNY: Of me? Of yourself?

MOLLY: Yes. That and some other new feelings that I can't explain.... We gotta be good Johnny.

JOHNNY: Good. Is it easy to be good?

MOLLY: Are you bad Johnny? Have you been bad with girls?

JOHNNY: No. I just don't exactly know what that word good means. Is it good for us to be apart.... Is loneliness good?

MOLLY: That's not what I mean!

JOHNNY: I think all of you is good. I know your lips are good.



The scene is played out on a rocky beach where Molly and Johnny have spread a towel. They are sheltered from prying eyes by a number of large, jagged boulders. In the wide-shots, a treacherous surf is visible beyond the rocks, and it is treated in such a way to symbolize their intense passion for each other. Much of their dialogue is shot in a tight close-up, with both actors filling the frame from the shoulder, thus allowing the audience to become intimately acquainted with them, and the power of their feelings. Throughout *A Summer Place*, Johnny and Molly struggle with these desires, and with questions of appropriate sexuality which they are only able to describe as “good” and “bad.” To them, the so-called “good” values are those expressed by their parents and the previous generation. As a result of the “good” values of their parents, the sexual feelings which Molly and Johnny cannot even explain, become the “bad” feelings. Under the surface is the teen’s curiosity about the so-called “bad” passions and their growing desire to become sexually involved. The insistence toward a “good” and “bad” sexuality is a relevant part of American society at this time, particularly since the Production Code outlawed demonstrations of “deviant” sexuality on-screen. However, by 1958 definitions of “deviant” sexuality were changing, and through Johnny and Molly’s confusion the film is beginning to question these static ideas of the past.

In his own way, Ken demonstrates the evolution of sexuality occurring in the late 1950s. He is well aware of the young couple’s growing feelings, and as he expresses his worries for his daughter, he also summarizes the dilemma facing parents on the cusp of the changing sexual climate in America:

You mean kiss a little, but not too much. Don’t let Johnny make love to you, but don’t be too angry if he tries....To be a half virgin, to allow herself to be fondled half way in the back seats of parked cars, but always draw back in time. How do I tell her that one single reckless night can destroy her happiness and her life....I can’t tell her to be half-good. I feel

like a hypocrite....youth must be a time of suspended animation. Or is the solution for parents to maintain a frightened, worried silence...

The scene takes place between Ken and Sylvia in the bedroom of their beach house. Ken is the clear focus of the scene. His speech is delivered in a single primary shot, broken only by two secondary shots: a close-up of Sylvia and a different angle of Ken. This dialogue hits the metaphorical nail on the head in an examination of adolescent sexuality in the late 1950s; Ken implies that parents realize the growing sexual activities among teenagers, and their overt denial of this behavior leads many parents into hypocritical expectations of their children. While *A Summer Place* tends to follow the teenagers, the film is well aware of the grown-up perspective and provides four adults each representing different beliefs relating to sexuality.

From early in the first act, Ken's realistic views on sexuality are contrasted with those of his wife Helen, who is afraid of not only her own sexuality, but also that of her daughter. In the first scene, Molly comments to Ken about her Mother's fear:

She's anti-sex. She says that all a boy wants out of a girl is that and when a girl marries it is something she has to endure. I don't wanna think like that, Pappa. She makes me ashamed of even having a body and when I have a naughty dream at night she makes me feel like hanging myself. How can you help what you dream?

There are a number of scenes where Helen's feelings toward her daughter's sexuality are explored. This begins even before the Jorgenson's arrival at Pine Island. Molly bursts into Ken's stateroom upset: "She says I have to wear this armor plated bra to flatten me out and a girdle. She says I bounce when I walk! Do I? Do I?" Helen is seemingly obsessed with her daughter's changing body, which leads Helen to subject Molly to an invasive physical examination when she returns after being shipwrecked overnight with Johnny:

HELEN: This is Dr. Matthias. I sent him from the mainland. Take off every stitch you've got on and let him examine you.

MOLLY: But we haven't done anything wrong, Mama. We slept all night.

HELEN: I'm not asking you for the truth because I know you'd lie. So I'm having him examine you completely and make his own report.

MOLLY: No.

HELEN: You have disgraced me enough. Now, do as I say! Do as I say!

MOLLY: (screaming hysterically) No! No!... Oh, please, I want my father, I want my father. Oh, please, no. Oh, please, no. I want my father... I haven't done anything wrong. I've been a good girl. I haven't done anything wrong! Please, I want my father. No! No!

Throughout much of the scene, the camera is focused in a tight, high angle close-up of Molly, who is being restrained by the Doctor. The shot is oppressive, and any power Molly had is taken by the male doctor holding her, all she can do is scream hysterically, to which nobody listens. The main shot is only broken twice for a brief secondary shot of the Doctor. While the narrative provides four varying views of sexuality, it is clear that Helen is the film's main villain, and as viewers we are supposed to side against her for the torment she inflicts on her daughter.

The treatment of Molly's pregnancy is handled in a delicate manner, and almost as an afterthought, with the announcement occurring with twenty minutes left in the film. Throughout the scene the word pregnant or pregnancy is never actually used.<sup>67</sup> The Production Code never explicitly forbade the discussion or depiction of pregnancy. Their censorship revolved around the topic of "illicit" sex as well as abortion. The scene is played out at the doctor's office through a phone call from a tearful Molly to Johnny. The dialogue between the couple as well as the

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<sup>67</sup> The Production Code makes no direct statement against the general depiction or discussion of pregnancy on screen. It does expressly forbid engaging in casual sex while not married, as well as any mention or showing of abortion, but there seem to be no regulations regarding the treatment of pregnancy. The word itself is taboo throughout the post-war period. In 1952, actress Lucille Ball became pregnant with her second child, and rather than hide it, situation comedy *I Love Lucy* chose to work with the pregnancy, using it as a story line. The show turned it into an event, with Ball continuing to work long after she started to show, eventually planning the episode of "Little Ricky's" birth to coincide with Ball's actual due date. Despite all of this, the show had to make one concession, they would not use the word 'pregnant' on the air. Interestingly, Lucille Ball was not the first actress to appear pregnant on television, that honor goes to Mary Kay Stearns on the 1947-1950 sitcom *Mary Kay and Johnny*. Pregnant women on film tended to not show throughout this period. This is consistent through all of the 'Pregnancy Melodramas,' as well as films like *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955).

handling of the pregnancy is quite conservative when taking into account the films which came afterward. It is made clear that for the happy ending to occur, Molly and Johnny need to remain a couple:

MOLLY: ...I had to call you.

JOHNNY: Darling, don't cry. We'll-- We'll figure this out.

MOLLY: How? I need you so much, Johnny.

JOHNNY: I'll come to you.

MOLLY: When?

JOHNNY: Tonight. I'll come tonight.

Visually, the scene is composed through tight alternating close-ups. It is not the setting which is important, but the actors and their emotions. Johnny and Molly are both crying by the end of the scene. In their discussion, the narrative makes the eventual formation of their romantic union the main goal. From the beginning of the scene, Molly is the more emotionally fragile of the two and needs Johnny to help her through the situation. From this point on, the happy ending is made clear. The young couple is intent on getting married and starting their lives together, no matter who may stand in their way.

One of the most interesting motifs in the 'Pregnancy Melodrama' is the continual presence of the happy ending. These films establish a completely different tone when compared to the bleak punishment handed out by earlier melodramas. In *A Summer Place*, being unable to marry without a valid birth certificate stating they are of legal age, Johnny and Molly return home to Ken and Sylvia. After each parent embraces their respective child, the family comes together. The personal moment is depicted in a tight close-up. Ken and Molly are the primary figures in the shot, with Johnny and Sylvia seen in profile. As the music begins to play, Ken says "You got a fight ahead of you, kids. But you've got the beauty and strength of love on your side. And if we can find our sense of humor too...why, these are the weapons of the angels...." This

dialogue provides an interesting frame on the events of the conclusion. Through this line, Ken acknowledges that although the film is ending happily, Johnny and Molly will still face some tremendous obstacles as they begin their lives together. As the story comes to an end, Johnny and Molly, who is called his “pretty new misses,” are dropped off on the dock of Pine Island. The couple embrace in a medium close-up with sky serving as the only background, and Molly says “In front of God and everybody this time?” The film provides a happy ending; Johnny and Molly are together and in love. However, through Ken’s words to his children he is showing surprising realism. Things will not always be carefree, and Molly and Johnny will have to work to make their relationship successful.

Other than the rare *Blue Denim*, *A Summer Place* is the earliest example of what can be termed the ‘Pregnancy Melodrama.’ The film showcases the many interesting motifs of the sub-genre, and while *A Summer Place* was incredibly scandalous for its 1959 release date; it is shown to address sexual questions and themes in a serious manner. While *A Summer Place* still takes a noticeably conservative stance on sexuality and pregnancy, there is a transformation evident when examining earlier films dealing with this same subject matter. This topic was further discussed and expanded on two years later in *Susan Slade*.

*Susan Slade* was released two years after *A Summer Place* in 1961. While the film demonstrates the motifs of the ‘Pregnancy Melodrama,’ it is evident that the sub-genre is evolving as more progressive ideas of female sexuality came to the forefront in society. The earlier film excused the pregnancy by tying everything up neatly with the marriage of Molly and Johnny. However, in *Susan Slade* the filmmakers remove the baby’s Father, forcing Susan to deal

with the pregnancy without his help. Through this, the work creates an environment that is more accepting of illegitimate pregnancy than the one created in *A Summer Place*.

In *Susan Slade*, 17 year old Susan (Connie Stevens) meets Conn White (Grant Williams) on board a luxury liner. She has spent her formative years in South America, where her father Roger (Lloyd Nolan) has worked for an oil company, and in the first act her family is moving back to the United States after years abroad. Conn is an adventurous playboy from a wealthy family, and Susan is immediately attracted to him. They quickly consummate their relationship onboard ship. Conn is traveling to Alaska on a mountain climbing expedition, and their plan is to marry upon his return. While he is in Alaska, Susan learns of her pregnancy. However, the 'Pregnancy Melodrama' is part melodrama, and the night Susan discovers she is pregnant, she learns that Conn has been killed in an accident on the mountain. In response to the unplanned pregnancy and lack of a father, Roger moves his wife Leah (Dorothy McGuire) and Susan back to South America where she can have the baby. The family returns to California after 2 years, and Susan's son Roger is passed off as Leah's. However, as the narrative progresses, Susan becomes increasingly unwilling to maintain the charade. Complicating matters further are Susan's competing suitors, wealthy Wells Corbett (Bert Convy) and the poor stableboy and aspiring writer Hoyt Brecker (Troy Donahue), as well as the ultimate question whether a boy can accept a girl with a sexual history.

In the narrative of *Susan Slade*, the biggest punishment Susan is subject to is the death of Conn. However outside of this, many of the problems she faces are the result of her own self-penance. In an intimate scene caring for Roger, Susan and her mother discuss the complicated nature female sexuality:

LEAH: You think all girls who marry are virginal?

SUSAN: Well at least if they do they can tell their husbands. I can't even to that.

LEAH: Not all of them do.

SUSAN: I'm not made that way. I can hardly walk down the aisle with Wells with somewhat soiled gown. Isn't that what it's supposed to stand for? Purity? Well let's face it. I'm not.

LEAH: You've got to get over this idea that your one mistake denies you happiness and you have to pay for it for the rest of your life.

This scene between mother and daughter addresses the topic of a woman's sexuality; the societal expectations of the time favored purity, much as Susan is describing. However, Leah's dialogue suggests that chastity is merely an illusion maintained for the benefit of her husband. This moment, coming in the third act, is covered in a very straight forward manner with alternating medium shots of first Susan and Roger and then Leah, who wanders around the set, seemingly unsure of what to do with herself. In this construction, Susan's maternal instinct with Roger is emphasized. While he is supposed to be her brother, in this scene it is clear that Leah lacks the maternal nature with Roger which Susan displays. *Susan Slade* establishes the idea that a woman need not be virginal, or married to the baby's father, to have a "happy ending." In this scene, the expectation of purity is diminished to merely an idea held by husbands about their wives.

*Susan Slade* advances more progressive ideas of female sexuality than *A Summer Place*, because in this work the pregnancy is Susan's problem. Due to Conn's death, Susan does not have the father of the baby to comfort and protect her. While *A Summer Place* follows Johnny and Molly, *Susan Slade* focuses on the story of Susan. The men in her life are purely secondary to the narrative, serving as her romantic interests.<sup>68</sup> In the trailer, it is made clear that this is

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<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, much of the film's marketing features Connie Stevens in a secondary role behind Troy Donahue, who is even given first billing over her in the credits. Donahue and Stevens had starred together in *Parrish* (Delmer Davies, 1961), which had been a summer release for Warner Brothers, and *Susan Slade* was a November release for the same studio. The opening minutes of the trailer demonstrate this marketing, as it begins by introducing Donahue and Stevens as a couple and on-screen lovers, rather than *Susan Slade*.

Susan's film. The trailer proclaims, "The love story of Susan Slade, is the story of a girl of today, living at today's upbeat tempos, playing at today's jet age speed on San Francisco societies posh Knob Hill, aboard the queen of luxury cruise liners... Susan Slade appeared to be a girl who had everything...."<sup>69</sup> In scenes between her and Wells, and later with Hoyt we learn that the status of these male characters is that of men with whom she becomes involved. This pattern evolves further in *Love with the Proper Stranger*, which drastically minimizes the role of Angie's parents, placing the pregnancy squarely on her shoulders.

The final straw comes when Roger, who has been fascinated with Leah's cigarette lighter the entire film, sets himself on fire. However, everything reaches a happy conclusion when Hoyt agrees to marry her, baby and all. How *Susan Slade* differs, and expands on the narrative established by *A Summer Place*, is that it minimizes, essentially forgiving Susan's illegitimate pregnancy by showing that a woman can live happily ever after, even after conceiving a child out of wedlock. Susan, after admitting that Roger is indeed hers, is not shunned by the people around her for her "mistake." In fact, her indiscretion is forgiven with the formation of her relationship with Hoyt, who is seemingly unconcerned with his future wife's lack of "purity." It is in this slight evolution occurring between *A Summer Place* and *Susan Slade* which presents positive, progressive ideas of sexuality and not the rigid morality preached in the Production Code.

#### The Pregnancy Melodrama and The Production Code

In decades past, illegitimate pregnancy, even if the heroine was of legal age, typically spelled trouble. Previously in film history, many melodramas and so-called "woman's films" revolved around a mother attempting to raise a child on her own. The taboo nature of this topic

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<sup>69</sup> *Susan Slade* trailer.



can be seen in an examination of the Production Code “...The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld.... 2. Scenes of passion (a) These should not be introduced except where they are definitely essential to the plot....”<sup>70</sup> In fact, the only acceptable form of sexual relations were between married, heterosexual couples. Each of the ‘Pregnancy Melodramas’ highlight an unmarried couple, and the sexual encounter results from a lust and passion that is repeatedly warned against in the body of the Production Code: “...(b) Excessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive posture and gestures are not to be shown. (c) In general, passion should be treated in such manner as not to stimulate the lower and baser emotions....”<sup>71</sup> The morals of the previous generation, signified by the Production Code, explain the harsh punishment of women who became pregnant out of wedlock, often the topic of 1930s and 1940s melodrama.

A single mother raising a baby has been a troublesome topic throughout the history of Hollywood. The women’s film and the melodrama of the 1930s and 1950s adopted this as a typical narrative plot point. *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945), *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophuls, 1948), *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959) and *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937) all feature the heroine attempting to raise a headstrong child, typically a daughter, on her own. However, there is one consistency in each of these films: it is difficult for the woman to be an effective parent without the presence of the paternal figure in their life.

*Letter from an Unknown Woman* provides a revealing example of illegitimate pregnancy in Hollywood cinema as well as the punishment the Production Code mandated on the heroine.

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<sup>70</sup> The Production Code of 1930” <http://www.und.edu/instruct/cjacobs/ProductionCode.htm> Production Code II. 2. (a).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

While many of the other pictures like *Mildred Pierce* and *Stella Dallas* focus on the female protagonists attempting to raise their children, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* looks at the couple's relationship in the years before and after the conception of the child. The narrative focuses on Lisa Berndal (Joan Fontaine) who harbors a school girl crush on her sophisticated next door neighbor, musician Stefan Brand (Louis Jourdan). In the second act, the couple enjoys a brief flirtation leading to premarital intercourse and Lisa's pregnancy. In classic melodramatic fashion, after their intimate encounter Stefan is called away and promises Lisa that he will be back in a few weeks. However, years pass and it is learned in that time Lisa gave birth to Stefan's child, and in his absence marries another man. Eight to ten years likely pass before Stefan's return, reopening Lisa's long healed wounds. Adding insult to injury, Stefan does not remember Lisa or their earlier affair, only noticing that she seems familiar. Lisa quickly realizes that any significant relationship with Stefan is out of the question. Yet, in a moment of classic Production Code censorship Lisa and her son are accidentally placed in a quarantined train car as she sends him off to school. While they are only exposed for a matter of seconds, it is long enough for both to be taken ill with typhoid fever. It is established in Lisa's letter that her son passed away first, within a week of his exposure to the illness. This is how Lisa is ultimately punished; at the time of her son's death, her marriage has crumbled with the return of Stefan, whom Lisa realizes she has no future with. Thus, Lisa is left alone in the world, but must still sacrifice her own life for her sexual indiscretion. *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is a melodrama which focuses on a woman's illicit sexual encounter, and it is an extreme example of the punishment mandated on a woman who showed any sexuality in the early Production Code years.

In the film noir/melodrama *Mildred Pierce* by contrast, Mildred (Joan Crawford) is forced to raise her two daughters Veda (Ann Blyth) and Kay (Jo Ann Marlowe) after her marriage ends. Throughout the narrative, Mildred's parenting choices are under constant scrutiny. The most serious problem occurs when Veda murders her stepfather and lover Monty (Zachary Scott). A more melodramatic example happens earlier in the second act, Mildred is on a date with Monty while the children are out with their father Bert (Bruce Bennett). However, upon her return Mildred discovers that Kay has been taken ill with pneumonia, and with her mother no where to be found, Bert takes his daughter to the house of Mrs. Biederhoff (Lee Patrick) the woman who reportedly broke up their marriage. While Mildred cannot blame herself for the problems which befall her family, many characters throughout the film are quick to heap blame on her shoulders. The similarities between these older works and the 'Pregnancy Melodramas' are evident, however the primary difference is the later films focus on adolescent sexuality.

*Love with the Proper Stranger* aided in the gradual process of breaking down the stigma plaguing single mothers throughout history. The strict moral dividing line drawn by the Production Code required that the sanctity of marriage and family be upheld on screen. As a result, films that dealt with the topic of single motherhood often did not end well for the mother. The structure of the "Pregnancy Melodrama," begins to blur the strict morality required by the Production Code when dealing with sex and pregnancy outside of marriage.

*A Summer Place* and *Susan Slade* each employ a standard plot structure: boy and girl meet, boy and girl fall passionately in love, boy and girl consummate their relationship and must suffer through a horrendous tragedy coinciding with the revelation of the pregnancy. Most

interestingly, each of the films have one common motif: a happy ending. The pregnancies which were supposedly the product of “baser emotions” should, according to the Production Code, subject the mother to harsh punishment. Both *A Summer Place* and *Love with the Proper Stranger* provide examples of a couple who apparently live “happily ever after,” even after conceiving a child out of wedlock. However, *Love with the Proper Stranger*’s handling of pregnancy really sets it apart from the earlier films. A brief examination of the star persona of Natalie Wood, who did not appear in any of the ‘Pregnancy Melodramas’ before *Love with the Proper Stranger*, sheds further light on this topic, as the characters she plays are representative of the gradual evolution of American sexuality and the onset of second wave feminism.

### **The Career of Natalie Wood and its Influence on the Film**

Natalie Wood, having made her first film in 1945 when she was six years old, was a long standing figure in Hollywood.<sup>72</sup> By the age of ten she had worked with such Hollywood heavyweights as: Maureen O’Hara, Rex Harrison, Walter Brennan, Claudette Colbert and Orson Welles. In a 1955 article reflecting on Wood’s already decade long career, columnist Hedda Hopper described her young beginning in Hollywood: “She was tiny at 6, with solemn, dark eyes and straight hair in long braids... On screen she had a direct and simple approach, and she could cry in a way that tore your heart....”<sup>73</sup> It was in 1955 that Wood starred in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955). It was the role of Judy which first allowed her to break away from the juvenile roles that had begun to stifle her. Judy, a deep and well crafted character, is a confused

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<sup>72</sup> Finstad, Suzanne. *Natasha: The Biography of Natalie Wood*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 45.

<sup>73</sup> Hopper, Hedda. “Child Star to Glamour Girl” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. June 26, 1955. L22.

teenager at heart. In a 1970s interview, Wood speaks extensively of *Rebel Without a Cause* and how she felt the film changed the direction of her career:

Well, it was a very important film for me personally because up until then I had worked as a child and I had always just done as I was told....I was a rather dutiful child. When my parents read the script of *Rebel* they said ‘Oh no, not this one...’ It showed parents in a rather unsympathetic light. And yet I read it and for the first time in my life I said ‘I have to do this!’ I felt very much an identification, a connection with the part....<sup>74</sup>

The “connection” she speaks about demonstrates the transition Wood was undergoing at this period in her career, and seems to lay the groundwork for the complicated sexual persona she would develop in her later acting roles.

Wood’s characters are in a constant state of sexual confusion. They seem to epitomize the blurring of the sexual dichotomy evident in films like *Love with the Proper Stranger*. Wood carried with her a lingering association of childhood (remnants of her 15 years on screen by 1960), and as such was often pigeon holed into stereotypical “good girl” roles. However, in films like *Marjorie Morningstar* (Irving Rapper, 1958), *Splendor in the Grass* (Elia Kazan, 1961) and *Love with the Proper Stranger*, Wood broke away from the roles of her youth. In these pictures she is often cast as girl-next-door characters. However, in each she is aware of this classification and is actively rebelling against it. In *Splendor in the Grass* and *Marjorie Morningstar*, Wood portrays young women who wish to be seen as attractive, sexual beings, not the good girl types being pushed on them by the older generation. In *Love with the Proper Stranger*, she successfully erases the line between good and bad and sexual and virginal, and thus begins to break down one of the most stigmatizing gender dichotomies in cinema history.

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<sup>74</sup> YouTube. “Natalie Wood Interview” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8cZgqqNrG4&NR=1> Interview with Natalie Wood, conducted by Peter Lawford in what appears to be a James Dean retrospective.

*Splendor in the Grass*, which was directed by Elia Kazan, is a film that is well aware of the social issues under examination. Kazan, a well-established filmmaker by this point, was not shy about tackling substantive, controversial issues in his films: anti-Semitism in *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1947), labor unrest in *On the Waterfront* (1954), and alcoholism and mental illness in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951). *Splendor in the Grass* is a film that delves into the sexual hypocrisies in society and examines the potentially tragic affects of their repression.

Deanie Loomis (Natalie Wood) is a high school girl involved in a hot and hormone driven relationship with Bud Stamper (Warren Beatty). Early in the first act, after Deanie returns from a date with Bud, the film introduces Mrs. Loomis (Audrey Christie), who represents the puritanical repression of the previous generation. She says to Deanie, "Bud Stamper could get you into a whole lot of trouble... Boys don't respect a girl they can go all the way with. Boys want a nice girl for a wife. Wilma Dean, you and Bud haven't gone too far already have you?" Once again, a character is depicted splitting sex into a good/bad dichotomy. It was a widely stated belief that nice girls did not have sex. There are statements similar to this repeated throughout the cinema of this period. Moments later Deanie asks her mother the important question representing the evolution of female sexuality occurring at this time: "Mom, is it so terrible to have those feelings about a boy?" To which her mother responds, representing the older generation's view of sexuality: "No nice girl does.... Your father never laid a hand on me until we were married. Then I just gave in because a wife has to. A woman doesn't enjoy those things the way a man does. She just lets her husband come near her, in order to have children...." The scene is played out in Deanie's bedroom; she has thrown herself onto her mother's lap in a very childlike manner. Deanie's relationship with her mother complicates the narrative. Deanie has incredible difficulty

separating her own thoughts and desires from those of her repressed Mother. However, the visual coverage alternates between close-ups of Deanie and her mother. Each woman faces the opposite direction, granting Deanie privacy from her mother's prying eye. The intense debate over sexuality within the narrative could also be interpreted as being representative of Wood's complicated relationship with sex.<sup>75</sup> This issue of sexual desire making a girl "bad" is something Deanie struggles with throughout the film. Throughout the narrative it is made clear that she is a respectable teenager; she is often contrasted against the flappers who are slowly appearing in her high school. Though she and Bud maintain they have not engaged in intercourse, it is evident from the first scene that they do have strong desires for each other. These thoughts fuel a recurring confusion that becomes a motif during this period, does having sexual feelings before marriage make you bad or somehow impure?

Throughout the film, Mrs. Loomis holds the values of purity, virginity and chastity over Deanie's head. While there is no evidence that Deanie and Bud have indeed consummated their relationship, her Mother's puritanical nature places an incredible strain on Deanie. As she begins to have her mental breakdown, the issue of "bad" sexuality again emerges. The idea of a woman being "spoiled" once she has sex is particularly responsible for Deanie's decline in the face of the repressive culture surrounding her:

MRS. LOOMIS: Did he spoil you?

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<sup>75</sup> The topic of Natalie Wood's relationship to sex is further illuminated by looking at her early marketing by the studio. While this "good girl" image was maintained on screen, off-screen she was reportedly, romantically linked to a number of older male celebrities before her twentieth birthday. Even before her marriage at 19 to Robert Wagner, many biographies have reported that she had reportedly been linked to older actors like Frank Sinatra and Raymond Burr on top of the studio approved dates with the younger male celebrities of the period. One example is Wood's lingering romantic partnership with actor Tab Hunter, who has recently come out as homosexual. There is also much written about her tumultuous relationship with Dennis Hopper at the time of *Rebel Without a Cause* while she was reportedly also involved with the film's much older director Nicholas Ray.

DEANIE: Spoil? Did he spoil me? No Mom! I'm not spoiled. I'm not spoiled Mom! I'm just as fresh and virginal as the day I was born! I'm a lovely virginal creature...

MRS. LOOMIS: Stop it!

DEANIE: I'm a good little, good little, good little girl.

This is a particularly vulnerable moment for Deanie, and the construction of the scene reflects this. Her mother has much of the narrative power. She is positioned at the foot of the bathtub and towers over Deanie in the frame. The camera seems to be adopting the perspective of Mrs. Loomis as the shots of Deanie look down at her in the bath, seemingly coming from her Mother's point-of-view. A few years earlier in *Marjorie Morningstar* (1958), Wood portrayed a character dealing with much of the same confusion regarding sex in the face of the conservative adult generation.

In *Marjorie Morningstar*, Wood plays the title character who is dealing with the very difficult topic of an adolescent girl coming of age and the resulting sexual awakening. Marjorie is characterized as a typical teenager, who after turning 18 begins to push against her conservative Jewish upbringing. Betsy Israel describes the film in her book, *The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century* (1998), writing "Marjorie, part princess, part bohemian, struggles with everything--her mother's prudish interference in her career and snobbish views of boyfriends; the embarrassment and love she feels for her lower-class Jewish relatives; and then the boyfriends themselves...."<sup>76</sup> Her mother (Claire Trevor) sums up the older generation's views on sex, saying "Take those feelings, put them in the bank and save them for the man who will appreciate them and love them after you are married...." The narrative follows Marjorie as she leaves home and eventually gets a job as a camp counselor, and later as an

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<sup>76</sup> Israel, Betsy. "Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the 20th Century" (NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998) 198.



actress and stage hand at an exclusive Long Island summer retreat. While there she meets, and becomes romantically involved with, dapper ladies man Noel Airman (Gene Kelly). In her relationship with Airman, the film further explores the good girl/bad girl dichotomy. While Marjorie is desperate to be seen as a sexually available woman, and a serious actress, she is widely seen as a “good” girl. Airman tells her, “I don’t have time for another Shirley in my life.... It's a trade name for the respectable middle class girl who likes to play at being worldly...it’s monogrammed all over you the way parents sew camp initials on a child. Hand’s off. Decent girl. Object matrimony....” In this statement, Airman is pinning her with the chaste and societally acceptable sexuality that her mother preaches, and it is this label that Marjorie rebels against.

In the *New York Times* review of *Marjorie Morningstar*, A.H. Weiler comments on the similarity between Wood and Marjorie, writing “Natalie Wood, who only yesterday was playing with dolls in films, has blossomed into a vivacious, pretty brunette who very likely is as close to a personification of Marjorie as one could wish.”<sup>77</sup> This seems to be fairly accurate analysis from Weiler, taking into account Wood’s star persona. She grew-up on screen in front of the American public and her roles in memorable family classics like *Miracle on 34th Street* (George Seaton, 1947) kept Wood in public consciousness as a child, not the young woman she was becoming. It can be argued that during this period of Natalie Wood’s career she was in Marjorie’s position, trying to convince everyone she was an adult, and not the innocent child they saw her as. It was this struggle to change her public image which lead to the evolution she underwent during this period. Once a child of the studio system, Wood transformed into a freethinking leading lady not afraid to take sexually progressive roles.

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<sup>77</sup> Weiler, A.H. “Version of Wouk Novel Opens at Music Hall” *New York Times* April 25, 1958.

In her portrayal of Angie in *Love with the Proper Stranger*, Wood creates a character who is an independent woman more reminiscent of the growing feminist movement of the late sixties than the bubbly and innocent heroines of the early sixties. Angie was a character that Wood is said to have felt strongly about, and she threw herself deeply into the role. Finstad writes in her biography *Natasha: The Biography of Natalie Wood* (2001):

She rejected *Charade*, typically forming a bond with the character.... Natalie recognized the intelligence of the script and the dimensions of Angie, the brave, scrappy salesgirl from Little Italy struggling to break away from her overprotective family, unwilling to settle for anything less than romance....<sup>78</sup>

This is shown through Angie's ultimate feelings toward the pregnancy. During the third act, Angie is confronted by Rocky who is under duress from her over protective brother Dominick (Herschel Bernardi). Confronted with the pregnancy, Rocky admits, "I'm just as much to blame as you are. More, it was my fault and I'm willing to take my medicine." It is Angie's response that stands out in the context of the narrative and solidifies *Love with the Proper Stranger* as a work of second wave American feminism:

That's really wonderful...and I'm the medicine right? I know this may come as a shock to...you, but underneath all this hair and skin is a human girl with all the regular things going for me, and believe it or not I don't wanna spend the rest of my life married to a man who is doing me a big favor. Alright, I made one mistake, and it was a bute, but I don't wanna ruin my life, his and the baby's.

At this moment, Angie demonstrates her control of the situation, making it strikingly clear that she does not need to marry Rocky. She is prepared to have the baby and raise it without his help.

The film further expands on the pattern evident in *A Summer Place* and *Susan Slade*. In *A Summer Place*, the presence of the baby's father is necessary. However, in *Love with the Proper*

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<sup>78</sup> Finstad, Suzanne. *Natasha: The Biography of Natalie Wood*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 285.

*Stranger*, Angie makes it clear that she does not need Rocky, and that she will not be marrying him simply because she is pregnant with his child. The strength Angie shows in this sequence demonstrates how progressive ideas of feminism had evolved in the two years separating *Susan Slade* and *Love with the Proper Stranger*.

In *Love with the Proper Stranger*, Natalie Wood plays a character who is young, independent and above all else sexual. Even though works like *A Summer Place* and *Susan Slade* depict increasingly progressive leading ladies, the independence Angie displays separates her from the earlier characters, and further establishes the evolution of American feminism in society. Furthermore, *Love with the Proper Stranger* displays an awareness of casual sexuality which had been growing, but had not quite taken hold, in the years leading up to 1963.

### **Love with the Proper Stranger**

*Love with the Proper Stranger* was produced by Alan Pakula and director Robert Mulligan. At this point in their history, Pakula and Robert Mulligan were a production team. Prior to *Love with the Proper Stranger*, they had worked on two well known movies together: *Fear Strikes Out* (Robert Mulligan, 1957) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan, 1962). These films share a notable similarity with *Love with the Proper Stranger*, in that each deals with intense, socially relevant subject matter: mental illness, racism and finally abortion. This is a trend that Pakula would continue throughout the rest of his career in Hollywood as one of the best remembered directors of the 1970s releasing films like *Klute* (1971), *The Parallax View* (1974) and *All the President's Men* (1976). Pakula's work with Mulligan shares a similar cinematography element, namely the use of gritty black and white stock, which contributes

significantly to the construction of the picture. Color had been primarily used in films more fantastic in nature--musicals, fantasy and period pieces--while black and white was often used in crime dramas and thrillers which tended to be geared towards achieving a sense of social realism. *Love with the Proper Stranger* demonstrates a visual and narrative style very similar to that of television. The film's treatment of abortion, as well as the low-budget aesthetic employed by former television director Robert Mulligan, aligns the picture with the motifs of the smaller, more independent medium of television.

#### Direct from Television: The Burgeoning American New Wave

By the late 1950s, many talented young directors from the burgeoning television industry were moving to California to break into the film industry, and director Robert Mulligan is one of the many who made the jump to Hollywood. The connection of *Love with the Proper Stranger* to television is made stronger when looking at the career of screenwriter Arnold Schulman. Before penning the script for *Love with the Proper Stranger*, Schulman was primarily writing for television, working on shows like *Kraft Theater*, *Studio One in Hollywood* and *G.E. True Theater*. Other eventually notable filmmakers working along side them were John Frankenheimer, Robert Altman, Sydney Pollack, Arthur Penn and Sidney Lumet.<sup>79</sup> The 1950s and 1960s were a transitional time in Hollywood, and a study of many of the directors gaining popularity establishes a trend towards independent, gritty and socially relevant films rather than

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<sup>79</sup> These directors, each of whom got their start in the television industry, were beginning to make films in the late 1950s and early 1960s and adopted similar visual motifs in their movies. Films like *The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962), *12 Angry Men* (Sidney Lumet, 1957), *Marty* (Delbert Mann, 1955) each are examples of this gritty, realistic style that was more reminiscent of television than anything on screen at this moment in cinema history.

the flashy, big budget studio works common to the 1950s. *Love with the Proper Stranger* fits into this pattern, and director Robert Mulligan earns a place in this “New Wave” of American cinema.

### The British New Wave and *Love with the Proper Stranger*

*Love with the Proper Stranger* has remarkable similarities with many of the international film movements that were coming to prominence, particularly the British New Wave. The works coming out of this movement portray similar elements of social realism with many including very gritty, black and white depictions of urban slums. Films like *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960) and *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961) feature characters with working class backgrounds and deal with premarital sex, pregnancy and abortion. In his essay entitled “Beyond the New Wave: Realism in British Cinema, 1959-1963,” Peter Hutchings writes,

The thematic refocusing was coupled with an increased openness on the part of the films regarding the representation of sexual behaviour and other subjects previously deemed unacceptable in the mainstream cinema. All of the films featured extramarital sex, for example, alongside what were for the late 1950s and early 60s scandalously frank discussions of abortion, miscarriage and homosexuality....<sup>80</sup>

Interestingly, like the American filmmakers listed above, Richardson worked in the British television industry before moving into films and Reisz was a member of the British free-cinema movement. In these two movies, the directors’ backgrounds in television and documentary serves to create a gritty and realistic social environment similar to that created in *Love with the Proper Stranger*. The connection between these works in particular, and *Love with the Proper Stranger*,

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<sup>80</sup> Hutchings, Peter. “Beyond the New Wave: Realism in British Cinema, 1959-1963.” In *The British Cinema Book*, edited by Robert Murphy London: British Film Institute, 2001.

demonstrate that Pakula and Mulligan were likely trying to work with the films coming out of international markets rather than the classical Hollywood fare.

The “New Waves” which swept international cinemas in the early 1960s revolutionized the visual and narrative ideas of audiences. Prior to this time, viewers were exposed chiefly to the films coming out of the Hollywood studio system. However by the early 1960s, American audiences were becoming exposed to these works from developing national cinemas. These films were different from the traditional Hollywood cinema. They did not have the Production Code watching over every step of the production process, and as a result they did not necessarily uphold the Production Code’s rigid ideas of morality, and exposed audiences to different points-of-view and ways of thinking.

#### Does “Low” and “Deviant” Sexuality Equal Unhappiness?

*Love with the Proper Stranger* is the first of the ‘Pregnancy Melodramas’ to openly disregard the Production Code’s ideas of “high” and “low” sexuality. In *Love with the Proper Stranger*, the treatment of abortion, as well as the depiction of the main couple’s relationship, is openly pushing the standards of “high” sexuality established by the Production Code. The relationship and resulting pregnancy of Rocky and Angie results from a drunken one night stand, a narrative element that is left off-screen. The film begins with Angie coming to Rocky in hopes of securing an abortion, saying “...All I want from you is a doctor. An address you know?” Throughout the scene, Rocky is struggling to remember who she is. Immediately any illusion of typical romance and courtship between Rocky and Angie is shattered. Even though they barely

know each other, the relationship has been consummated, and the romantic comedy must happen essentially in reverse.

While the film provides another example of a happy ending, which is characteristic of the 'Pregnancy Melodrama,' it could be questioned just how happy the ending is. The main narrative focus is the relationship between Angie and Rocky. When the *New York Times* reviewed the film on December 23, 1963, critic Bosley Crowther wrote, "I feel very unhappy about the sturdy little clerk of Miss Wood, who deserves someone much more substantial and attractive than this lug of Mr. McQueen.... I cannot go with her in her enthusiasm for the whirling dervish of Mr. McQueen...."<sup>81</sup> Crowther makes a valid point regarding Rocky as a character. He is present in the film as the romantic, male lead. However, he is far from progressive. After his one night stand with Angie, he is able to cast her aside, and does not remember her when faced with the consequences of his actions. Furthermore, this has all occurred while he is apparently in a serious relationship with another woman, Barbie (Eddie Adams) who he also seems to have no problem casting aside.

In the treatment of Barbie, the filmmakers seem to be taking a conservative step back to the immediate post-war era. Barbie and Angie are directly contrasted in a good girl/bad girl dichotomy. The two women are diametrical opposites of each other, even down to their physical appearance. Natalie Wood, coming from Russian parentage, has very dark coloring with dark hair and brown eyes, while Eddie Adams has reddish blonde hair and blue eyes. When we are introduced to Barbie, it can be inferred that she is a showgirl of some sort, and a narcissistic one at that. Her apartment is covered with posters and pictures of herself in various poses and scanty

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<sup>81</sup> Crowther, Bosley. "Screen: Eight New Movies Arrive for the Holidays," *New York Times* December 26, 1963.

outfits. Barbie is contrasted with Angie the young, modest Macy's salesgirl who lives in a tiny apartment with her family. These differences would, in the Hollywood narrative structure, establish Angie as the good girl in *Love with the Proper Stranger*. However, what can be done with the fact that it is Angie who has slept with Barbie's steady, and is now looking to abort his child? At the time of the film's production, and even still in contemporary Hollywood, this would make Angie into a bad girl caricature. Yet, it is Angie who is the female lead while Barbie is dismissed from the narrative as quickly as she is introduced. Considering the obvious dismissal of Barbie--her boyfriend cheats on her with Angie, and leaves her for this other woman--it is possible to argue that Angie is in fact the good girl despite her sexual indiscretion.

From the beginning viewers are made aware of Angie's problem, and of her intention to secure an abortion; which is still a notoriously taboo topic, and was even more so when this film was released. In fact, the Production Code devotes an entire point to the topic:

The subject of abortion shall be discouraged, shall never be more than suggested, and when referred to shall be condemned. It must never be treated lightly, or made the subject of comedy. Abortion shall never be shown explicitly or by inference, and a story must not indicate that an abortion has been performed, the word 'abortion' shall not be used.<sup>82</sup>

Abortion is an important part of this picture and the treatment of the procedure contradicts the values maintained by the Production Code. Through the dangerous and unfavorable depiction of abortion, the filmmakers are reflecting and presenting the problems associated with it to the American public.

*Love with the Proper Stranger's* portrayal of abortion is calculated for shock value. The sequence is shot largely in wide shots, carefully showing the decrepit environment out of which the abortionist is working. Upon Rocky and Angie's arrival into what appears to be a vacated

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<sup>82</sup> "The Production Code of 1930" (<http://www.und.edu/instruct/cjacobs/ProductionCode.htm>).



apartment, Angie is shown into another room by a middle aged woman, presumably the abortionist. When the two are alone together, the scene is constructed from two primary long shots. The first looks from the corner of the room at Angie who stands opposite, nervously undressing. In the foreground, the abortionist digs through a suitcase. The second focuses on the abortionist, as she begins pulling equipment from her bag. The environment is hardly medical, the abortionist places a dirty towel on the floor to function as a mat, she then produces a few small sheets then a flashlight. The focus is not on dialogue, rather it is the setting and the eventual realization that if Angie stays she will be putting her life in jeopardy. As the scene concludes, her crumbling demeanor finally cracks and Rocky comes to “protect” the hysterical and incoherent Angie as the abortionist flees the scene. At this moment, the film is at its most conservative and at the same time its most progressive. Angie is reduced to the position of the archetypal damsel in distress, reliant on Rocky to get her through the experience. However, in the mere depiction of an abortion, Mulligan and Pakula are demonstrating that back-alley abortions were happening and were a relevant topic of social discussion.

Throughout *Love with the Proper Stranger* there is an interesting rejection of romance that infuses much of the film. In the early ‘Pregnancy Melodramas,’ the emotional build-up of the film revolves around the sexual feelings and desires of the characters. However, in *Love with the Proper Stranger* the sex has already been had, and informal, and casual sex at that. Angie clings to the hope that she can build a relationship around the feelings she already has for Rocky. Since the characters have already consummated their relationship, the plot must focus on the establishment of the traditional heterosexual couple. Midway through the film, Angie asks Rocky over for dinner. Before his arrival, she goes through a number of records to find some dinner

music; she pulls out two records entitled *Dinner for Two* and *Music for a Cozy Corner*. Angie stops and briefly examines a record called *Jungle Rhythms* before throwing it away, exasperated. At this moment, the film score changes from a classical score, to primal and rhythmic jungle drums. This is a quick moment, lasting little more than a few seconds, but it is a shockingly conservative addition. When the score changes, the film is relying on racially motivated stereotypes connecting African American culture to a primitive sexuality, with the *Jungle Rhythms* record arguably standing in for sexual intercourse. Later in the film, Angie gets into a discussion with Rocky on the merits of love and romance. During the scene, they are listening to a romantic ballad sung by crooner Jack Jones serving as diegetic music for the scene. Angie asks him “That’s what love is? Bells and banjos playing? How they brainwash it.” After she delivers this line she shuts off the romantic song, shattering the romantic mood. This moment is very reflexive, as in the act of shutting off the love ballad, Angie is directly commenting on (and against) the typical structure of the Hollywood romantic comedy. Earlier in the same sequence, Angie delivers another oddly reflexive line: “How the movies build it up... All I felt was scared and disgusted with myself...” Reading the line with Angie’s pregnancy in mind, this seems to be a critique on Hollywood’s idealized views of sex. Her encounter with Rocky did not have the romantic music and the passionate feelings that are typically part of the romantic comedy; it was a cheap one night stand, and she does in fact regret it. While *Love with the Proper Stranger* is repeatedly classified as a romantic comedy, the film is a transitional and revisionist entry into the genre. The traditional hallmarks of the romantic comedy, the courtship and formation of the heterosexual monogamous couple, are reversed in *Love with the Proper Stranger*; instead focusing on the formation of the heterosexual romantic couple after casual sex has already

produced a child. In traditional Production Code values a baby should be the ultimate goal of a romantic union, not the cause.

A big part of *Love with the Proper Stranger*'s status as a transitional film is its' exploration of so-called "good" and "deviant" sexualities. In the years leading up to and through much of the post-war period, the Production Code was responsible for regulating and maintaining a perceived sense of morality on the big screen. However, while these earlier works punished examples of supposedly "deviant" sexuality, *Love with the Proper Stranger* founded the main romantic coupling through casual sex and pregnancy after a drunken one night stand.

The topic of female sexuality and reproductive freedom was one that was rapidly evolving throughout the post-war period. The films that have eventually come to be known as 'Pregnancy Melodramas' are deeply representative of the transformation occurring in American society. Before this period in Hollywood history, a woman who dared to get pregnant out of wedlock was subject to unthinkable punishment. While in these movies, the couple is often subject to hardship, unlike the earlier films, these end happily without requiring total self-sacrifice of the heroine--a plot point that is often seen in melodramas throughout the 1930s and 1940s, for example *Stella Dallas* and *Letter from an Unknown Woman*.

With the release of *Love with the Proper Stranger*, it becomes clear that the cultural transition leading to a greater acceptance of female sexuality was in progress. While the sub-genre displays many conservative motifs of the Hollywood studio system out of which it emerged, the narrative treatment relating to the topic of abortion as well as the fact that Angie considers the procedure is an exercise of her reproductive freedom.

Abortion is a topic of contention in today's society, but in the decade before *Roe vs. Wade* it was an illegal and dangerous procedure that cost the lives of countless women. *Love with the Proper Stranger* addressed the topic of abortion in its depiction of the dangerous back-alley practices. While the film is ultimately a Hollywood romantic comedy, the filmmakers demonstrated insurmountable courage in displaying the realities of abortion, and in doing so really opened the door for the values embraced by second wave of American feminism yet to come.

## Conclusion

The middle of the twentieth century from World War II until the end of the 1960s is a period defined by the rapid societal advances that occurred throughout American culture. By the late 1960s, the second wave of American feminism was in full swing after getting a foothold in 1963 after the release of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. My thesis examines different facets of the teen film genre from *Where the Boys Are*, to a series of "Pregnancy Melodramas," and looked at how these works displayed the growing importance of female characters within their narratives. Combining this filmic approach with a historical study, the evolution of female sexuality within post-war American society becomes strikingly clear. The 1950s was not the sexually repressive period it is usually perceived to be, rather with the aid of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) and the publication of *Playboy Magazine*, the decade jumpstarted the gradual development of female sexuality that culminated in the second wave of American feminism.

Throughout this period, the evolution of female sexuality was further fueled by the approval of the birth control pill in May 1960, as well as the growing popularity of the bikini among American women. Most importantly, the development of the contraceptive pill revolutionized female sexuality. The pill diminished the consequences of sex, namely pregnancy, and as a result casual sex was introduced into American society. For the first time in history, women were free to enjoy sex as something for recreation, without the ever-present fear of pregnancy tainting the encounter. Also at this time, the bikini was gaining popularity on American beaches. The skimpy two-piece swimwear was known for the amount of the female body that it displayed, and it signified an explosive sexuality represented by its name. While

previous eras deemed the female body something to be covered up, the bikini granted women the opportunity to show their bodies and display their sexuality if they chose. These sociological developments played a vital part in transforming the question of female sexuality into a reality within American society.

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, Hollywood cinema was gradually adapting to include and take advantage of the evolving female audience in society. In years before, female characters had been kept on the periphery as girlfriends and wives. However, by this period films were beginning to represent a female point-of-view. *Where the Boys Are* (Henry Levin, 1960) features four primary, young female protagonists who are placed in the narrative drivers' seat. While the film does include a number of male characters, they do not serve to influence the story. Rather, they fulfill a romantic, passive role within the plot typically reserved for female characters. *Where the Boys Are* is a film which features not only literal examples of an active female gaze, but also demonstrates the growing importance of the female perspective within the Hollywood narrative.

An important element of my analysis revolves around the growing presence of an active, independent female point-of-view within the movies. Films like *Where the Boys Are*, *Susan Slade* and *Love with the Proper Stranger* show how the status of female protagonists in Hollywood was evolving during this period. The women in the lead roles are self-sufficient individuals who serve as an active influence upon the narrative development. These characters show the changing status of women in post-war America. To further examine this from a filmic perspective, I conducted a star persona study of actresses Connie Francis and Natalie Wood. Examining the careers of these women shows the scope of the changes occurring in the treatment

of femininity on screen and in other areas of public life. Angie in *Where the Boys Are* and Angie in *Love with the Proper Stranger* were not isolated roles. In fact, both of these performers repeatedly portrayed positive and active examples femininity throughout their careers, giving support to my idea that this change was a growing evolution which pinnacle with the publication of the *Feminine Mystique*.

The influence of the teen film on this period in history cannot be underestimated. Teenagers were the group greatest affected by the invention of the birth control pill, the birth of the bikini and the resulting influence on society. Through the adolescent lens of the films I have examined, the contradictions of the post-war era are clearly established. The narrative focus on teenagers allows the filmmakers to explore the dichotomy between teenage culture and the views and beliefs of older generations. None of the movies solely feature teenage characters. Rather, each integrates adults into the plot and it is these adults who function as a mouthpiece for the cultural status quo. Thus, the films' comment on the evolution of American society, while at the same time demonstrating from where American culture emerged.

Abortion is an important topic in the discussion of female reproductive freedom. During the late 1950s and into the early 1960s, there was a growing examination of abortion within popular culture. The procedure was repeatedly debated and analyzed in contemporary news media due to the untold number of women who died as a result of dangerous and illegal back-alley abortions. Coinciding with the growing discussion was a documented increase in teenage and illegitimate pregnancies. With birth control limited to many women, abortion was often a last option to avoid an unwanted pregnancy. By 1963, abortion was depicted on-screen in *Love with the Proper Stranger*, an entry into the "Pregnancy Melodrama" sub-genre. This unofficial series

of films: *A Summer Place*, *Susan Slade* and *Love with the Proper Stranger* was Hollywood's response to the increase in the rate of illegitimate pregnancy among American women.

In my examination of the "Pregnancy Melodrama," it becomes clear that the sub-genre is crafting a progressive environment that is accepting of adolescent, female sexuality. Each of these films conclude with a happy ending, in which the pregnant heroine ends up coupled, to either the Father of the baby or another male protagonist who is accepting of her sexual past. These happy endings are drastically different from those of previous Hollywood melodramas. The Production Code mandated that pre-and extramarital sexuality be punished and this was often exacted on the film's leading lady. This punishment is clear in the narratives of films like *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945) and *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Opuls, 1948). Considering this long history of repressing female sexuality, it is significant that each these films go against the established censorship standards in Hollywood and the previous genre history of the melodrama.

In this thesis, it has been my aim to demonstrate how post-war American society evolved throughout the 1950s and 1960s eventually resulting in the birth of the second wave of American feminism in 1963. Teen films establish the evident societal tensions that were rampant as the conservative 1950s transitioned to the liberalism of the 1960s. Combining a historical examination of the post-war period with a close analysis of numerous films marketed toward an adolescent audience, it becomes clear that cultural ideas of gender and sexuality were evolving throughout the 1950s, eventually leading to the onset of the second wave of American feminism in the 1960s.



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