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Wonder girls: Undercurrents of resistance in the representation of teenage girls in 1980s American cinema

Wilkinson, M.C.

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04. Players and Plots: Stereotypes and Narrative Trajectories

Stereotypes

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the teen film genre did not originate in the 1980s. The first wave of popular teen films that addressed, established, and represented a teen film audience found root in the 1950s¹¹¹. This wave of films often presented teenagers as rebelling against their parents, as coming to terms with adolescence and adulthood post-World War II, and as proposing radical breaks with the conventions of previous generations, through an increasingly outspoken engagement with sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll. These films engaged their audiences by placing strong leads, often presented as particular teen types like the rebel or the good school girl, *against* (or amongst) a group of others. The popularity of the genre pronounced this construction through most of the 1960s and 1970s. As Timothy Shary writes:

Most school films *before* the 1980s focused on *one type* of school character and his or her relation to others, such as the misunderstood rebel played by James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*, the sexually curious but nonetheless repressed virgins played by popular schoolgirl Natalie Wood and jock Warren Beatty in *Splendor in the Grass* (1961), or the outcast nerd played by Sissy Spacek in *Carrie* (1976).¹¹²

I agree with Shary that early teen films focused primarily on singular teen types and their engagement with their surroundings. Catherine Driscoll observes: “[The] dominant strategy for teen film [is] repetition... Teen film works largely by telling us things we already know about characters and situations that we are presumed to instantly recognise...[through a] systematic use of repetition and stereotype.”¹¹³ The repetition of specific (singular) teenage ‘identities’ on screen over time, lead to clear definitions of typical traits; in the genre, teen types had slowly distilled, and as their represented identities became more clearly defined, the range of specific types diverged. This type of systematic use of repetition and stereotypes increasingly shaped teen film from the 1960s onwards; it informed the British youth films of the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, introducing mods, rockers and punks, as well as the popular American teen films of the 1970s, presenting a wide range of specific teen types, in

¹¹¹ For an extensive exploration of this wave in American cinema, see Thomas Doherty’s *Teenagers and Teenpics* (2002).

¹¹² Timothy Shary. *Generation Multiplex*, 30-32 (my italics).

¹¹³ Catherine Driscoll. *Teen Film*, 85.

films such as *American Graffiti*, the aforementioned *Carrie* and *Grease*. As the principal gist of the American teen film began to shift from rebellion against previous generations and societal values, to emphasising relationships between peers and the “desire for parental control and authority”¹¹⁴, the genre more consistently presented a wider range, a *collection*, of teenage identities and often played them off against one another, as opposed to figures of authority.

During the second resurgence of teen film in the 1980s, the stereotyping of teen characters was established as an essential part of the generic ‘code’ of the teen film. Timothy Shary, Jon Lewis and Jonathan Bernstein¹¹⁵ suggest that the resurgence of stereotypes in American teen films during this decade can be linked to Hollywood’s new marketing strategies; teen films were increasingly catering to a broader range of teenage consumers in the audience at the multiplex as well. Jonathan Bernstein notes:

...the multiplex played home to a white-bread world populated by an unruly mob of alienated outsiders, rich, privileged emotional cripples, horny high schoolers, computer whiz kids, loners, stoners, princesses, cheerleaders, geeks, jocks and dweebs, all of them demanding their due in terms of attention, respect and empathy.¹¹⁶

Bernstein thereby suggests that the varied teen types in the audience were now each ‘expecting’ to be represented on screen; a phenomenon that perhaps can be linked to the advent of MTV (a network addressing and affirming specific teenage groups through music tastes, and alternative, fast-paced programming) and the growing, diversifying teenage culture/fashion market in the 1980s. Addressed as instantly ‘recognisable’ (quasi)individuals, the teenagers visiting the multiplexes at the mall now readily encountered (idealised) reflections of themselves on screen. Having their own pocket money to spend, the teenagers were thus targeted as potential consumers, through quick alignments with particular characteristics in pre-moulded, fashioned and clearly labelled teenage identities. This context, in conjunction with the evolution of the teen film through the aforementioned generic repetition, perhaps explains why the teen character stereotype became such a strong staple of the genre in the 1980s.

¹¹⁴ This is a trend that Thomas Doherty (2002) analyses at greater length (for example on p. 196). I will come back to this observation (and quote) later in this thesis, when I discuss the representation of the relationship with the father.

¹¹⁵ In *Generation Multiplex* (2002); *The Road To Romance And Ruin* (1992); and *Pretty In Pink* (1997).

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Bernstein. *Pretty In Pink: The Golden Age Of Teenage Movies* (USA: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), 4.

In the 1980s, the boundaries and distinctions between different teen stereotypes were mostly made visible through the distinctive ‘looks’ of each type on film. This visual imagery was transferred from literature or early teen films (the rebel’s characteristic leather jacket, for instance, appeared to reference James Dean’s onscreen persona, while the delinquent’s tight trousers could be tied to Elvis iconography), and was further developed into specifically fashioned ‘types’, through visual and narrative repetition in the 1980s. As technology boomed and computers were made accessible to teenagers at home, two 1980s studios ‘types’, for example, (used mostly for boys, but at times for girls as well) could soon be identified; the ‘nerd’ was directly identifiable through his/her glasses, braces and old-fashioned, out-of-touch, grandfather-style clothing (as Shary suggests, it is an image “of gawky appearance, social discomfort and personal confusion...”¹¹⁷), whereas the closely related ‘geek’ tended to have a more childish look, often achieved through oversized clothing, and demonstrated more advanced academic and technological potential, through accessories/props such as portable gadgets, computers, laser guns, magnifying glasses, and other scientific hobby equipment.



Figures 1a - e – Recurring visual imagery confirms the stereotypical identities of the ‘nerds’ in *Revenge of the Nerds* (top left) and the ‘geeks’ in *Lucas* (top right and bottom row).

¹¹⁷ Timothy Shary, “The Nerdly Girl and her Beautiful Sister”, in *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice*, Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance, eds. (Detroit: Wayne State Michigan Press, 2002), 236.

For teenage girls, the most common visually (and narratively) coded stereotype in the 1980s was that of the ‘cheerleader’. As author Megan Abbott explains: “You know her instantly. Fresh-faced, teeth gleaming, bouncing ponytail. Eyes wide in either innocence or experience... Body held tight, brimming with promises soon to be fulfilled... Few symbols of all-American girlhood have proven more enduring in the last half century than that of the high school cheerleader.”¹¹⁸ Occasionally introduced in the clean cut teenpics of the 1950s, the cheerleader featured in a range of more exploitative representations in the 1970s (including titles such as *The Cheerleaders*, *The Swinging Cheerleaders*, *Revenge of the Cheerleaders*, *The Pom Pom Girls*, *Satan's Cheerleaders*, and *Cheerleaders's Wild Weekend*). But the 1980s brought a return to more wholesome representations of the cheerleader (in *Lucas* and *Can't Buy Me Love*, for instance) alongside the continued exploitation of her sexual potential (in films such as *Porky's* and *Revenge of the Nerds*). Most often in the teen films of the 1980s, however, the ‘cheerleader’ is positioned at the sidelines, cheering on boys, or used as a counterpoint for the figuring of other female characters and stereotypes. The recent wave of depictions of cheerleaders in film and television, in titles such as *American Beauty*, *But I'm a Cheerleader*, *Sugar and Spice*, the *Bring it On* series and *Glee*, have continued to play with the contradictory aspects of this stereotype that were developed in the 1980s; she can embody both wholesomeness and promiscuous sexuality, both ‘goodness’ in her support, and the potential for ‘evil’ teen girl manipulation through powerful cliques, and so on.



Figures 2a and b - Cheerleaders in *Can't Buy Me Love* and *Lucas*

¹¹⁸ Megan Abbott, “Looking Past the Smile and Sheen”, *The New York Times*, July 26, 2012.

By repeating such distinct visual imagery and coding, different teen stereotypes were frequently set off against one another in these teen films. The films thereby instantly marked the differences/boundaries between stereotyped groups, and often deepened these boundaries by defining the hierarchical dynamics between the groups; the popular jock and cheerleaders, for instance, were commonly attributed superiority in standing over the geeks in *Lucas* (see figure 1e, bottom right). It is in this sense that the 1980s most ‘established’ the generic code of the teen film/television show that we know today; through the neutralisation/naturalisation of the hierarchical relationships between the ‘the nerds’, ‘the virgins’, ‘the jocks’ and ‘the cheerleaders’, ‘the rebels’ and ‘the princesses’ and so in, in films such as *Fast Times*, *Porky’s*, *Revenge of the Nerds*, *The Breakfast Club* or *Can’t Buy Me Love*. By now, these relationships and personas have become almost invisibly universal, in the landscapes of recent television programs such as *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Freaks and Geeks*, *The OC*, *Veronica Mars* and *Gossip Girl*, or teen films such as *Clueless*, *Never Been Kissed*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, *It’s a Boy Girl Thing*, *Mean Girls* or *Bratz*, to name but a few.

Alongside the introduction of stereotyped teen characters and the suggestion of hierarchies between them, the “habit of taxonomizing teen tribes”¹¹⁹ in teen films, through a shot that pans past different social groups of teenagers to establish clear social divisions, which Roz Kaveney calls “the anthropology shot”¹²⁰, also originated in the 1980s. This shot defines the teenage social groups by attributing particular social labels (often introduced in the dialogue on the soundtrack) to them, derived from the teenager’s stereotypical, visual appearance, and delineating clear physiological and geographical distances between them; one group only sits at *that* table, and one group may only walk down *that* corridor, or only fraternises with that *one other* group, and so on. Roz Kaveney also observes the rise of this trope in the teen films in the 1980s:

The anthropology shot is not a Hughes invention, though he uses it, more or less in *Pretty in Pink*, but his awareness of its potential is signaled by the selection of types in *The Breakfast Club* and the School Secretary’s slightly bizarre reeling off of tribes in *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*: ‘Sportos, motorheads, geeks, sluts, pinheads, dweebies, wonkers and richies.’¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Roz Kaveney. *Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television from 'Heathers' to 'Veronica Mars'*. (IB Tauris, 2006), 3.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid, 45.

Such ‘tribal’ introductions to the different stereotypical high school social groups in fact feature in a wider range of 1980s films, and even when not addressed directly in an ‘anthropology shot’, are otherwise rendered visually present. Even when unspoken (though mostly, the rules are introduced in the dialogue), the ‘rules’ around access to specific spaces for each specific group are made evident in these films. In *Pretty in Pink*, areas in the school are divided according to class differences (the corridors are for the wealthy kids, the courtyard for those from the ‘wrong side of the tracks’); in *Sixteen Candles*, “only geeks ride the bus”; in *Smooth Talk*, only the older, popular kids go to the bar across the freeway; in *Can’t Buy Me Love*, groups of teen ‘types’ sit separately at specific tables in the dining area outside; in *Heathers*, the cafeteria seating is organised to cater to the power relations of social groups; and in *Fast Times*, Linda introduces Stacy to a range of specific isolated groups (such as for instance, the group of girls that “have cultivated the Pat Benatar look”) over lunch. In short, these “guided tours of high school groups... [naming] class and ethnic diversity as well as leisure groups”¹²² introduce and reaffirm the stereotyped teen characters, and reiterate the pre-supposed social and cultural boundaries between them. If the teenagers at the high school are to be interpreted as acting out a ‘microcosm of society’ (see my discussion of Bailey and Hay in chapter 1), these societies are infused by social, ethnic and material (class) divisions – and a hierarchical organisation that is in line with the neo-conservative values of the 1980s. Moreover, these stereotypes, and the organisation of the relations between them, suggest that the hierarchical structuring of social positions is all-pervasive in American culture and popular imagery.

In his book *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (1993), Richard Dyer revisits the cultural significance of the stereotype. He proposes a reading of Walter Lippmann’s original coining of the term, that places renewed emphasis on (and confidence in) the ‘usefulness’ of stereotypes and their ideological implications. In line with Lippmann, he identifies four areas in which stereotypes function: (i) as an ordering process, (ii) as a ‘short’ cut, (iii) as referring to ‘the world’ and (iv) as expressing ‘our’ values and beliefs. Dyer stresses that what is most important when looking at stereotypes in these four ways, is that we understand and become critical of who controls and defines them. This is most evident, he argues, when we look at whose interest these stereotypes serve¹²³. Dyer seems to suggest here, that the construction of the stereotype can be a clear indicator of underlying ideology.

¹²² Catherine Driscoll. *Teen Film: A Critical Introduction*. (Berg Publishers, 2011), 59

¹²³ Richard Dyer. *The Matter Of Images: Essays On Representations*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 11-12.

By looking at the interests that particular stereotypes serve, fundamental power constructions may be revealed. If we look at the representation of stereotypes in teen films, and the hierarchical relations between presented in the 1980s teen film, the ‘ordering process’ of these short-cut stereotypes already reveals that these films narratives propose a clear separation between ethnic, class and gendered groups. But what else do they reveal?

If we take a closer look at the different categories of stereotypical representations in teen film, the delineations between them become even more apparent. Timothy Shary refers to the five basic characters of ‘school films’, which he derives from the five principal characters in *The Breakfast Club*:



Figure 3 - *The Breakfast Club* presents five principal teenage stereotypes – from right to left; the delinquent, the psychologically distraught rebel, the jock, the popular type and the nerd.

...By the 1980s, many school films began showcasing an ensemble of school characters, as was shown in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* ... reaching an apex with the ‘experiment’ of (stereo)typecasting in *The Breakfast Club*. Both *Fast Times* and *Breakfast Club* feature the five basic characters of school films that permeate the subgenre: the clean-cut and essentially repressed (and thus occasionally aggressive) *nerd*; the *delinquent* boys and girls ‘from the wrong side of the tracks’, who either pay for their crimes or learn to reform; the *psychologically distraught rebel* who may dabble in crime but are usually looking

for a more acceptable outlet for their malaise; the *popular* types whom everyone at school knows and who support their status through fashion, appearance and attitude; and *jocks*, usually shown as physically focused and prouder than their counterparts, dedicated to a given sport yet surprisingly emotional as well.¹²⁴

The definitions that Shary provides here suggest that the characters are defined (and divided) by American ‘middle class’ norms; by social, financial, pathological, intellectual and physical standards. According to these norms, ‘living on the wrong side of the tracks’, having a fashionable appearance, functioning inside or outside ‘the system’, and demonstrating physical prowess through dedication to a particular sport, is what defines a given (pseudo) individual identity/representation. And it has to be noted here; these five primary stereotypes are not only middle-class – they are all assumed to be white, of course, and heterosexual.

Shary continues to point out that these character types lead to particular narrative trajectories: “These stereotypes ... are indeed not only codifications for the behaviour of each type, but also certain patterns that reveal narrative modes of acceptance within each type.”¹²⁵ I agree with this observation, but would argue that these stereotypes not only inform certain modes of acceptance within the film (such as the hierarchical relations between teen types), but they inform specific narrative trajectories as well, much like the characters and their functions proposed by Vladimir Propp when analysing Russian folktales¹²⁶, whereby delinquency and rebellion are always either ‘corrected’ or punished (in *Over the Edge*, *River’s Edge*, *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish*, for instance), the unpopular are ultimately redeemed through the ‘alternative’ (often moral) values that they offer their surroundings, and the popular are rewarded for their achievements.

But most of these categories do not commonly apply to teenage girl types, however; Shary’s list may propose compelling categories for the depiction of teenagers on film, they nevertheless draw heavily on the representation of teenage boys. The categories do not reflect, for instance, one of the essential components of the stereotypical representation of teenage girls, insisting on how they relate to sexual experience. By reducing the cheerleader to the category of the ‘popular type’, as Shary does, more specific labels that define such girl types as either ‘virgins’ or ‘sluts’ no longer apply; and these labels are often used for teen girl

¹²⁴ Timothy Shary. *Generation Multiplex*, 31-32.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹²⁶ Propp, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. (University of Texas Press, 2nd edition, 1968).

stereotypes, because they lead them to the quintessential coming-of-age trajectory, involving 'becoming woman' through the (symbolic) loss of virginity.

The division of girl types along lines of sexual experience is quite crucial to understanding the representation of teenage girls in the teen films of the 1980s. In films that feature boys in the lead role, for instance, the girl characters often fall in one of two categories. In the first, girls are presented as nameless, at times even faceless, Other 'bodies'; as part of an array of overtly blonde cheerleaders and/or sorority girls, who are either already sexually experienced, or shown to be willingly pursuing sexual experience. These types are coded by, and for, to-be-looked-at-ness and potential sexual gratification (see the images of the cheerleaders in chapter one, for instance), and feature prominently in the raunchy teen sex comedies of the 1980s, such as *Porky's*, *Revenge of the Nerds*, *Risky Business*, *The Last American Virgin*, *Class* and *Private School*. In the second category of teen girl types, in teen films featuring boys in the lead role, teenage girls are presented as good, kind and considerate, as the righteous and chaste 'girls next door'. She is the humble yet pretty (frequently) brunette, who in due time *becomes* the object of the boy's affection. In this role, the teen girl is often presented as the opposition to the blonde, promiscuous cheerleader (in films such as *Teen Wolf* and *Secret Admirer*, for instance). She is presented as the innocent, inexperienced virgin; a prospective wife for the boy, and a prospective mother for his children. This 'dream girl' is often still a fairly flat character; she plays second fiddle to the teen boy protagonist/hero, and is defined mostly by her abiding admiration and support for him, in films such as *WarGames*, *Karate Kid*, *Teen Wolf*, *Secret Admirer*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Lucas* (see Figures 4).



Figures 4a - d – Prospective wives and mothers (the kind brunette ‘next door’) in *WarGames*, *Teen Wolf*, *Secret Admirer*, and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

Within the narrative trajectories that feature lead boys, both these types of teen girl figures are ultimately defined and bound by *his* narrative closure. She is either secured in the prospect of a romantic union or a ‘marriage’ (in *Ferris Bueller*, the last line of dialogue Sloane utters into mid-air, for the benefit of the audience alone, is: “He’s going to marry me!”), or alternatively, upon discovery that her promiscuity is incorrigible, is cast aside in favour of a more suitable, virginal dream girl (in *Weird Science*, *Secret Admirer* and in *Teen Wolf*, for instance). This kind of polarised ‘categorisation’ of women on film is not a new development, of course. It follows a traditional line of representation for women in Hollywood that commonly dichotomised the blonde, sexual bombshell (or at certain times, brunette femme fatale) against the dowdy, plain and homely, but good ‘other’ woman.¹²⁷ Within the teen films of the 1980s these distinctions are explicitly brought onto the bodies of teenage girls, however, and established a trend that is still continued to this day (in series such as *Dawson’s Creek* and *90210*, for example). But what I mean to demonstrate here foremost is that the representation of the teen girl type is inherently connected to her state of sexual experience; and this is brought into play with the constant ‘clarification’ over which side of this ‘boundary’ the girl is on (the sex test Samantha fills out in *Sixteen Candles*, for instance,

¹²⁷ For more research on this, see for instance Annette Kuhn’s work on the three types of blondes in cinema (ice cold, blonde bombshell and the dumb blonde) in *The Women’s Companion to International Film* (1994), Molly Haskell’s seminal work *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (1974), or Richard Dyer’s work on white women in *White* (1997) and *The Matter of Images* (1993).

or the carrot lesson in *Fast Times*, the constant spoken reminders in *Seven Minutes in Heaven*, the bet in *Little Darlings*, and so on, all remind the audience that the teenage girl on screen is (still) a virgin, or, to the contrary, experienced). In *The Breakfast Club*, when Claire (Molly Ringwald) is asked whether she has ever done it, Allison (Ally Sheedy) points towards the double-bind of the answer: “if you say you haven't, you're a prude. If you say you have you're a slut. It's a trap. You want to but you can't, and when you do you wish you didn't, right? Or are you a tease?” Although John Hughes appears to be opening these stigmas up to critique here, he then proceeds to reaffirm their very validity by establishing that both Allison and Claire have, in fact, never done it, and by assuring that they, through their subsequent specific trajectories, are ultimately re-positioned securely within the patriarchal realm, with the prospect of romantic union/marriage, as a virgin ‘dream girl’, at the conclusion of the film.

To summarise, then, the teen film genre in the 1980s established a formative new trope, whereby a collection of stereotypes fuel the narratives. This trend was solidified by new marketing practices, a shift in focus away from rebellion to peer relations in the coming-of-age trajectory, and the endless repetition of certain ‘types’ inherent to the genre. Most of these teen types are coded by their visual appearance, by specific character traits and set narrative trajectories. The stereotypes are usually set off against one another, and they are organised within a hierarchical structure (both visually, and at the narrative level), emphasising boundaries and distinctions between different types. The standard range of stereotypes identified in the 1980s teen film (by, for instance, Timothy Shary) does not cover important labels attributed to teen girl characters in these films. It seems the boundaries and distinctions proposed to define them generally fall across five lines; these five lines organise them as ‘short-cuts’ within a specific ordering process. I will just briefly review them here, and how they are organised within the films, before moving on to specific teen girl narrative trajectories.

The first and most pervasive defining boundary is that of sexuality/sexual experience (with two, polarising ‘virgin’ and ‘slut’ extremes). This divide *always* privileges the virgin over promiscuity, in 1980s teen films. The second boundary is the girl’s financial background or class status (the poor vs. rich divide) – a line often enunciated by references to the father’s line of work, where the girl lives, the car she drives, the activities she takes part in, her holiday destinations and, most importantly, the clothes and brands she is shown to wear. Most 1980s teen films privilege and celebrate the middle/wealthier classes, such as *Valley Girl*, *Sixteen Candles* and *Fast Times* for instance, while films like *Pretty in Pink* and *Some Kind of Wonderful* propose poorer girls redeem themselves through upward mobility; they can attain

the status of richer teens by either ‘buying’ into the look/behaviour of wealthier, popular girls (like Amanda Jones in *Some Kind of Wonderful*), or by romantically attaching themselves to a wealthy boy (Andie in *Pretty in Pink*).

The third distinction falls across social standing, and is often addressed through the popular vs. the unpopular divide at the school. This distinction - between the popular cheerleader and the unpopular nerdy girl for instance - appears generally to be driven by information gathered from the other categories; the teenage girl’s level of sexual experience, her physical appearance, her class background and her social skills all inform the reading/coding of her popular/non-popular status. The teen girl’s academic skills are rarely presented in relation to her status of popularity; moreover, they are often shown to be at odds with social success (the smart girl/nerd is never as ‘popular’ as the dumb blonde cheerleader, for example). The teen films of the 1980s generally privilege popularity (in *Valley Girl*, *Some Kind of Wonderful* and *Can’t Buy Me Love*), and often present jokes at the expense of the ‘unpopular’; with laughs aimed at bigger sized students, Asian students or nerdy characters (in *Sixteen Candles*, for instance). The films do, however, suggest social climbing is possible for unpopular, virtuous/virginal teen girl types, but only through ‘magical transformation’, such as the makeover at the hand of a ‘fairy godmother’ (in *She’s Out of Control*), or becoming a witch and using magical powers to become popular (in *Teen Witch*).¹²⁸

The fourth category for the distinction between teen girl types is that of the girl’s physical prowess and appearance, expressed through her successful ‘control’ of her own image (beauty) and/or her body through physical talents (especially the more ‘seductive’ and subservient ‘cheering’ and ‘dancing’). This category links to the previous three; the teen girl’s ‘control’ over her body/virginity, her ‘control’ over her body/appearance (especially by financial means), and her ‘control’ over her body/activity with regards to social standing (cheerleading, for instance) are consistently celebrated. The teen films of the 1980s always privilege physical prowess over lack of physical control (presented in a negligence of grooming, overweight characters, fumbled and floundering or loose movements, etc.), and consistently connect this kind of prowess to whiteness, and hetero normativity.

The final distinction for the teen girl type belongs to the representation of the girl’s intellect, her academic ability/ambition and her, usually related, integrity, or tendency towards

¹²⁸ It is only in later films such as *Heathers*, that the relationship between intelligence/goodness and the popular/non-popular teen girl type was finally problematised, and ultimately redefined, creating another trend that was picked up on by films such as *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *Mean Girls*, *Saved!*, *Never Been Kissed* and *Easy A*. Other films, such as *Bring it On*, *Clueless* and *Legally Blonde* continued the 1980s glorification of popular types.

‘goodness’. The teen films of the 1980s unfailingly reward the good, subservient, caring girl types – especially those who do not rebel against elders or authority figures, the good ‘daughters’ - and the ‘smart’ teen girl types too (in *Say Anything*, *Lucas*, *Seven Minutes in Heaven*, *Pretty in Pink*, *She’s Out of Control*, and many more), as long as her smartness does not interfere with any of the other distinctive categories; the smart girl/nerd *must* be good, she *must* be (made) attractive, if she is poor, she *must* attach herself to a wealthy boy, and so on. In truth, the smartness/goodness of the teen girl type is perennially eclipsed by categories that define her body first (as beautiful, virginal, to-be-looked-at, popular etc.). (This seems to suggest a disconnect of sorts, between the teen girl type’s ‘head’ and ‘body’; a line of thought that is made explicit in *Say Anything*, when Diane Court is described as “a brain trapped in the body of a game show hostess”. The disconnect can only be ‘cured’ by romantic fulfilment (in *Say Anything*, Diane can only overcome her fear of flying to go study in England on a scholarship, if she has her boyfriend Lloyd by her side holding her hand/body, and similarly in both *She’s Out of Control* and *Just One of the Guys* the disconnect between the girl’s body and brain is ultimately ‘cured’ through the attainment of the boyfriend). The celebration of the teen girl type’s (academic) intelligence does increase throughout the 1980s, however, in films like *Say Anything*, *She’s Out of Control*, *Seven Minutes in Heaven*, *The Legend of Billie Jean*, *Just One of the Guys*, *The Sure Thing* and *Heathers*, where the lead girls are ‘qualified’ as straight A-students. (And this trend was picked up in the 1990s, where series such as *My So-Called Life* and *Freaks and Geeks*, *Dawson’s Creek* and *Felicity*, and films such as *The Prince and Me*, *Can’t Hardly Wait*, or *10 Things I Hate About You* all privileged smart teen girl types). Nevertheless, the intelligent teen leads of the 1980s are rarely *shown* to end up in college; the films tend to position them in the arms of a boy at the end of the film instead.

These five lines of distinction comprise divisions along strict conservative moral standings, financial standings, social standings and family backgrounds, ideals of physical beauty and individualised control of the body, productivity, virtue (including respect for elders and a lack of rebelliousness) and academic excellence/intelligence in order to secure a fitting, correcting partner. If we ask whose interests are most served by privileging such representations of white, non-promiscuous, middle-class, consuming, serving, virtuous, smart and non-rebellious stereotyped girls, the answer is not the working, feminist mother of the Equal Rights Amendment of the 1972, it is not the rebellious teenager breaking away from confinement or the values of previous generations, or the ambitious, independent, freethinking teenage girl - rather, these stereotypes appear to serve the interests of the protective father; a patriarch intoxicated by Reagan’s renewal politics, the praise of the moral values of the (pre-

sexual revolution/feminist) 1950s, and the celebration of the neo-conservative, materialist ideals of the 1980s.

The New Father (and the Failing/Absent Mother)

In his article ‘Papering the Cracks: Fantasy and Ideology in the Reagan Era’, Robin Wood analyses the dominant trends of the American cinema of the 1980s. He writes:

It will be scarcely surprising that [the popular Hollywood films of the 1980s] – as it were, incidentally and obliquely – diminish, defuse and render safe all the major radical movements that gained so much impetus, became so threatening, in the 1970s: radical feminism, black militancy, gay liberation, the assault on patriarchy.¹²⁹

Wood identifies several themes in 1980s cinema that articulate this ‘backlash’ against the radical movements of the 1970s, including, amongst others, the *fear of fascism*, *nuclear anxiety*, *childishness* and *the restoration of the father*. This last theme, which Wood argues must be understood in all senses (as a restoration of the symbolic, literal and potential father), constitutes: “the dominant project, ad infinitum and post nauseam, of the contemporary Hollywood cinema.”¹³⁰ By tracing this ‘dominant project’ of Hollywood cinema to the 1980s, Wood’s findings fall in line with other academics studying the cinema of this decade, including Ryan and Kellner (1990) and Traube (1992)¹³¹, who all note the prominence of the ‘return of the father’ in this decade. Sarah Harwood places this emphasis on the father within the larger framework of the idealised nuclear family and the importance of strong family values, under Reagan. She elaborates:

[The ideal family types presented in 1980s American cinema] are authentic inheritors and embodiments of the American Dream – white, middle-class, affluent, beautiful, mid-American, affectionate, permanently laughing/happy, untouched by external events and upwardly mobile. ... They are neither urban nor rural dwellers. ... They belong to the ... sunlit suburbs ... earthly paradises where the sordidness of history and politics cannot intrude, where picket fences are kept intact, lawns mowed and

¹²⁹ Robin Wood, “Papering the Cracks: Fantasy and Ideology in the Reagan Era”, in John Belton (ed), *Movies and Mass Culture* (Rutgers University Press, 1995), 205.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹³¹ See for instance, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*, by Ryan and Kellner (1990), *Dreaming Identities: Class, Gender, and Generation in 1980s Hollywood Movies* by Elizabeth G. Traube (1992) and *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan ...and Beyond*, Robin Wood (2003).

dogs kept on leashes ... The distinctions and nature of public and private space are crucial to establishing the stable, universal nuclear family. Untouched by the passage of social time, the domestic sphere can remain the inviolable, unalterable domain of the patriarch.¹³²

Harwood's emphasis on the utopian and nostalgic nature of the suburb in 1980s American cinema is one that I also addressed in my first chapter, when I looked at the three principal locations of the teen films, and analysed the generic settings of the home/suburb and the mall as untouched, 'safe' locations. These films represent spaces where both the past and the future may be (generationally) present, but the 'present' itself is consistently absent - any contact with surrounding social or political contexts were avoided, and potentially dangerous or inharmonious forces/desires kept strongly at bay, in favour of the harmonious representation of the nuclear family, and a presiding, powerful father.

Elizabeth Traube argues, in her book *Dreaming Identities: Class, Gender, and Generation in 1980s Hollywood Movies*, that Reagan's call for strong fathers as symbols of American masculinity was, in fact, more complex:

The authoritarian backlash of the 1980s ... left its mark on mainstream politics and culture, but it ha[d] not restored the image of the strong, disciplinary father to hegemonic status. As president, Ronald Reagan used the image cautiously, in selective contexts, and not without a trace of 'postmodern' irony. Standing tall against the Communists (or other appropriately 'savage' enemies), sternly slashing the welfare budget in order to educate the poor in self-reliance, Reagan cloaked himself in the hard, rugged, patriarchal masculinity celebrated by the New Right. But Reagan also wore the kinder, gentler face of the "overconsumptionist demiurge" (Pfeil 1985: 290). Those of the professional middle class who were assimilated to the new conservative bloc responded to the promise of abundance that the Reagan administration enacted in its ritual practices. ... During what Mark Crispin Miller (1990: 219) calls the "epoch of revision" in Hollywood, movies rehabilitated patriarchal authority along non-traditional lines.¹³³

¹³² Sarah Harwood. *Family Fictions: Representations of the Family in 1980s Hollywood Cinema*. (St. Martin's Press, 1997), 67-68.

¹³³ Elizabeth G. Traube. *Dreaming Identities: Class, Gender, and Generation in 1980s Hollywood Movies*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 137-138.

What Traube seems to be suggesting here, is that Reagan's government not only reflected but also welcomed more diverse images of masculinity, and in so doing, re-established patriarchal authority across a greater variety of domains. This perhaps explains why 1980s American cinema not only welcomed the 'return of the father', as Wood argues, but also advocated 'the new, caring father'.

As women increasingly entered the work place and began to work their way up the socio-economic ladder after the 1970s, men not only remained principal players in the office, but also became more significant in the parental role at the home. In her book *Backlash*, cultural analyst Susan Faludi argues:

...the backlash against feminism which dominated the eighties ... was symptomised by the parade of the 'new man', a figure who both reacted against, and occupied, traditional female spaces... The 'new man' gained his credentials by adopting 'feminine', nurturing, affective qualities and the terrain in which he staked them was the domestic scene traditionally associated with the mother.¹³⁴

Faludi analyses films of the era such as *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Three Men and a Baby* and *Parenthood*¹³⁵, and finds in these films examples of relocated, reinvented and designer fatherhood/parenting. Myra MacDonald observes this trend as well, and links the arrival of the 'new man' specifically to the materialism of 1980s American culture, suggesting "the 'new man' and the caring father' were commercially motivated inventions as evidence mounted that supermarket shopping was attracting more male trolley-pushers and that the increasing range of male toiletries and male fashion was having difficulty making an impact on its target market."¹³⁶ Whether or not the phenomenon was fuelled by specific marketing strategies (although this does seem a likely convergence), the new, caring father dominated American screens throughout the decade, in films such as those mentioned above, and other profitable dramas and comedies such as *Ordinary People* (1980), *Author! Author!* (1982) and *Mr. Mom* (1983).

Within feminist film theory, Tania Modleski addressed the new father in an article entitled 'Three Men and Baby M', in which she places her (psycho-analytical) reading of the

¹³⁴ Sarah Harwood (summarizing Faludi's *Backlash*), *Family Fictions: Representations of the Family in 1980s Hollywood Cinema*. (St. Martin's Press, 1997), 73.

¹³⁵ Susan Faludi, *Backlash* (Crown Publishers Inc, 1991), 264-5, 133-135 and 132-133.

¹³⁶ Myra Macdonald. *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), 161.

phenomenon within a framework that suggests the 1980s at large had become an era for “Feminism Without Women”. In her reading of *Three Men and a Baby* (1987), she argues that the film “...constitutes a flagrant encroachment of the (ever multiplying) fathers onto the mother’s traditional domain.”¹³⁷ This trend, she argues, in fact reached beyond the cinema screens and invaded the homes of millions of Americans through their television set, in successful sitcoms such as *My Two Dads* and *Full House* (both starting in 1987), that featured multiple, single fathers raising girls together. These films and series not only appropriated feminism for the male cause, Modleski argues, but actively tried to recruit and enlighten girls away from female feminism, to ultimately (re-)accept patriarchal dominance:

[T]hey can be real fathers, ‘imaginary’ fathers, godfathers, and, in the older sense of the term, surrogate mothers. [But] the fact that in every one of the cases the children reared exclusively by men are female suggests that the daughters are being seduced away from feminism and into a world where they may become so ‘dazzled’ by the proliferating varieties of paternity that they are unable to see whose interests are really being served.¹³⁸

This argument, where the image of the father as the ideal replacement for the (absent) mother served reactionary interests against feminism, was presented by Modleski, and also by Harwood, Traube and Faludi, but their studies focused on 1980s family films (featuring young children), and tended to overlook the teen films of the decade. This is odd because the figure of the father as an emerging, domestic hero features strongly in 1980s teen films, and especially in films that feature teenage girls in leading roles. The ‘new, caring father’ in these films is ideally positioned to supervise, control and rein in *developing* femininity, at the crucial adolescent stage – and it strikes me that Modleski’s argument in particular could be expanded on, and substantiated further, by taking a closer look at the representation of the role of/relationship with the father in these teen films as well.

The 1980s teen films present four primary ‘situations’ that cater to the new caring father thematic. The first (and most prevalent) situation suggests the single father lives alone with his daughter, because her mother has died (or, alternatively, abandoned them), in an apparent analogy for her disappearance from the ‘home scape’. We see this in many 1980s teen films, including *The Journey of Natty Gann*, *Pretty in Pink*, *Seven Minutes in Heaven*,

¹³⁷ Tania Modleski. *Feminism Without Women*. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 86.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

Say Anything and *She's Out of Control*. The trope has remained an extremely prevalent narrative set up for teen films featuring teenage girls, even today¹³⁹. The second 'situation' catering to the representation of the caring father in the 1980s, is created by the failing, dysfunctional and often absent(minded) mother within the home. We see this in films such as *Valley Girl*, *Sixteen Candles*, *Smooth Talk* and *Teen Witch*, where the father consoles and counsels his daughter, while the relationship with the mother is dismissed as dys/non-functional. The third situation is created in films where an overbearing, but 'rightfully concerned' father closely monitors his daughter's ascending physical liberties (especially expressed through her desire to dance), and, in a gesture that reassures the audience, is shown to ultimately guide and approve the teen girl's behaviour/trajectory. These films feature 'convincing' fathers that are not only strong leaders within the home, but perform authoritative paternal roles in specific aspects of American society as well; in films such as *Footloose*, where Ariel's (Lori Singer) father is a reverend, in *Girls Just Want to Have Fun*, where Janey's (Sarah Jessica Parker) father is an army colonel, in *Dirty Dancing*, where Baby (Jennifer Grey)'s father is a doctor, and in *Shag*, where Luanne's (Page Hannah) father is a Senator. (I will come back to this 'reassuring' setup briefly in my next chapter, when I look at teen girl bodies and performance). The fourth category for new, caring fathers involves 'adoptive', non-biological fathers, who care for the teenage girls and demonstrate a natural, innate talent for paternity. We see this in films such as *Teen Wolf*, where Scott's father plays basketball with Boof (Susan Arsitti) and gives her advice, in *Uncle Buck*, where Uncle Buck (John Candy) comes to babysit and, against all expectation, sorts out problems for his teenage niece Tia (Jean Louisa Kelly), in *Summer School*, where Mr. Shoop (Mark Harmon) is the caring summer school teacher who convinces his teen girl students to better themselves at school and refrain from having sex too early, in *Welcome Home, Roxy Carmichael*, where motherless Dinky (Winona Ryder) is befriended and consoled by her guidance counsellor, and in *Mermaids* (1990), where Mrs. Flax's new boyfriend takes care of her two daughters and introduces them to the joys of domestic life (he cooks with them, they eat together as a family for the first time, he re-decorates a bedroom with them, etc.).

¹³⁹ Contemporary teen films that feature deceased/absent mothers, leaving fathers and teen daughters together, range from *My Girl*, *Fly Away Home*, *Clueless*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, *Save the Last Dance*, *The Craft*, *Crazy Beautiful*, *Dan in Real Life* to *Chalet Girl*. According to Ann DeVaney (2002), "a narrative in which a mother is absent and a daughter assumes the caretaking role for the father is a perennial strategy in melodrama and was popular in old Hollywood films – especially Westerns..." (p. 210) – and so, even though, it may have a long history in Hollywood, it is interesting to note that this the trope has since become so embedded in teen films, including comedies and romantic films as well.



Figures 5a - d - Teenage daughters find comfort in heart to hearts with their caring fathers in (clockwise from top left) *Valley Girl*, *Teen Witch*, *Say Anything* and *Sixteen Candles*.

In most of the films, the noted absence of the mother (or, as Tania Modleski proposes, the effective de-realization of the mother¹⁴⁰) has developed a ‘special bond’ between the father and daughter. In *Pretty in Pink* (1986), for instance, we see Andie (Molly Ringwald) tend to her single father Jack (Harry Dean Stanton) at home. In the opening scene of the film, she prepares eggs for her father in the kitchen, and repeatedly calls out to him: “Daddy, it’s 7.30!” She then comes into his bedroom to wake him up, with a cup of coffee, and says: “Here. I want you to drink this, then take a shower and get dressed. Your clothes are there. Then I want you to go see that woman about that job”, in a stern, insistent tone of voice. As she proceeds to pick up clothes from the floor, in a seemingly accustomed and motherly manner, he asks her, rhetorically, where he would be without her nagging, and then how she is, stating they haven’t talked in a while because he’s been getting home so late. After he asks “When was the last time I told you how beautiful you are?” Andie answers, “About yesterday.”, and then, upon his instruction, turns to model her outfit for her father, and guides him through how she put it together. (Jack’s question here, asking when he had last commented on his daughter’s beauty/visual pleasure, borders on the perverse, but this is promptly countered by the direct follow-up that presents the visual/narrative deconstruction of Andie’s appearance; Andie’s de-sexualised style of clothing - her layered outfit is pink,

¹⁴⁰Tania Modleski. *Feminism Without Women*. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 77.

flowery, preppy and high-collared – does not reveal much skin and is rather demure¹⁴¹, which, in an act of back commentary, shifts the tone of father’s observation away from a more sexual gaze). After the two joke together over adding ruffles to Jack’s shirt, Andie pursues her insistence about his new job, reminding her father that he is not happy with part-time work, after which he concedes to get up. Moments later, when Andie has left the room and her father has turned over in his bed once more, she ‘knows him so well’ that she re-enters the room instantly, with a disapproving and threatening expression on her face, to which her father replies “I’m up! I’m up!!!” and finally gets up.

This scene presents Andie as the ‘ideal’ and nurturing daughter, but also as a surrogate wife/partner and mother – she speaks to her father about his work, lays out his clothes for him, and prepares his breakfast. But this double role is not presented as problematic or onerous – rather, the dynamic reflects on both characters sympathetically, and portrays their relationship as a kind of a romantic ideal, where, through their tight, loving and all-encompassing bond, domestic bliss has been successfully re-established *in spite* of the absent mother.



Figure 6 - The breakfast scene in *Pretty in Pink* where Andie acts a wife and mother to her father.

¹⁴¹ Director John Hughes seemed particularly fond of this more conservative and preppy, ‘Annie Hall’ style of dress for his teen girl leading ladies (also see Ann DeVaney, 2002). He cultivated this almost tomboyish ‘look’ for his leading girls – featuring high buttoned shirts and long wide shorts or trousers, as opposed to revealing/figure hugging dresses – throughout much of his oeuvre: Sloane (Mia Sara) in *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*, Amanda (Lea Thompson) in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, Sam in *Sixteen Candles* and Tia (Jean Louisa Kelly) in *Uncle Buck* all adhere to this image. For Andie’s character in *Pretty in Pink*, however, this choice has always struck me as particularly remarkable, because she is explicitly presented as the more rebellious ‘punk’ outsider in the film; for this teen girl character, the clothes she wears and makes herself are shown to be her personal trademark. But there is nothing outspoken or rebellious about her clothes; they are old-fashioned and proper in appearance, and very traditionally ‘gendered’ in their pinkness.

The depiction of the relationship between Andie and her father does play with incestuous tensions, of course, but by re-locating the child/daughter as adult/mother/wife, the threat of this taboo is quickly warded off. As Ann DeVaney points out, “[the daughter’s] changeling behaviour ... provides filmmakers with an opportunity to represent female behaviour as childlike or adultlike, without confronting the sexual tension of adolescence.”¹⁴² This rejection of female adolescent sexuality (established in this scene both through the dialogue and Andie’s de-sexualised, girly and nurturing appearance) positions the father-daughter relationship safely within the domestic realm, and, by extension, positions young female subservience within patriarchal valence.

But this opening ‘situation’ nevertheless does imply an Oedipal component inherent to the represented teen girl narrative trajectory/rite-of passage. This Oedipal dimension typically plays out the relationships between the teen girl and her father/(absent)mother in two ways; in the original female Oedipal trajectory (as conceived by Freud) it presents a gender reversed form of the myth (where Andie ‘kills’ her mother, in order to marry her father), and in the more complex ‘Electra’ version (as conceived by Jung), the girl must displace her desire for unity with her mother, and overcome her as an object of rivalry to secure the affection/phallus of the father, in order to re-unite with the figure of the mother and identify herself (or re-align herself) as the ‘new’ mother instead¹⁴³. These psychoanalytical elements of teen girl development appear fundamental to the representation of the ‘healthy’ teen girl rite-of-passage; they lie at the root of most all teen girl narrative trajectories, including her transition from ‘daddy’s girl’ to ‘prospective wife’ through his supervision/approval of her new partner (like the final scene in *Sixteen Candles* discussed in chapter 2), her being ‘made-over’ into more desirable/adult femininity (and thereby becoming/replacing and identifying with the mother), and, in more convoluted ways, the ‘loss’ of her virginity (which not only involves literally reclaiming the phallus, but also re-positions the teen girl body as potential mother, securing it within heteronormative ‘wedlock’, and so on).

In *Pretty in Pink*, many of these narrative trajectories come together in the Oedipal trajectory that the Jack/Andie father-daughter relationship undergoes. Later in the film, when love interest Blane (Andrew McCarthy) has invited Andie to the prom - the teen film ‘ceremony’ *par excellence* which, appearing so often at the films’ conclusion, effectively parallels a teenage wedding ceremony – she finds herself unable to afford a new prom dress at

¹⁴² Ann De Vaney, “Pretty in Pink – John Hughes Reinscribes Daddy’s Girl”, 210.

¹⁴³For more information on this trajectory and its relation to the representation of women on film, see for instance Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock And Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 48 and 152-162.

the mall. Andie's father Jack then comes home with a surprise gift; a second-hand pink prom dress.¹⁴⁴ Upon handing it to his daughter, he exclaims: "God, it reminds me so much of your mom. You know, she always wore pink, and she looked so beautiful in it." By making this connection between how Andie will look in the second-hand (implying someone else wore it before her) pink dress, and how her mother looked wearing pink – a comment that also recalls the opening scene of the film, in which Jack told Andie she looked beautiful, that bordered on the perverse - the film actively positions their relationship within the Oedipal triangle. This again temporarily perverts the bond between the father and daughter; the scene presents the father as actively refashioning his daughter in the image of his former lover/wife (reminiscent of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*). When Andie reacts uncomfortably (she questions how he paid for the dress), the tone of the scene shifts and the two enter into a row over the fact that Jack lied about taking on a new job.

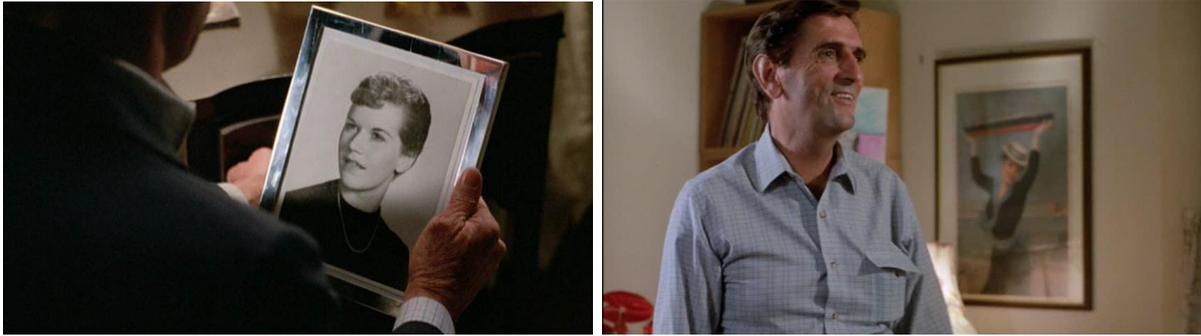


¹⁴⁴ Again, this scene demonstrates that adult men are seemingly privileged and isolated in their spending power in these films (also see Chapter 3). This trait, of a father buying his daughter a dress, has become somewhat of a recurring narrative element in itself. In the recent *It's a Boy Girl Thing*, for instance, a strikingly similar scene occurs, throwing the daughter into a tight embrace with her father in gratitude. But the gift of a dress has also by now, I would argue, become associated with other prominent films, such as *Now Voyager*, *Vertigo*, and especially later examples such as *Pretty Woman* and *Indecent Proposal*. In these films, a wealthy senior man buys a woman a dress in order to refashion her to his desired image, and consequently become sexual with her. The dress appears to be offered as a trade for the body of the woman; again playing with her 'exchange value' and her nature as a commodity – a reading that does not translate easily into the father/daughter dynamic but does open up alternative, and perverse dimensions.



Figures 7a - f – In *Pretty in Pink*, Andie and her father Jack enter into an argument over Jack’s inability to forget her mother...

Suddenly and unexpectedly, Andie shouts out at her father: “Why can’t you just forget her?” This line, apart from commenting on the nature of the absent/present mother, suggests Andie must convince her father to remove her mother from their Oedipal ‘affair’ – its intense delivery carries with it connotations of an aggressive, lovers’ dispute. The rivalry is soon resolved, however, when Andie ‘wins’, after she lectures her father in a motherly tone about the failures of the mother (thus doubly defying the mother): “Why can’t you just realise that she’s gone and that she’s not going to come back? She’s never coming back... Why can’t you accept it? ... I loved her too, you know. She just didn’t love us back. Okay she tried. She just couldn’t handle it. You can’t go on living every day in the past. She left us, daddy. We didn’t leave her.” This dialogue establishes an ‘us’ that only consists of the father and daughter unit; it thereby excludes the mother verbally, as well as delivering dismissive comments over mother’s failure to ‘handle’ domestic life. The two subsequently embrace, and Jack concludes the row tearily by replying: “I’ve just been a blind fool”, as though his obscured/misdirected vision has been corrected (his eyes are literally washed out by tears), and he now only has eyes for Andie in his life. This image is emphasised once more when we later see him put his wife’s photograph away in a drawer, and when he alone admires/views Andie’s transformed appearance (his point of view is translated into a tracking shot up her body) after her ‘makeover’; he exclaims “Look at you!”, before she informs him her date is not coming and she is going to the prom alone.



Figures 8a and b – In *Pretty in Pink*, father Jack corrects his vision, puts ‘mother’ away and only has eyes for his daughter, in a story arc that closely follows the female Oedipal trajectory.

Andie’s trajectory is not yet complete, however, for she is presented as having to resolve her relationship with her absent mother as well, before she can ‘successfully’ enter into a romantic union with Blane. This solving of the absent motherhood follows directly after the confrontation with her father in the plot. Andie’s friend and co-worker Iona (Annie Potts) is presented as somewhat of a shape-shifter throughout the film, as a woman who takes on a variety of guises:



Figures 9a - d - Iona (Annie Potts) takes on a variety of guises in *Pretty in Pink*

But when she too has found a wealthy man to date, Iona transforms into a more permanent maternal/domestic ideal (she claims she is so happy she will soon be “picking out china patterns”). When she opens the door to welcome a distraught Andie (because Blane has

“changed his mind” over taking her to the prom), Iona appears in this new, stable guise. She has rejected her punk/shape-shifter image, and has transformed into a matronly, clean-cut and stylish, ‘secured’ woman. When Andie tells her she looks great, Iona smilingly replies she looks “like a mother”. She then proceeds to console Andie, in a sequence of shots that establishes her, visually and narratively, as a replacement mother to the teenage girl:



Figures 10a - d - Iona has transformed into a (surrogate) mother for Andie.

This scene thus presents Andie as finding, and reconciling, with her (surrogate) mother before entering into her own union. The sequence concludes with Iona giving Andie the prom dress that *her* mother had bought for *her* (this was established in earlier dialogue) - a gesture that, in mimicking a mother’s passing of her wedding dress onto her daughter, brings female, generational succession into play, and the stable continuance of the family unit. When the two subsequently embrace, Andie smiles in relief; the film thereby suggests that she has now not only successfully claimed the affection of her father for herself, but she has re-united with ‘her mother’ as well (completing the Electra trajectory), and this averts her hysteria (her tears), stabilises her ‘female’ identity, and allows her to identify herself with (to accept herself as) the role/figure of the mother in her own prospective union.



Figure 11 – Andie’s upset gives way to relief and a stabilised, female identity, after ‘her mother’ has consoled her and offered her a dress to wear at her prom.

In the next scene, Andie is presented in a montage sequence set to music, as she fuses the two dresses (her father’s gift-dress and her mother/Iona’s prom dress) together to create a self-designed prom/wedding dress – in a sequence that, it must be noted, attributes great creative and active agency to the teen girl. After her makeover ‘reveal’, and her father’s approval of this new appearance, she arrives at the prom alone. There, as she hesitates to walk down the long corridor that leads to the entrance, she first resolves her conflict with her friend/child, the bicycle riding, infatuated Duckie (Jon Cryer). In this scene, Duckie has seemingly accepted they cannot be an item, and, dressed in a suit (he has now become a man himself), he accompanies her ‘down the aisle’ into the main prom venue. There he hands her over - expressing his approval; “You were right. He’s not like the others” - into Blane’s arms, like a makeshift father of the bride. This scene thus disentangles the *other* Oedipal trajectory in the film as well, one that revolved around Duckie, and his ‘mother figure’ Andie, where either her father Jack (as Andie’s husband/his father) or Iona (as a rival mother) acted as the third party, reassuring the audience that Duckie has moved from childhood to (prospective) fatherhood too; we briefly see him secure his own new romantic prospect, a girl who flirts with him at the prom, before we leave him to pursue her. The final shot of the film, presenting a concluding kiss between Andie and Blane outside in the parking lot, establishes the principal new couple/prospective parents in their ‘wedlock’. The pink and blue cars on either side of the couple suggest a return to traditional gender divisions, and emphasise the restored, heterosexual balance that concludes the film, and guarantees the continuance of a stable, nuclear family unit.



Figure 12 - The final kiss presents the new couple in 'wedlock', a conclusion that resolves the Oedipal trajectory with normalised heterosexual, traditional gender divisions.

The narrative conventions of 1980s teen film generally privileged the relationship between the teenage girl and her father as *the* formative and instrumental force responsible for her becoming the 'right kind of' subservient, prospective wife/woman. In its national, historical context, where the 'feminist' woman had left the home for the workplace, the representation of thriving and independent (let alone 'single') motherhood, and its influence on girlhood, was thus promptly disqualified. Robin Wood explains Hollywood's reactionary stance: "if the woman can't accept her subordination, she must be expelled from the narrative altogether... She becomes superfluous."¹⁴⁵ Many of the 1980s biggest box-office hits (including titles such as *Blade Runner*, and the *Indiana Jones*, *Star Wars*, *Rocky*, *Superman*, *Back to the Future*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Die Hard*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *StarTrek*, *Rambo*, *Ghostbusters*, *Batman* and *James Bond* series) presented male-oriented and male-driven landscapes, that did indeed exclude the representation of prominent, independent women and mothers almost entirely. A few romantic comedies of the time, aimed at a predominantly adult, female audience, attempted to depict successful working women balancing their domestic life/motherhood with work on screen (in titles such as *Nine to Five*, *Baby Boom* and *Working Girl*). Tania Modleski, Barbara Creed and Myra MacDonald, however, have proposed that these films actually promoted a negative view of female success instead¹⁴⁶, and,

¹⁴⁵ Robin Wood, "Papering the Cracks", 214.

¹⁴⁶ See Modleski, *Feminism Without Women* (1991); Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine – Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*; MacDonald, *Representing Women – Myths of Femininity in Popular Media* (1995).

through their analyses of other dramas and thrillers that feature ‘working’ mothers (such as *Ordinary People*, *Terms of Endearment*, *Fatal Attraction*, and *Black Widow*), concluded that 1980s films consistently present the ‘monstrous’ side effects of female transgression outside the home; the films illustrate the threatening dangers that the cocktail of power, ambition and the desire for motherhood ‘produces’ in women¹⁴⁷.

In such studies, again, the teen films of the decade have commonly remained overlooked. Although many teen films did exclude the representation of the mother, other titles, such as *Valley Girl*, *Sixteen Candles*, *Smooth Talk*, *Teen Witch* and *Mermaids*, proposed the ‘new, caring father’ as a more convincing alternative by placing him *alongside* the failing, dys/non-functional, ‘monstrous’ mother. Myra MacDonald, following from Barbara Creed’s work on the ‘monstrous mother’ in *Aliens*, suggests: “Since maternal instincts are supposed to be innate, the mother who reverses the caring paradigm ... earns a special place in the gallery of horrors”¹⁴⁸. The ‘monstrous’ mother has thus long garnered popularity, as a fixture in Hollywood narratives, especially in melodramas and horror films¹⁴⁹. Kathleen Rowe Karlyn has investigated the neglected/thwarted depiction of the mother-daughter bond on film, in a range of articles, as well as in her recent book *Unruly Girls and Unrepentant Mothers* (2011), and argues “While representations of sisterhood or female friendship have begun to appear with more frequency in popular culture ... the mother/daughter bond, a key model of female connection remains, as Adrienne Rich has argued, invisible, unexplored or taboo.”¹⁵⁰ She proposes that Hollywood films generally present: “an enduring ambivalence about mothers, motherhood and mother-daughter relations that [date] from the earliest myths of Western culture... [M]otherhood has become an increasingly charged site on which unresolved conflicts about ideologies of gender, race, and class collide.”¹⁵¹ This type of ‘ambivalence’ about motherhood on screen, and the ‘increasingly charged site’ that the depiction of motherhood presents, was also introduced and established in the teen films of the 1980s, and, I would argue, the representations of motherhood in this decade directly influenced many of the films and television series that Rowe Karlyn discusses in her book, that followed in the 1990s (including the ‘mother-daughter’ bonds in *My-So Called Life*, *Clueless*, *Mean Girls*, *Election*, *Thirteen* and *Titanic*).

¹⁴⁷ See McDonald (1995) for an overview of these analyses, and also Harwood (1997) and Traube (1992).

¹⁴⁸ Myra Macdonald. *Representing Women*, 152.

¹⁴⁹ See for instance Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁵⁰ Kathleen Rowe Karlyn, "Scream, Popular Culture, and Feminism’s Third Wave." *Motherhood Misconceived: Representing the Maternal in US Films* (2009), paragraph [6].

¹⁵¹ Kathleen Rowe Karlyn. *Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers: Redefining Feminism on Screen*. (University of Texas Press, 2011), 3.

The representation of the failing mother is presented as a 'given' in 1980s teen films. The mothers' failures are consistently trivialised, presented as innate, and on occasion, laughed over by the father and daughter unit. In *Teen Witch*, Louise's mother gives her an unsightly sweater as a birthday gift that demonstrates she has no insight into teen girl styles or any valid connection with her daughter's life and desires. In *Valley Girl*, Julie's parents are both liberal free-thinking hippies, but while her father is able to warmly connect and communicate with his daughter, her mother is presented as a fumbling, yoga-posing, new age eccentric who presents no adequate parenting skills. In *Sixteen Candles*, Sam's mother Brenda (Carlin Glynn) is defined as a flawed mother/housewife. Although hers and Sam's relationship is by no means presented as difficult, subtle hints do suggest she is failing in these tasks; she did not "have time to prepare Sam's carrots" for lunch, she is unable to pronounce the surname of her eldest daughter Ginny's fiancé properly, or control Ginny's intake of Valium on her wedding day, and, most importantly, she forgets Sam's birthday. Although Sam's father (Paul Dooley) has forgotten it too, it is he who comes to tell Sam that they remembered it after all, it is he who she confides in with her romantic troubles and who ultimately 'approves' of Jake in the final scene (see chapter 2). Brenda, as Sam's mother, is kept safely on the sidelines, she is disconnected and merely of 'trivial importance' in Sam's represented, daily life and narrative trajectory.

Nevertheless, in the second half of the decade, more teen films (especially the dramas/romantic dramas) began to focus on issues of conflict between teen girls and their mothers. These depictions again propose the teen girl is engaged in a formative Oedipal trajectory, but more emphasis is placed on the active disavowal of the mother's behaviour (through rivalry and/or rejection), and the discomfort that the alignment/identification with the mother might present. These films introduce the mother/daughter bond as a particularly charged site, because it is permeated with 'dangerous' female affects, such as neglect, envy, spite and promiscuity. In *Smooth Talk*, for instance, we find an intense representation of 'failing' motherhood and the toxic mother/daughter bond it 'causes', between Connie and her mother Katharine (Mary Kay Place). Katharine is tirelessly spiteful and begrudging towards her daughter, and the two have constant arguments throughout the film (after which Connie receives consolation from her father (Levon Helm)). The arguments between mother and daughter are preceded and interlaced by shots of Katharine looking at Connie – a 'look' that consistently emphasises the differences in their appearances: Connie is tall and slender, with long blonde hair, while Katharine is frumpier and has short brown curled hair (a look that Connie's older sister June resembles closely).

In one scene, Katharine is on the phone in the kitchen, when Connie comes in and sits down to have breakfast. Dressed in a short pink robe, Connie, seemingly naive and unaware of her body's impact on her surroundings, caresses her long legs, as her blonde hair is highlighted by light from the window. As her mother observes her, her words on the phone become more austere. She is just so frustrated with kids right now, she says, but "No, not with June, June is wonderful, June is an angel!" and she turns to Connie as she says this, implying the explicit fault lies with her. After she finishes her phone conversation, she yells at Connie for not having cleared away other people's dishes before sitting down to eat breakfast: "You stink - why can't you just pick up one dish?" and the two argue until Connie walks out. This scene (which is a typical example - other arguments ensue over Connie not helping to paint the house, not helping to buy paint rollers, not coming along to a neighbour's barbecue, and so on) suggests that the relationship between mother and teenage daughter is not only inherently strenuous and tense, but that this dysfunction derives from the teenage daughter's unruliness (or her unpreparedness, or her young, pre-formed feminine condition) that refuses to subscribe to subservient, adult female behaviour; she does not help around the house, and she is unable/unwilling to rein in her seductive and provocative appearance, and so in. Such concerns, about Connie's refusal to adjust to 'reality', is voiced by Katharine in a later scene, when she watches Connie dance to the radio in her bedroom, and then tells her: "I look at you - I look right into your eyes and all I see are a bunch of trashy daydreams."



Figure 13 – Connie's (Laura Dern) appearance and behaviour are met with constant disapproval by her mother Katharine (Mary Kay Place).

Smooth Talk presents a complex and layered tale of developing femininity (it is both directed by a 'feminist' filmmaker, Joyce Chopra, and based on a story written by Joyce Carol Oates) that ultimately places neither blame nor redemption with the knowing, mature mother *or* the naive, seductive daughter. The troubles between them are finally resolved, however, in the final scene, when Connie has 'sacrificed' her youth/innocence/virginity for the sake of her family. After she has been 'smooth-talked' into what is essentially rape, by Arnold Friend (Treat Williams) – he threatens to destroy/burn her house if she does not go out for a drive with him, and insists his friend Ellis look after the house while they are gone – she returns, and is reunited with her family after they return from the barbecue. Unaware of what has (we are made to assume) happened, and in an epilogue that does not feature in the original Joyce Carol Oates story, Katharine all of a sudden apologizes to her daughter for hitting her that morning, embraces her, suggesting their battles have been resolved. The final shot shows an emotionally subdued Connie dancing with her sister June, who lives at home as an 'old maid' and had recounted how she lost her virginity earlier in the film, in her bedroom, suggesting they too have reconnected, in this collective acceptance and/or suffering (I am aware there is a huge discrepancy between these last two interpretations, but both do apply). The film's conclusion thus implies that resentment between mother and daughter, the hysteria between women, can only be resolved by their realignment *after* the loss of virginity, *after* the surrender/submission to patriarchal authority has taken place. When looking at this from the perspective of the Electra trajectory, it suggests the narrative trajectory for the teenage girl can only conclude when the teen girl has conquered the phallus (although, admittedly, this is a crude interpretation of what happens in the film) and conceded to 'become more like'/'become one with' the mother.



Figures 14a - d - Connie is 'smooth talked' into her rape/the loss of her virginity, under the threat of the destruction of her home, and afterwards is realigned with her mother and sister, in a collective, submissive femininity.

The narrative progression becomes even more complex when the teenage girl is presented as living alone with a single, working mother, and without a father, in *Mermaids* – one of the first important teen films that features this dynamic. In this film, set in 1963, and therefore disconnect from any direct references to the 1980s, 15 year-old Charlotte (Winona Ryder) and her younger sister Kate (Christina Ricci) are moved from town to town every time one of their ‘working’ mother’s, Mrs. Flax (Cher), relationships ends. From the very beginning, Mrs. Flax is presented as a non-domesticated (and therefore as an inadequate/failing) mother. As her two daughters watch nuns singing on television in the living room, Mrs. Flax is presented, contrarily, in her bedroom, as she selects a tight dress to wear for a date with her boss, and sings along to the sexually suggestive song ‘Fever’ in the mirror. Charlotte, who acts as the (often cynical) narrator, refers to her mother as Mrs. Flax and expands on her homemaking skills: “Mrs. Flax doesn’t believe in ritual or tradition... A word about Mrs. Flax and food - the word is ‘hors d’oeuvres’; *Fun Finger Foods* is her main source book, and that’s all the woman cooks. Anything more, she says, is too big a commitment.”



Figures 15a and b – In *Mermaids*, the daughters are given finger food for dinner as single mother, Mrs. Flax (Cher) prepares for a date.

Mrs. Flax inability to cook or to eat with her family at the dinner table (an important recurring theme in the film – in a later scene she is shown not to ‘understand’ what is happening at the dinner table) is offered as a “symptom of her refusal to settle for domesticity”.¹⁵² Throughout the film, Charlotte and her mother enter into conflicts over their different interpretations of femininity/female identity. Mrs. Flax’s abundant promiscuity and her reluctance to settle down as a homemaker, are set in stark opposition to Charlotte’s chaste virginity, her pursuit of Catholicism (she wants to be a nun) and her longing for nuclear family life. But neither are necessarily presented as ‘better’ than the other, both women are presented as ‘independent’ eccentrics (and the younger Katie too; she wants to be an Olympic swimmer, and is presented as a ‘fish out of water’) unable to accept, or be accepted by, their surroundings.

The ‘hysterical’ struggles between Charlotte and Mrs. Flax are presented in the film as essentially rivalling; the two compete for Katie’s affection (they even ‘argued’ over who would name her), sabotage each other’s dates, comment incessantly on each other’s clothing and behaviour, and even ‘vie’ for the affection of Charlotte’s love interest Joe (Michael Schoeffling), after Mrs. Flax kisses him in front of her daughter. In a seemingly vindictive act, Charlotte then dresses up as in her mother’s clothes (repeating the ‘Fever’ dressing sequence), mimicks her behaviour, and seduces Joe in a bell tower, losing her virginity to him.

¹⁵²Yvonne Tasker. *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*. (Routledge, 1998), 191.



Figures 16a and b – Charlotte mirrors her mother’s behaviour, singing ‘Fever’ while dressing in her clothes and then loses her virginity to Joe.

This transgressive, unruly behaviour is instantly punished, however, as Charlotte’s sex scene is intercut with shots of her sister Katie, who, while waiting outside for her sister, falls into a river and nearly drowns. As Katie recovers in the hospital, Charlotte returns home and rigorously cleans the house, in an act of apparent ‘repentance’ for her sins; as though her transgression can be redeemed by domestic behaviour, the scene presents her swinging back and forth between female ‘identities’. When her mother returns, the two engage in the film’s climactic argument. Charlotte suddenly throws and breaks a plate on the kitchen floor, screaming at her mother, indicating she too is breaking with domestic ideals (after the loss of her virginity). Mrs. Flax exclaims she doesn’t understand why Charlotte is trying so hard to become like her, and accuses her of trying to be the ‘mother’ when she is “just a kid”. After the two women both identify the other as ‘town whore’, Mrs. Flax hits Charlotte across the face and Charlotte moves towards the living room to sit down in silence. The balance is finally restored, and the ‘hysteria’ is overcome, when Mrs. Flax sits down next to her and the two address the men in their lives who have left them; Charlotte asks Mrs. Flax whether her father is ever coming back, to which her mother replies he is not, because he has since remarried, and Mrs. Flax asks whether Charlotte is upset over Joe leaving, to which Charlotte explains she is not, because “it is over” and “she’s fine”. When Charlotte proposes they not move and stay put for a year, she calls her mother “mom” and the argument concludes with their calm, restorative embrace.



Figures 17a - d - In the climactic argument in *Mermaids*, mother and daughter shift between feminine roles and ultimately 'settle' in renewed, female bonding when talking about the men in their lives...

The scene does not sit 'easily' amongst the other teen films I've discussed so far. This film, released at the cusp of the decade, marks a definitive shift towards more progressive representations of teenage girls, and independent working mothers/women. Nevertheless, the film suggests the relationship between the women is restored over specific lines of narrative development; Charlotte has lost her virginity (her chastity/religious aspirations) and is now positioned on 'the same side' of femininity as her mother – this realigns them not only as ostracized, 'loose' women, but also as prospective mothers/wives (their hysteria, and/or potential for sexual deviance has been 'corrected', since it is confirmed as heterosexual). At the same time, the women are now united in their rejection by men, proposing, again, that female strength and collectivity develop from suffering at the hands of men, and their 'acknowledgment' of this position. But lastly, the film also proposes female harmony is re-established over the consent to domesticity – Mrs. Flax accepts Charlotte's proposal that they settle in the town. An epilogue reveals the women have moved towards a more traditional realisation of the nuclear family; they are shown on a visit to the baseball museum with Mrs. Flax's partner Lou (Bob Hoskins), where their image (captured as such when Katie takes their photograph) closely resembles that of a nuclear family on a 'happy holiday'. In a subsequent shot, Mrs. Flax speaks to Lou outside of his store, and as she walks away to her car and turns to wave at him, Charlotte's narration indicates they are in fact a very good match, as a white

church towers up behind Mrs Flax, foreshadowing a possible marriage. In a final, celebratory and life-affirming scene, the three women dance and sing along to Jimmy Soul's lines: "If you wanna be happy for the rest of your life, never make a pretty woman your wife!" as they prepare a meal together in their kitchen. The meal still consists of finger food, but as part of the choreography of the musical number, the women set the table, which indicates they will now be sitting down to eat it as a family.



Figures 18a - d - In the final scenes of *Mermaids*, balance is restored as images of traditional domesticity have begun to permeate the lives of the mother and daughters Flax.

The standard teen girl narrative trajectory in the 1980s teen film revolves around the rite-of-passage that concludes with (the prospect of) heteronormative union; it is a coming-of-age tale that, in one way or another, always addresses a girl's transition into 'proper' womanhood and her ultimate acceptance of its subservient position within the patriarchal realm. Most commonly, the depiction of this transition adheres to the classical Oedipal/Electra narrative progression that involves specific stages in the psycho-sexual development of the teenage girl, and her relationships with her parents. But in teen film, this transition, whether catering to the eyes of the approving father or prospective husband, or in service of becoming more like/one with the mother, is triggered by a physical/bodily 'becoming'; the precise transformative moment is perpetually 'marked' by a physical

transformation, either through the loss of virginity (in *Smooth Talk* and *Mermaids*, for instance, and I will come back to this later in this thesis) or by taking on a more ‘acceptable’ female appearance (as we have seen in, for example, Andie’s ‘montage sequence’-transformation into her ‘wedding’/prom dress-look in *Pretty in Pink*, or Charlotte’s transformation to become more like her mother, by dressing up in her clothes in *Mermaids*). It seems, therefore, that what most often marks ‘becoming’ in a teen girl narrative is, at its core, a physical transition that is made visible by a change/adaptation or evolution in appearance, most commonly transcribed by a makeover sequence.

The Makeover Trajectory

In feminist film theory, the analyses of the representations of adult women have often included readings that relate them to figures from popular folktales and myths. Such readings traced the representations of women as contemporary incarnations of, for instance, Eve, Medusa, or Pandora¹⁵³. For the representation of teenage girls, however, the analyses of structural narrative ‘blueprints’ based on myths, fairytales or folktales have, again, remained underexplored. This is odd because, as we have seen, the communication of teen girl-becoming insists on the clear depiction of certain ‘set’ rites-of-passage elements, especially those that are physical and that can thus be visually marked, in order to actively refigure the girl as becoming/having become ‘woman’.¹⁵⁴ These elements are most clearly communicated when contained in a familiar progression – a progression that, through its very familiarity, (consciously or unconsciously) reassures the viewer of an imminent ‘safe’ resolution.

It seems to me that, while the ‘mythologies’ of Little Red Riding Hood and Alice in Wonderland inform more fantastical and/or horrific tales of girlhood-becoming in cinema (in examples such as *Labyrinth*, *Halloween* and *Freeway*, or even *The Journey of Natty Gann*, for instance), the most conventional underlying narrative structure for the representation of the teenage girl rite-of-passage on film, refigures the Oedipal/Electra myth through adaptations of *Cinderella* and/or *Pygmalion* (in either the Ovid or the George Bernard Shaw version). In both these ‘makeover’ tales of becoming, a mature ‘agent’ helps the girl transform, in order to become more successfully woman and/or ideally feminine (meaning, in most cases, more

¹⁵³ See, amongst others, Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993) and Myra MacDonald, *Representing Women – Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media* (1995).

¹⁵⁴ It might, incidentally, be interesting to consider, psychoanalytically speaking, why the *visual rendering* of this process of becoming is so important to its telling; is it because the transformation process, if it were to pass by unseen or unnoticed, would pose another, more dangerous, ‘invisible’ castration threat to the (male) viewer? And is it because of this that the very process of ‘becoming’ woman must remain explicitly signified at all times, rather than riddled or obscured?

explicitly sexualized), thereby carefully guiding and supervising the process that projects her from girlhood to womanhood. According to Tamar Jeffers McDonald, who analyses makeover films in her book *Hollywood Catwalk: Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film* (2010), the main difference between the two myths is that in *Pygmalion*, a man ‘creates’/reshapes the woman (in the original myth, it was the artist Pygmalion who sculpted his ideal woman out of an ivory statue and then fell in love with her; in the Shaw play, it is a phonetics professor who teaches the common flower girl how to speak, behave and become a ‘proper’ woman), whilst in *Cinderella*, it is the fairy godmother who magically transforms the girl into the type of ‘womanhood’ that will attract the prince.¹⁵⁵ Although McDonald analyses a wide range of makeover films in her book, she focuses predominantly on the makeovers of adult women (from *The Bride Wore Red*, through *Calamity Jane*, to *Pretty Woman*, *Single White Female* and *The Devil Wears Prada*) and does not specifically address the (historical) development of its relations to teen girl bodies. The dissemination of this particular phenomenon, I would pose, can be situated most significantly in the 1980s, and the 1990s.

The popularity of the makeover trajectory, and its debts to *Cinderella* and *Pygmalion* as a trope for the depiction of female transformation/‘becoming’, was in itself not new to the 1980s, of course. Narratives presenting female, bodily transformation and other rites of physical ‘beautification’ or ‘feminisation’ were first adapted for American movie screens as early as the 1920s, by Cecil B. DeMille in *Why Change Your Wife*¹⁵⁶, and were properly institutionalised by the successes of *Now, Voyager*, *Sabrina*, *Funny Face* and *My Fair Lady* (1964)¹⁵⁷. It wasn’t until the box-office success of *Grease*, however, that the ‘popular’ makeover trajectory was explicitly imposed onto the body of the teenage girl, and subsequently became a staple for the ‘female oriented’ teen film as well. In the final scene of this film, Sandy (Olivia Newton-John) is transformed by her friends, from the ‘good’ and chaste, Sandra Dee-like cheerleader, into the sexually ‘liberated’, black leather wearing vixen, in order to (re)captivate the affections of her love interest Danny (John Travolta). In this film, the actual transformation process (the makeover sequence itself) remained hidden from the viewer; Sandy was merely ‘revealed’ in her final, transformed state. But the scene nevertheless established a teen girl narrative trajectory in which “the makeover is seen to

¹⁵⁵ Tamar Jeffers McDonald. *Hollywood Catwalk: Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film*. (London: IB Tauris, 2010), 26-27.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁵⁷ Elizabeth Ford, and Deborah C. Mitchell, eds. *The Makeover in Movies* (USA: MacFarland & Co, 2004).

render romantic love/attention possible...”¹⁵⁸ – a trajectory that insists the girl must transform physically, in order meet the male’s desired image of femininity, and thereby ensure the continuance of the family unit.

In the 1980s, both the *Cinderella* and the *Pygmalion* trajectories were avidly taken on by a wide selection of teen films, ranging from *Weird Science* (in which two boys create their ‘ideal girl’ on a computer) as a reworking of *Pygmalion*, to films like *She’s Out of Control* (in which a ‘nerdy’ girl is transformed into a popular beauty queen, aided by her stepmother) as *Cinderella*. It was during this decade that, in my opinion, the makeover trajectory (I will refer to it by this name, since under this term it encompasses both the *Cinderella* and the *Pygmalion* varieties) became the teen girl trajectory *par excellence*, because it seemed to connect not only with the ideological discourse of the teen films of the time – and I will explore this further in the next few paragraphs - but it also catered to the teen audience’s desire for visually, clearly ‘typed’ identities (a particular aspect of teen culture that was propagated by marketing strategies and MTV, at the time). The repetition of teen girl makeover sequences in the 1980s teen film consequently established the formative style and structure of the sequence that we can still recognize in films/television today, in films such as *Clueless*, *Jawbreaker*, *She’s All That*, *Mean Girls*, *The Princess Diaries*, *Josie and the Pussycats*, *What a Girl Wants* and *The House Bunny*, to name but a few.

In her essay ‘Now I Am Ready To Tell How Bodies Are Changed Into Different Bodies – Ovid, The Metamorphoses’, Kathryn Fraser breaks down the makeover trajectory into specific ideological elements:

[These are] the main themes informing the Cinderella-cum-makeover narrative in all its incarnations: 1) the presentation of the self as a ‘problem’ in need of external expertise; 2) the idea that transformation will improve a person’s life and life chances; 3) the democratization of beauty: everyone has the ability to transcend their appearance; 4) the aim being to become more attractive to the opposite sex – heteronormativity; 5) consumption/self-commodification; 6) passing/class-transcendence and celebrity emulation or identification; 7) that the self is malleable, plastic.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Kathryn Fraser, “Now I Am Ready To Tell How Bodies Are Changed Into Different Bodies – Ovid, The Metamorphoses”, in Dana Heller, ed. *Makeover Television – Realities Remodelled* (NY: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 189.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 178. (Clarifications relating to an in-text example have been removed from this quote).

The observation that the makeover trajectory involves notions of self-commodification, self-malleability, the democratization of attainable beauty and a strong heteronormative insistence proposes an ideological stance that, I would argue, is inherently conservative and American; it reflects aspects of the American dream, especially its propagations of individual ability, with and through consumerism. More importantly, I would argue, it perhaps indicates why this narrative trajectory became so popular in the 1980s; these themes connect specifically to the prevalent values of the American cultural and political zeitgeist of the time, including, for instance, the predominance of the Body-As-Project/'healthism' ideal, as evidenced by the success of the fitness/body-building videos by Jane Fonda, Raquel Welch, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Cher in the decade¹⁶⁰, or the popular rise of the mall as the ultimate locale for 'individual', all-round consumption, beautification and self-improvement. Before I move on to how this contextual setting might have shaped and shifted the style and structure of makeover sequences, however, I first want to explore Fraser's first theme of the makeover trajectory, that presents the self with a 'problem' that requires external expertise to be corrected, and its relations to the makeover, teen girl trajectory in 1980s teen film.

In her work on the medical discourse in women's films of the 1940s¹⁶¹, Mary Ann Doane suggested the unmarried woman in these melodramas was often presented as 'dysfunctional' by cause of a pathological affliction. In *Now, Voyager* (1942), for instance, spinster Charlotte Vale's (Bette Davis) condition is diagnosed by a psychotherapist as requiring immediate treatment. Mary Ann Doane writes:

[In *Now, Voyager*] the woman's illness is registered as an undesirable appearance. Charlotte (Bette Davis) in the beginning of *Now, Voyager* wears glasses, clumsy shoes, an unattractive dress, and is presented as being overweight, with heavy eyebrows and a harsh hairstyle. The woman's 'cure' consists precisely in a beautification of body/face.¹⁶²

In this film, it is the male doctor, who, by means of directing Charlotte's makeover, guides the beautification of her body/face. Like *Pygmalion*, he adjusts and shapes Charlotte into a 'corrected', desirable femininity; and offers an outside, more 'valid' expertise on femininity

¹⁶⁰ The connection between these videos and the origins of makeover television has also been proposed by Vanessa Russell in her article *Make me a Celebrity: Celebrity Exercise Videos and the Origins of Makeover Television* in Dana Heller, *Makeover Television - Realities Remodelled* (2007).

¹⁶¹ Mary Ann Doane. *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*. (Indiana University Press, 1987).

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 41.

that redirects it, above all, to cater to the male gaze. The post-makeover Charlotte is promptly revealed as ‘cured’, because she undertakes a physical love affair with the male lead of the film (it is suggested she loses her virginity to him) and, ultimately, offers the ‘right kind of’ motherhood to his daughter as well. In this sense, the makeover cure proposed by *Now, Voyager* adheres to Fraser’s analysis of the Pygmalion/makeover myth itself, which, she argues, is inherently misogynistic because it is based on:

...the construction of a female subjectivity as something akin to a disorder, and the presentation of male desire and/or male intervention as its remedy.... [It presents the construction of an ideal femininity, whereby the post-makeover/’made’ woman is:] above all else, passive. She is immobile and essentially decorative... She has no thoughts of her own, no ambitions nor desires. She exists for male desire and for reproduction, not as an autonomous, desiring subject in her own right.¹⁶³

In truth, the representation of Charlotte Vale’s femininity in *Now, Voyager* is perhaps more complex than Fraser’s interpretation of *Pygmalion* would suggest here, but I wanted to lay out these analyses, because there are elements of both that apply to the teen girl makeover in 1980s teen film as well. I will illustrate this with an example.

Arguably the most remembered and significant teen girl makeover of the 1980s featured in John Hughes’ *The Breakfast Club*.¹⁶⁴ In this film, five teenage types, a jock, a princess, a criminal, a basket case and a brain, are kept in detention at their high school on a Saturday. Allison (Ally Sheedy), the ‘basket case’ (a label that notably identifies her as mentally disturbed from the start), is introduced in the film as an isolated, non-socialised, non-conforming teen ‘rebel’. Dressed in a ragged black sweater and old worn out sneakers, with wild hair covering her face, she presents strange eating habits and hygiene issues (she crushes cereal onto a sandwich, chews her fingernails and uses the dandruff from her hair to illustrate a drawing with falling snow) and does not communicate easily with the other students. Throughout the film, she is presented to the audience as a creative but troubled mind. She describes herself as undergoing psychological treatment; at first, she claims she is a “nymphomaniac”, having slept with her ‘therapist’, but then she admits she is in fact a virgin

¹⁶³ (Fraser is here speaking of Ovid’s *Pygmalion* and Galatea) Ibid., 185-186.

¹⁶⁴ It often features in online lists of best movie makeovers, such as those found at: <http://blog.moviefone.com/2011/08/26/geek-girl-makeovers-in-movies/>, <http://www.thefrisky.com/2012-01-05/10-teen-movie-makeovers-and-what-we-learned-from-them/> or http://www.ew.com/ew/gallery/0,,20483133_20581835,00.html?xid=ew-mar12-movie-makeovers-more#21126557, accessed November 26 2012.

and a “pathological liar”. When the others ask her why she was called into detention, she explains she simply “had nothing better to do”. Later in the film, Allison empties out her purse in front of two of the boys. She admits she carries so many belongings with her, because her home life is “unsatisfying” (implying she intends to run away). When jock Andy confronts her with this situation, she explains that her parents “ignore” her (which reminds the viewers of the opening of the film, when her parent(s) drove off when she attempted to say goodbye to them). In these ways, Allison’s problems are consistently identified as deeply pathological to the audience. Even though the other students express they have problems as well (one is even suicidal), and the film revolves around the discovery that they share many of their issues, it is only Allison who, it is suggested, undergoes psychological treatment, and whose subjectivity needs to be ‘corrected’ before the conclusion of the film.

In one of the final scenes, the wealthy ‘princess’ Claire (Molly Ringwald) – visually presented as an opposite to Allison, she is exceptionally well-groomed, and wears pink, diamond earrings, and heeled boots - looks Allison up and down, expressing critical judgement, before pulling her out of frame and leading her into the film’s makeover sequence.



Figures 19a - d - In *The Breakfast Club*, Allison and Claire are presented as visual opposites, until Claire sees a makeover opportunity in Allison.

In the next shot, we see Claire put eye pencil onto Allison's eyes, as she demonstrates how to hold her face ("Go like this") to make sure the pencil doesn't hurt her. With this gesture, Claire's middle-class expertise on the 'right kind of' female appearance is thus explicitly deemed more 'valid' than Allison's lower-class/rebellious interpretation of it – a line continued by the dialogue that follows, when Claire's opinion overrules Allison's; Claire tells Allison she "looks so much better without all that black shit on [her] eyes", to which Allison replies, "hey, I like that black shit", while Claire keeps adjusting her makeup. Allison then asks her why she is being so nice to her – expressing a sincere gratitude towards her actions - to which Claire smilingly replies: "Because you're letting me!" This scene thus suggests that Allison's appearance (and, by connection, her pathologically disturbed nature) can be 'fixed' by re-examining and re-adjusting her femininity towards the 'correct', wealthier and more clearly marked (or more traditional) display that Claire provides.

In the scene that follows, we cut to a shot of jock Andy (Emilio Estevez), whose eyes suddenly fall upon 'a spectacle' (he stares off screen with visible awe), and then to his near point-of-view that 'reveals' the renewed Allison. Allison's hair is now pulled back, by a white decorated hair band, and her face is made-up to emphasise a natural, rosy-cheeked beauty. Her black sweater and dark scarf have been replaced by a high-buttoned, white lace, armless blouse. The shot is accompanied by the onset of a light romantic score, and the two begin to walk towards each other. During her tentative approach, Allison briefly exchanges glances with the seated Brian (Anthony Michael Hall – the brain), who first stares at her with an open mouth and then confirms his approval with a smile (to which Allison mouths: "Thank you."). When Andy and Allison face each other, he asks: "What happened to you?" to which Allison replies: "What-why? Claire did it." She thereby vocally attributes the transformative 'agency' to the established, 'other' feminine identity within the group. When she subsequently asks Andy "What's wrong?" he replies that: "Nothing's wrong. You just look so different. I can see your face." With this response, Andy not only readjusts her diagnosis (nothing is wrong anymore), but also suggests the makeover has revealed her 'true identity', because he can now "see her face". A doubtful Allison asks: "Is that good or bad?" to which Andy answers: "That's good, that's real good", leading Allison, through a visible sigh of relief at this male confirmation, into a large, inviting smile.



Figures 20a - d - Allison after the makeover, as a summery and virginal bride, attains male confirmation of her new appearance.

Because this scene so specifically presents the final ‘reveal’ of the made-over Allison as a target for the male gaze (of both Andy and Brian), it redirects its purpose; it appears as though the entire transformation was intended for the approval/desire of the prospective, heterosexual suitor. This is corroborated by Allison’s new image; she is presented as a virginal, summery bride - not only does she wear white lace, she also approaches Andy with the steady, focused pace and tread typically associated with the image of the bride walking down the aisle. Allison’s subsequent union with Andy, and her successful entry into the social/patriarchal realm, is legitimised by the final scene outside, as the teenagers wait for their parents to pick them up. Allison is now wrapped in Andy’s blue sweatshirt (she is draped in the colours of his sports’ team, and, by extension, in the security of his wealth), and, after they kiss, she rips the emblem patch off his sports’ jacket and holds it up to him, as if to claim his ‘token’, his ring, as evidence to their union.

This makeover scene has divided audiences over the years. Many have critiqued the ‘Stepford’-like transformation of Allison, claiming it robs her of her ‘individual’ identity and voids her rebellious, ‘feminist’ nature¹⁶⁵. Others have suggested Allison is ‘merely choosing’ to expose her femininity and her ‘prettiness’; this scene shows her breaking out of her

¹⁶⁵ Timothy Shary in *Generation Multiplex* (2002) for instance, or Alissa Quart in *Branded* (2004).

traumatised shell and opening herself to the world while, in an act of female friendship, she “lets Claire help her”¹⁶⁶. What I find most interesting to this scene, however, is the consistency with which it repeats both Mary Ann Doane and Kathryn Fraser’s observations about female (adult) makeovers; the teen girl subjectivity in transition is constructed here as a disorder/mental illness, and only male desire is presented as its remedy (and this is true for Claire’s storyline as well, who, after having revealed she is a virgin, is reined in by her romantic union with John Bender (Judd Nelson). The teen girl trajectory is thus again resolved by the taking on of a more sexualised femininity (discarding youthful transgressions and becoming ‘the mother’), in order to be appropriated safely into a patriarchal and heteronormative hegemony (marrying ‘the father’). Nevertheless, it has to be noted that there are some aspects of female agency/resistance to this scene as well. The teenage girls are presented as able to transform themselves/each other, and, in doing so, are able to break out of one stereotypical mould, even if it be only into another. Other makeover scenes of the decade, such as those in *Pretty in Pink* or in *Teen Witch*, also promoted this sense of ‘creative’, active, self-transformation (in *Pretty in Pink*, Andie makes her own dress for prom, and in *Teen Witch*, Louise (Robyn Lively) gives herself a makeover in a school washroom – she reveals hip clothes underneath her other, unfashionable clothes, redoes her hair and makeup, and comes out looking revamped – *and* uses her own magic to transform herself into a ‘popular’ girl later on in the film). Although the girls in these films are never entirely ‘independent’ (Allison is aided by Claire, Andie is aided by her father, Iona and Duckie, and Louise by her mentor, Madame Serena) and their resolutions still involve their entry into a heterosexual union, these semi-‘self-transformation’ examples do stand in contrast to the more typical makeover format developed in the 1980s, namely the makeover montage sequence that insists teen girl transformation relies on consumer/material actions.

In *She’s Out of Control*, nerd-girl Katie (Ami Dolenz) shares a special relationship with her father Doug (Tony Danza), who buys her a teddy bear and a ticket to Europe for her 15th birthday. While celebrating her birthday with her family at a club that evening, Katie admires a highly sexualised (through her dress and movements) female dancer there, who is lifted into the air by a boy. The dancer visibly leaves her father speechless at the sight - struck mute in assumed desire – and results in Katie asking her father why, now that she is getting older, she can’t be more like her (the dancer).

¹⁶⁶ See for instance the cast and crew debates in ‘Behind the Scenes’ - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jVn76gyw_U&feature=related, accessed November 26, 2012.



Figure 21 - In *She's Out of Control*, Katie (Ami Dolenz) is presented as a 'nerd' girl who shares a special relationship with her father.

When her father leaves on a business trip a few days later, his new girlfriend Janet (Catherine Hicks) asks Katie whether she is sure she “really wants to do this”, and, upon receiving an affirmative response, drives Katie and her cheering younger sister off at speed. The scene leads into a fast-paced montage-sequence, set to music, where we see Katie abandon her ‘nerdy’ characteristics one by one. In the first shot, an orthodontist holds x-rays of Katie’s teeth against the lens of the camera, and then examines them, before suggesting “they are not supposed to come off for another two months”. After Katie looks to Janet, Janet turns towards the doctor and insists resolutely: “Yank ‘m, Doc. Yank ‘m now!” The sequence then shows Katie enter a hairdressing salon, exchange her glasses for lenses at the optometrist, turn to makeup (she puts on lipstick and blows out a kiss midair), learn to walk in heels, have the length of a new skirt tailored, and undergo a facial treatment – all under the watchful eyes and guidance of Janet, who instructs the hairdresser, reassures Katie not to worry, gives Katie a thumbs-up for her attempts at walking in heels, and decides on the length of the skirt (she tells the tailor: “Higher. Higher. Even higher.” And then pulls the skirt down firmly herself, saying, “Not that high.”)





Figures 22 a to l - A selection of stills from the makeover montage sequence in *She's Out of Control*, where Katie undergoes a physical transformation, demonstrate a persistence of male expertise and the reassuring, watchful eye of Katie's prospective 'stepmother' Janet supervising the process.

Compared to the makeover scene in *The Breakfast Club*, this particular sequence makes the process of transformation explicitly visible (a trend that since then has become almost ubiquitous, if we look at the expansive ‘processes’ featured in makeover television or the increasing length of makeover sequences in films such as *Pretty Woman*, *The Princess Diaries* or *The Devil Wears Prada*). Rather than presenting the mere before and after (as was the case in *Grease*, for instance), this film illustrates and visually ‘marks’ all stages in feminine transformation/becoming - as though visual pleasure may be derived from ‘knowing’ and understanding the transformation, because such a ‘clarification’ refutes any possible (castration/transgression) threats implied by an un-‘set’/moving transition¹⁶⁷. But perhaps more significantly, it positions this staging of feminine becoming, the makeover, within the realms of consumerism and materialism. Situated at the mall (or an equivalent), Katie’s body is positioned amongst ‘purchased’/acquirable services and goods. It is only at the hands of external experts and through the consumption of specific products (note the L’Oreal product placement) that Katie’s transformation is rendered ‘magically’, instantly possible (and again, alongside other 1980s films such as *Earth Girls Are Easy*, where a musical makeover number voices specific brands such as Maybelline, Revlon and MaxFactor, this established a by now familiar trend). This sequence thus insists on the “...emergence of a particular brand of femininity – one forged through consumerism”¹⁶⁸, and imposes this ‘type’ of femininity (one based on conservative gender divisions, fetish imagery and the weakening

¹⁶⁷ I understand this is a very complex argument I’m posing here, but the abundance of fetishising objects (such as the high heels and the lipstick) and close-ups do invite a psychoanalytical reading of what is an incredibly dense and tightly cut together sequence, involving the revelation/exploration of a specific sex/sexuality.

¹⁶⁸ Kathryn Fraser, “Now I Am Ready To Tell How Bodies Are Changed Into Different Bodies”, 178.

of female independent, free movement¹⁶⁹) onto the body of the ‘becoming’ teenage girl. Meanwhile, the sequence’s constant emphasis on parental supervision, offered both by the shots of the male doctors and the reactions of the securely heterosexual ‘fairy godmother’ Janet, continue to reassure the audience, while the very way the sequence is structured, presenting an array of fast-paced consecutive close-ups, only *hint* at Katie’s physical transformation, and delay the full ‘reveal’ until it can meet its intended target: the male gaze.

The final, full ‘reveal’ in *She’s Out of Control* not only reaches the lusting male gaze of Katie’s potential, prospective partner, but it also specifically indulges the father’s gaze as well. After Doug returns from his business trip, he enters the house to find no one there to welcome him. His youngest daughter runs upstairs and leaves him to answer a continued frenzy of phone calls, in which boys ask for Katie, and eventually, the ringing doorbell. When he meets a boy there, asking whether Katie is ready, Frankie Avalon’s song “Venus” sets in on the soundtrack (a song that adds to the incestuous dimension of the scene, by offering lyrics such as “Venus if you will, please send a little girl for me to thrill, a girl who wants my kisses and my arms...”), as we follow the father’s wide-eyed stare move up towards the top of the stairs. In another by now familiar visual trope of the makeover, the transformed girl is ‘revealed’ in slow-motion while coming down the staircase (a trope that not only maximizes female ‘spectacularization’ through the staircase’s characteristics for display, but one that also implies change and transformation through its emphasis on differentiated levels, and that suggests the ‘new’, improved woman is coming down from heaven¹⁷⁰).

¹⁶⁹ For more information on how high heels, corsets and traditional female clothing contained and weakened the female body, see for instance the work of Susan Bordo in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (1993).

¹⁷⁰ This trope is discussed by Jeffers McDonald in *Hollywood Catwalk* (2010, p. 98-99), who also incorporates Doane’s analysis of the staircase as stage/display from *The Desire to Desire* (1987). The trope, where a camera tracks up the body of the teen girl as she comes down the stairs and reveals her new image, is also presented in *Teen Witch* and *Pretty in Pink* (where the camera tracks up Andie’s body), and since then, most famously in *She’s All That*. Its use has also been explicitly parodied in *Date Movie* and *Not Another Teen Movie*.



Figures 23a to f - The post-makeover Katie descends the staircase, revealing her new look to her father and a prospective suitor, as well as the audience.

Like Allison in *The Breakfast Club*, the transformed Katie is revealed in this scene dressed in white; she wears lace-like fabric that emphasises its own whiteness through its layering, and connotes an image of a bride, as well as that of a coquette ‘virgin’ (in contrast to Allison’s appearance, Katie’s post-makeover appearance is not demure but explicitly sexualised; it is reminiscent of Madonna’s look in ‘Like a Virgin’, a popular video-clip released five years before). Katie ‘floats’ down the stairs; she moves her hands gracefully, and ever so slightly, up and down as though her movement were subtly choreographed to resemble a bird’s flight. The sight leaves father Doug open-mouthed and dumbstruck. His expression mirrors his reaction to the sexual dancer in the club that Katie admired, but also indicates his onset panic at the realisation this girl/woman is his ‘former’ daughter. Meanwhile, the other prospective suitor at the door broadens his smile with glee.

This scene invites the viewer to laugh at the opposite expressions of the two gazing males. There is a humorous tone to this scene, achieved through its explicit showing of the different lines of reaction that the teen girl's transformation (and her simultaneously implied sexual awakening) provokes. In doing so, the film becomes momentarily self-reflective; it appears to play with an acknowledgement of its own effects, as if it is winking and nudging at the viewer. Amongst this self-reflexive quality (or ironic commentary even), the scene somehow celebrates Katie's transformation and her onset sexuality as well, as the transformation that she herself instigated (she might have been passive in its undergoing, but it occurred upon her demand and affirmation) has led her into a new 'performance of femininity', and allows her to achieve her desired result.

But even though *She's Out of Control* plays with such tensions (it hints at an incestuous attraction between the father and his daughter, and introduces a teenage girl who is actively pursuing and relaying her own sexuality onto her body), the film ultimately anchors this tightly within an extremely conservative framework. After Katie's reveal, Janet immediately enters the scene and, holding onto Katie's shoulders, suggests in a motherly tone, "Doesn't she look beautiful, Doug?" – realigning Katie's image with one subject to parental approval and pride (while simultaneously pointing towards her own 'failings' as a 'mother' – she fails to understand Doug's 'true' parental reaction). The rest of the film plays out the effects of Katie's changed appearance, and her blossoming sexuality, on the father/daughter dynamic; Katie learns from her father that she must cherish her own innocence, guard her (academic) potential, and not use her beauty as "a weapon" (he holds her face up to a mirror as he says this). In the final scene, she leaves for Europe, tearfully hugging her father who has 'saved' her from an evil suitor intending to rob her of her virginity. At her side, she suddenly finds neighbour boy Richard, a suitor her father had always approved of. As she glances at Richard with renewed interest, both smilingly wave at her father (as though they are embarking on their honeymoon), before the plane takes off.

She's Out of Control is a good example of a film that embodies much of what I have attempted to address in this chapter; it presents stereotyped teen girl identities ('types' that are delineated along conservative lines), a new caring father, a dead/absent as well as a 'failing' mother, and it resolves the girl's 'becoming' woman in an Oedipal / Cinderella-like trajectory, concluding with the representation of the teenage girl/woman as the 'good daughter' and as the 'good prospective wife', in a romantic union that father approves of. The film also presents a montage makeover sequence that has, since the 1980s, developed into somewhat of a staple for teen films featuring teen girl 'becoming'. The style and structure of the sequence -

it features a rapid succession of fetishizing close-ups, it relates the girl's transformation explicitly to consumerism, and it concludes with 'a reveal' on a staircase that caters to the male gaze - supports a particular ideology that was in line with the political and cultural zeitgeist of 1980s America. It follows a strong (neo)conservative discourse; one that celebrates self-improvement/malleability, consumerism, materialism and commodification, heteronormativity, strong values for the nuclear family, and a backlash against feminism (or, more bluntly, it thrives on strong undercurrents of misogyny), and it does all this in service of the continuance of male ruling. Nevertheless, the makeover trope, albeit in some cases more than others, and albeit perhaps inadvertently, brings with it a celebration of the female image as well, and herein lie, perhaps, some opportunities for resistance. Such sequences present teenage girls as actively involved with and pursuing their own 'becoming', their own transformation, their own sexuality, their own 'break' from the tightly set, typifying and confining moulds. They allow the teenage girls to 'move'. Moreover, the makeover suggests the teenage girl can willingly take on specific aspects and/or change the feminine role they have so far presented. Through the very fact that these transformations are 'staged' like performances in these films, they imply that the teenage girl is an 'actor' who can 'dress up' in femininity, as though femininity itself were an adaptable, fluid guise that can be taken on and performed, by and at will; as though the construction of the feminine image were a *masquerade*. And in doing so, these films play with the notion that all gender construction is, in fact, a performance. In my next and final chapter, this is precisely what I will turn to. I will look at gender as performance (including both Judith Butler's work on this and Mary Ann Doane's notion of the *masquerade*), at instances of unconfined movement, and at other potential areas for agency and rebellion, amongst the representation of teenage girls, in 1980s American teen film.