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**Memory and Anger:  
Teen Films and the Female Body**

**Elizabeth Pycock**

**A Thesis in the Special Individual Program**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

**March 1992**

**• Elizabeth Pycock, 1992**



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## ABSTRACT

### Memory and Anger: Teen Films and the Female Body

Elizabeth Pycock

Three levels of analysis are used to discuss adolescent sexuality and gender. These levels include American teenage films, sociological studies of adolescence, and autobiography. I have inserted myself as a viewer of teen films in order to discuss the potential relationship between the individual and cultural texts. I draw on current theories of audience research and the role of the researcher in order to situate my use of autobiographical memories of adolescence. I discuss teen films as a genre, and explore how the Hollywood film industry divides its films into two basic markets: "girls' films" and "boys' films." This division is based on texts that present two distinct sexualities in the form of sex comedies for boys, and romances for girls. Both kinds of presentations of sexual relations reveal disturbing images of male domination and female vulnerability. Although there are romances that depict more egalitarian relationships, the success of the sex comedies, with its humour based on the denigration of women, points to the circulation of harmful ideas about male and female sexuality.

It has become increasingly clear that at all levels how we think and feel we are, how we are treated, is bound up with how we are represented as being. This becomes a directly political issue when groups decide that they do not accept or else wish to change the way they are represented. (Dyer, 1987:x)

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I have two goals. I want to write about teenage films, to show what is being produced about teenagers. In that sense I want to describe films offered as entertainment for teenagers, films that are ostensibly about their culture. I also want to say a few things about what it has meant to me to be an adolescent girl. Although these two tasks may not seem to be directly related, each is a discourse on teenagers and I will construct a bridge between the two. Even though the connection is more emotive than intellectual, I want to explain it intellectually.

There is a connection between films and my perception of myself as an adolescent girl because watching a film is an emotive experience, just as adolescence is an emotive experience. Film is also an experience that acts upon my concept of myself. Because of the way film includes sexual discourses that rely on the display of women's bodies, it particularly affects my sense, or feeling, of being a sexual female.

I will argue that film is not "just entertainment" any more than a book is "just entertainment." The experience of film viewing is different from the experience of reading, but like books, films show us things, tell stories, and solicit reactions towards characters or events they portray. But films also have qualities that books do not have: they can offer us the sense that we are watching something that is actually happening in front of us. This impression is true to the extent that a woman undressing on the screen is a woman undressing in front of us. Although we all know that film is a construction—a stage, with actors/actresses who go through motions they have rehearsed—there are elements of the real, of actions, conversations, that could happen, that could be happening in front of us. And therefore we can find children unable to see the set behind the movie: they can become

extremely upset when a dog is killed or a child is beaten in a film. They will talk about the film afterward as if the story were true. Adults are also affected by films; some adults more so than others. Controversy over films (or film in general) often occurs when violence or sexual situations are portrayed. I have heard, and have been involved in, explosive arguments over the morality of showing certain acts: the violence in *Blue Velvet*, for example, or the rape scene in *Last Tango in Paris*. This debate becomes a moral one because some viewers feel assaulted or offended by images they witness. They express fear that these scenes encourage people to emulate the actions that are performed. The media's ability to incite strong reactions in some viewers inevitably raises the question of censorship. Because of the variety of different responses to film, the issue results in a dilemma: who can claim to have the "correct" interpretation? This diversity (for there can be a range of reactions to any given film) reveals the depth of the problematic and its corollary: whose reaction is most valid when it comes down to an issue of censorship? Since the Production Code was introduced in the 1930s to evaluate and control what kind of images or ideas were presented by the American Motion Picture Industry, films have been screened and rated according to a schema that determines not only what is permissible, but what is permissible to different age groups. Because I argue that film may play a role in structuring how individuals describe and view themselves and their position in society, my thesis might be interpreted as presenting a case for censorship. I do not believe censorship will stop sexism and exploitation.<sup>1</sup> Although I am critical of teen films I do not want to suggest that they be subject to more censorship than is already imposed.

The texts I will discuss are for the most part not "pornographic" in the sense that they do not reveal more nudity than the average mainstream films, and they are certainly not more violent. My description of these works is a translation, an interpretation, of what I see

and experience. I will question whether some portrayals are destructive in the way that they offer girls and boys images to measure themselves (ourselves) against: images that encourage us to feel certain things about ourselves; images that may affect the way we view other people, and especially, our sexual relations.

By focussing on what is presented, what is constructed, what is offered to us (and particularly to teenagers) as "entertainment," I hope to make the texts "strange."<sup>2</sup> I want to highlight them so they do not appear familiar. If this can be accomplished, perhaps questions that are not immediately visible (because we are used to seeing these narrative structures and these images of sexuality) will emerge.

In North American society, film is one of the most concrete forms of communication that gives us ideas about sexuality.<sup>3</sup> It is clear from the research on adolescent sexuality that most teenagers know very little about what to expect from sexual relations (Rogers 1977, Herold 1985, Ussher 1989, Whatley 1990). The topic is taboo in most families, sex education in schools is generally inadequate, and what adolescents do learn from people around them is often misleading or blatantly false. Sexuality is not just "how you make babies"; it is surrounded by social customs and attitudes that are sexist and which perpetuate the idea that domination over women through violence and denigration is a natural part of sexuality.<sup>4</sup> I am going to look at the films in light of this assumption, to see how the films may contribute to this problem, since they are one of the few sources of information for teenagers.

Originally I was hoping to include my own reception study that would have comprised interviews with teenage girls discussing some of these films. As I progressed in my research I realized the task was too ambitious for the size of this thesis. The readings I have done on ethnographic methodology have proved to be influential on the shape of my work, however, and I have set aside a chapter to discuss the ideas of Elspeth Probyn, Dorothy

Smith, Janice Radway, Angela McRobbie, and others. These readings helped me come to terms with what I feel is a highly subjective and problematic relationship: the one I have towards the thesis. Ten years ago it would have been impossible for me to write it at an academic institution. Many academics still believe it is unscholarly to use "I" in an essay. This thesis is filled with "I" and I am aware that parts of this writing may grate on the ears of some scholars. In Chapter II I will discuss why this position is indispensable to this research. I will discuss its limitations, and its strengths.

Clearly, my approach is different from the way the teenage audience approaches films. Not only am I not a teenager, but I have my own agenda; my own personal reasons for inquiring into this subject. I view adolescence as the time when my sexuality and my gender were turned into something that both disgusted and frightened me. In retrospect I connect these feelings to how our society addresses female and male sexuality; how it describes sexuality, and how this is manifested in day-to-day interactions. Adolescence is a moment when gender divisions are extremely strong and reinforced by peer pressure. It is a time when sex-role behaviour is asserted. It is also a time when girls begin to be harassed and talked about in certain ways and when their sexuality is policed by adults and their peers (especially boys through gossip).<sup>5</sup> I chose teen films because I wanted to see how they described adolescence. This pursuit proved fruitful: the films can be divided into two types: "boys' films" and "girls' films." Since they are divided by gender, they allow us to look at the differences between the two types of films and see what this division reveals about the assumptions our society holds about what it means to be a girl or a boy. The films are particularly of note because of the way that sexual activities are described and enacted, and the way the narratives construct and focus on these activities.

In my third chapter I describe the genre of teen films. (see Appendix A for a list of films I watched). I give an account of three books I was able to locate on the topic and relate these writings to my own research. Because of my interest in sexuality, I have tended to look at the genre in terms of bodies, and how bodies are characterized. On an immediately visible level, teenage characters look the same. Main characters are white, heterosexual, middle to upper class, with traditionally attractive bodies and pretty faces. I discuss how this homogeneity presents a teenage community that negates the experience and values of any other type of people. Because teen films function "affectively," by offering pleasurable feelings, they do not invite a questioning of what they represent.

In Chapter IV I discuss the films that are the epitome of what boys supposedly like: the "sex comedies" (films such as *Porky's*, *Revenge of the Nerds*, *Spring Break*). These are a sort of action film, and usually include a conflict with another gang or authority figure. Their narratives are constructed around sexual episodes, however, that involve a parody of sexual adventures, hence they are called "sex comedies." Of all the teen films, I have the most problems with the "sex comedies." Although they are the easiest of all types to criticize (because their sexism is blatant), I do not want this facile assessment to allow them to be dismissed. How are they sexist? I want to articulate what that might mean. From a general discussion of one aspect: how the films focus on and manipulate the image of the female body, I look specifically at *Porky's*, a prototype of the 1980s sex comedies, and one of the most popular teen films at the box office. If these films are representative of attitudes that surround male sexuality they are useful to examine and contrast with the films that are supposed to portray female sexuality.

In Chapter V, I look at "romance," the films made for girls. Using three examples of John Hughes' work (*Sixteen Candles*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Some Kind of Wonderful*), I

discuss how the female protagonist in each film pays a price for "romance." In the first two films romance is sought out in spite of the threat of sexual violence that the (male) "objects of desire" present. Because of the way the threatening male characters are presented favorably within the structure of the narrative (positioned for our attraction, approval, sympathy), the violence they present is eclipsed. The elevation and mystification of romance obscures the problems between the sexes. In the last example from *Some Kind of Wonderful*, I point out how Hughes takes the familiar story of the tomboy who becomes feminine (and by implication, deserving of the love of a boy) through romance. I place these examples together because they enable me to discuss two kinds of sacrifices girls are pressured into making in order to find sexual fulfillment.

It is difficult to find the enactment of female sexual desire in the films about romance. In the sex comedies we can find mimics of our desire, but these displays have more to do with conventional ideas of "the sexy woman." (In general she is by her nature "hot"; ever-ready with a wet vagina, waiting for the male to become aroused and "take" her.) When the films center on a reunion between a boy and girl, their attraction is usually based on emotional infatuation. When the couple is presented as sexually attracted there is often something illicit about the union (such as the breaking of class boundaries). Only a few of the films (*Say Anything*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Morgan Stewart's Coming Home*, *Reckless*) display moments of sexual desire alongside emotional or intellectual intimacy. (The sex comedies rarely display emotional intimacy.)

Although "girls' films" about romance (with sexual desire subsumed into "romantic" desire) correlate with studies on teenage sexuality that have found that girls in general are more interested in romantic than sexual involvements, where does this leave female sexual desire?<sup>6</sup> In discussing the sex comedies and romances I try to place female desire in the

context of a society that uses images of sexualized women to sell products and titillate men; and a society that controls women's sexual behaviour through gossip, ridicule, and sexual abuse. As I will show, this context makes it very difficult to describe female sexual desire. I argue that it is possible to find in the films assumptions that point to the difficulties for girls to assert their sexual desires. In teen films one can find repeated warnings about the threat of sexual violence present for girls in North American society. It is my belief that this warning is presented in most of the films as something girls and boys must accept as a "natural" part of sexual relations.

Aspects of the genre I focus on were chosen because they relate back to aspects of my adolescent self that presented difficulties for me as a social being. In the sex comedies I focus mainly on how girls and women are exhibited. This function of teen films refers me to my adolescent feeling of having been watched and scrutinized, to the point of wanting to disappear. When I discuss John Hughes' work, I look at moments when the female characters are made to accommodate themselves in order to be involved in a heterosexual relationship. These moments remind me of the sense of powerlessness I felt as a teenage girl.

In Chapter VI, I try to put into words aspects of female desire and pleasure that are obscured by both the traditional images of "the sexy woman" and the overemphasis on girls' interest in "romance." I look at the films *Say Anything*, and *Morgan Stewart is Coming Home*, and discuss how they offer a different kind of male character than those found in the sex comedies and a different kind of female character than those found in John Hughes' romances.

In Chapter VII I discuss how *Puberty Blues* portrays the same side of teenage society as the romances and the sex comedies, but from another perspective. Like many female characters in teen films, the protagonist undergoes a transformation. This time, however, the

transformation is empowering. I conclude with a final "memories of the body" that contextualizes both the sex comedies and the romances.

The most difficult issue in my thesis is my attempt to write about the connection between my body and the theory I am trying to understand and explain. In Chapter II I discuss the way in which intellectual discourse severs the personal from the privileged discourse we call "knowledge." The idea of knowledge in Western culture has become synonymous with the idea of "facts" that, if not capable of being proven, are at least debated with objective, unemotional rigour.<sup>7</sup> The kind of epistemological inquiry in which I seek to engage cannot avoid the vulnerability of taking a personal stand. If theory is to describe sexual desire at all, it must speak of the personal, of the emotional, and of the interpersonal. To pretend one can sit above experience and imagine one can know and say anything about sexuality effectively robs theory of its ability to speak to people about life. Assuming that theory attempts to guide us, somehow, how can we change our lives if we cannot speak of what we live?

## Chapter I Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Lynn Segal (1990) was very observant when she pointed out that "it does seem likely that it is when sexual expression is most contained within a sanctified private sphere that least public awareness of, and discussion about, women's vulnerability to abuse exists." (227) It is also important to remember that "if we attach sexual exploitation to pornography, rather than to wider systems of inequality and powerlessness, we fail to see across time and place who is most vulnerable to exploitation and why." (227) I am particularly concerned about the effect of censorship on sex education. Various groups and many individuals oppose sex ed on the grounds that it encourages teenagers to have sex.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of "'making strange' (*ostranenie*)" comes from Shklovsky, a Russian formalist who thought that "the essential function of poetic art is to counteract the process of habituation encouraged by routine everyday modes of perception. [He believed that] We very readily cease to 'see' the world we live in, and become anaesthetized to its distinctive features. The



aim of poetry is to reverse that process, to *defamiliarize* that with which we are overly familiar." (Hawkes, 1977, p.62)

<sup>3</sup> At "Le 3ième Festival international du cinéma et de la vidéo gais et lesbiens de Montréal" I saw a video called *Diana's Hair Ego*. [It's a marvelous video about an AIDS awareness group in South Carolina (SCAEN).] One of the doctors involved in teaching high school students about safe sex described being rather shocked to discover that the fourteen year old boys were learning about sex from their Friday night ritual of watching films like *Debbie Does Dallas*. They told her that after they watched these films, they would have what they called a "fuck-a-thon" which entailed acting out what they had just watched. Her point for including this was that there were people opposed to SCAEN's educating people about safe sex because they thought it would encourage teenagers to have sex.

<sup>4</sup> See Dyer 1985a, Stanko 1985, Weeks 1986, Warshaw 1988, Scully 1990, Segal 1990 and articles in *MS* (1990) Volume 1, Number 2.

<sup>5</sup> Konopka 1976, Herold 1984, Ussher 1990, in their studies of adolescent girls, all found that girls' first concern about having sex with a boy was the worry that they would be talked about in derogatory ways. For some girls this fear was stronger than the fear of pregnancy. This is clearly a powerful form of control over girls' sexual behavior.

<sup>6</sup> Conger 1973, Konopka 1976, Conger and Petersen 1984, Herold 1984, Ussher 1990.

<sup>7</sup> See the first part of Dorothy Smith's *The Everyday World as Problematic* for a thorough historical description of this development.

## CHAPTER II

### WATCHING MOVIES IN ACADEMIA

"I know you could be a girl like that [he snaps his fingers] if you tried." -*Some Kind of Wonderful*, about the tomboy.

Watts, the tomboy in *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987), is constantly reminded by others that she is a girl. In the film this means that she is not behaving quite the way a girl is supposed to. Ultimately, Watts does not mind modifying herself to fit into girls' clothing. She is a girl, after all, why should she not "be a girl" just like that, at a snap of her fingers?

I too am reminded on a daily basis that I am "a girl." Going to see movies, and working in academia, I can never forget this, I can never leave my sex at the door. It informs all my interactions. Like Watts, I feel a tension between how a "girl" is supposed to be, and how I am. I have tried for many years to be a girl "just like that," and have come to the conclusion that I have never easily assumed the posture of "girl." Yet, it is only on rare occasions that I have been mistaken for a boy, and therefore, if I do not feel like a girl, I am still not able to masquerade as a boy.

Between a constant awareness of being female, and yet not really feeling like a girl or "a real woman," I have been unable to don the costume Watts eventually dons in *Some Kind of Wonderful*. The conflict between knowing that I am a woman because of my sex, and yet not feeling I can live up to society's expectations of what is "womanly," is perhaps what makes me more aware of my sex, and what makes it more difficult to forget in my day to day living.

Carrying (and sometimes dragging, reluctantly) this awareness of gender with me to university has led my studies along untraditional paths. Because of the unusual nature of my studies, this chapter will discuss the theoretical framework that binds my thesis.

The work took place in the context of an interdisciplinary program connected to feminist theory, film theory, communication/cultural studies, history, and literature. My approach to cultural texts was influenced by a variety of sources. I am most deeply in debt to the studies in media theory that have appeared since the publication of Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." (1975) Although I am less interested in the psychoanalytic model Mulvey proposed, her essay remains provocative, and has been taken up by other writers in important ways. My approach tends to move along the lines of work in the more structural or semiotic areas of analysis, with an interest in work done by Bryan Bruce, Rosalind Coward, Richard Dyer and Annette Kuhn.<sup>1</sup> My project differs from that of those theorists in that I am equally interested in the current debate taking place in the social sciences concerning the audience, the text, and the theorist. As I will explain, recent scholarship in the field of ethnography has enabled me to construct a methodology that traditionally has not been within the bounds of academia. I will explicitly include memories of my own experience of adolescence as a starting point to examine how teen films portray adolescent sexuality and sexual difference.

This point of departure was chosen in order to discuss potential relationships between the media, society, and the individual. Ultimately I argue that texts (in this case, teen films) become meaningful in the contexts of the society in which they are produced; one important context being the life experience that an audience member brings to film viewing. Although I could have limited my research to a textual analysis of teen films, I wanted, instead, to attempt to put into practice some of the theoretical frameworks that have recently been proposed within cultural studies. Since this is a new field of research that is influenced by numerous intellectual developments, I have had to set my own parameters. In the

following paragraphs I will outline some of the ideas that have helped me to structure this thesis.

According to Bill Nichols, current film theory has been most strongly influenced by poststructuralism, which has, in itself, arisen as a result of a conglomerate of theories and positions from a variety of disciplines. Nichols defines poststructuralism as "an approach comprising elements of structural, semiotic, Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic thought." (Nichols, 1985:3) Underlying these movements is an approach to discourse that views the media (social texts) as an ideological and potentially socializing force. The questions of who is looking, who is being looked at (and how), who is speaking, and who is being spoken to, are raised in media analysis in general. In order to understand aspects of contemporary society, the media as a system of communication and dissemination of information has received much attention. The idea of the audience has therefore been a subject of much debate. (Allor, 1988; Radway, 1988) Although theorists may disagree on the modality of the effects of the media, it is difficult to claim that there are no effects.

Since the industrial revolution and the mass production of literature, the dissemination of ideas to the general population has been viewed as dangerous by those in positions of power. Historically, attempts to control access to the media (or control of the media itself) have been directed towards women, children, non-whites and the working classes. (Allor, 1988) The media was perceived to be capable of inciting sexual licentiousness or violence; in essence, actions that would upset the status quo. As the elitist nature of these attitudes became apparent, the question of what kind of effects the media might have also changed. Until recently, however, the idea of audience members as passive dupes was prevalent in much of the writing that was concerned with the impact of the media. At present the concern with effects has taken a slightly different turn.

Current audience research has moved away from what David Morley called the "hypodermic model" to a view of audience members as much more than passive receivers of information. (Morley quoted in Radway, 1986:95) Theorists in cultural studies generally accept that there is no guarantee as to how any spectator will "read" a text. As Radway writes:

the content of any message, whether textual or behavioral, is not simply found in that message but is constructed by an audience interacting with that message. (1986:96)

This view of the audience has engendered a questioning of the relationships between theorist and text and theorist and audience. Contrary to previous approaches that looked to the text to find the meaning and extrapolated from the text what the audience reads, new research is looking to see how actual audiences respond to texts. This has proved necessary since each critic is a member of an audience and might well interpret texts in very different ways from the texts' intended audience. (Radway, 1986) Jacqueline Bobo also points out that:

a viewer of a film (reader of a text) comes to the moment of engagement with the work with a knowledge of the world and a knowledge of other texts, or media products. What this means is that when a person comes to view a film, she/he does not leave her/his histories, whether social, cultural, economic, racial or sexual at the door. (1988:96)

Each audience member, therefore, may well respond to texts in her or his own way. This includes the theorist who studies any text.

Concurrent to the reassessment of "the audience" and its relationship to texts is what James Clifford has called a "crisis" in the social sciences that has ultimately called into question the authority of the ethnographer (anthropologist, sociologist, academic, theorist). (Clifford, 1986:3) In sociology and cultural studies, the topic of "who can speak for whom about what" has received attention from theorists such as Ien Ang, Lawrence Grossberg, Angela McRobbie, Elspeth Probyn, Jan Radway, Dorothy Smith—among others.

Traditionally in academic disciplines, the "who" authorized to speak were white, middle or upper-class men. "What" they spoke about effectively closed the doors to looking at the experience of all those designated "other" [blacks, the working classes, women, gays and lesbians, native cultures (as opposed to colonizers)]. In short, the ability to speak remained in the hands of those in positions of power in any society. As partial gains in status have been achieved by blacks, women, and others, cultural theory has opened up to try to accommodate the voices of those who have been and who still are oppressed. The ability to *speak* and be *heard* is a strategic position, without which change would be impossible. It is therefore inevitable that the act of speaking would become a point of scrutiny at a time when voices we had never heard before, saying things we had never heard uttered, were finally in the air.

There are numerous aspects to this discussion. I will focus only on a few points that are relevant to my work. As a heterosexual, white, educated member of the middle class, I have many privileges that I am probably not even aware of—privileges I take for granted. As a woman in academia, who grew up aware of how sexist and misogynistic our society is, I do not feel privileged. The impetus of this work is based on this latter position; the fact I can write it reveals the former privilege. The current theories on ethnographic writing allow me to question the traditional mode of scholarship, and attempt to speak of my experience as "other."

This possibility has opened up for me as a result of two kinds of questioning. Feminist work in sociology has identified that the so-called "objective" view is actually male-centered, with the straight, white male as the standard of "normalcy." (Smith, 1987; Gilligan, 1990) Post-colonial theories have also identified biases in the study of cultures, and have attempted to discover the voices of those who are most often studied, "named" and

silenced by the white ethnographer. The difficulty of writing about culture with these awarenesses is described by Angela McRobbie in this way:

[o]ften the urgency and the polemic of politics, all the things we feel strongly about and we desperately want, are quite at odds with the traditional requirements of the scholarly mode; the caution, the rigour and the measured tone in which one is supposed to present 'results' to the world. Frequently we worry about the extent to which we, unwittingly, impose our own culture-bound frame of reference on the data, and about how, so often, our personal preferences surface, as though by magic, as we write up the research. (McRobbie 1982:46)

The difficulty that McRobbie articulates has been addressed by researchers in two ways. The "results" will often be prefaced by an explanation of the methodological process entailed, including an acknowledgement of the assumptions and expectations of the researcher. (see Radway, 1984) If interviews have been used, the voices of those interviewed are presented with the least editing possible. (see Heron, 1986)

One result of this practice has been the proposal to include "uses of the self" (Probyn, 1990) in theoretical writing. This ranges from "a self-conscious acknowledgement of our own critical activity" (i.e. an acknowledgement of the assumptions we bring to our work) (Waldman, 1988:89) to the inclusion of autobiographical stories. (see Walkerdine, 1986; Heron, 1986) The former "use of the self" is easier for the traditional rigours of theoretical work to accommodate than the latter. Some readers (or listeners) react quite negatively to personal stories in academic contexts. Elspeth Probyn recounts how her mention of her own experience when presenting a paper caused a man in the audience to comment that what she was saying made him nervous. (Probyn, 1989:1)

Autobiographical writing, like other forms of self-exposure, risks a kind of vulnerability that is anathema in academic circles. Signs of vulnerability undermine a speaker's authority, leaving the speaker more open to personal criticisms. This may be compounded by our reliance upon the hierarchy and prestige of systems of knowledge. We

have stakes invested in academia to provide us with answers. The "nervousness" expressed by Probyn's listener may be part of what Clifford noted as the fear of the loss of "clear standards of verification." (Clifford and Marcus, 1986:7) As well, vulnerability may be aroused in the listener/reader: personal inclusions may affect a reader on an emotional level.

My own vulnerability began before I ever decided to speak from experience. In a literal sense, this thesis is about the exposure and control of a girl's adolescent body. I believe that the media constantly imposes/exposes a form of sexuality upon the teenage girl's body. This denuding is threatening because it presents a body denied protection from abuse. Or even worse: a body that appears to invite abuse in the way the media creates a titillation of violence. I believe that many images in our society naturalize a form of violence against the female body and psyche. I also think that discourse about female sexuality impedes the articulation of female desire.

At this point in my study of media and society, I do not know how I can explain the complexity of the possible relationships between the media and an individual's self-perception without implicating my self. I speak with hesitation because it is so difficult to understand how an individual (or members of a group) develops ideas about themselves. The only thing I can say without doubt is that "some thing, or things, happened to me."

When I am asked what this thesis is about, I usually respond by saying it is about how adolescent sexuality is portrayed in teen films. I could have written a thesis that discusses just that. Instead I have complicated the issue by inserting myself as a viewer of teen films and have created what Elspeth Probyn has called "conjunctural moment[s]." (1989:212) This term comes the closest to describing the process of what I am trying to do: "conjunctural" implies a meeting point of two or more vectors (lines, threads), and "moment" implies the historicity of this conjunction. The connections that I will make are placed together because of where



I am situated (as a white, heterosexual, middle class woman writing at an academic institution with an accumulation of experiences of sexism, etc.), and under what circumstances teen films are produced and viewed, at this point in history.

Beginning with Jacqueline Bobo's assumption that we bring our personal histories to our understanding of texts, and with the aim of acknowledging the assumptions I bring to my description of the teenage films, I will be discussing what I see as clearly identifiable characteristics of my adolescent self. The memory of feeling watched and invaded, combined with a sense of powerlessness and loss, characterize how I identify my experience of adolescent sexuality. When I look at the films, therefore, I look to see how the camera invades the female body, how it makes the image of the female body appear vulnerable, and how it disregards female experience.

From that point I take suggestions from Probyn and Smith, who propose that experience can be articulated if it is historically located and contextualized. I discuss results from studies on teenagers and join these with what I call my "memories of the body" and my interpretation of the teen films.

In her unpublished dissertation, *An Autobiographical Turn: Uses of the Self in Cultural Studies* (1989), Elspeth Probyn posits the possibility of an effective use of the autobiographical voice within cultural studies. Somewhere between "the evacuation of the self in postmodernism and poststructuralism" (1989:281) and the presentation of the self as "truth," Probyn proposes a theoretical position that can find a space from which to "speak." She notes that the impact of structuralism in cultural studies, specifically Althusser's conception of how we are all caught in ideological structures, inevitably raised the question: "where does the critic speak from?" (Probyn, 1989:23) According to Probyn, it is the limiting of autobiography to an ontological category ("an essential 'beingness'") that renders the self

ineffectual as a "ground." The autobiographical, in order to work theoretically, cannot be seen as a "guarantee" of representational truth. Like Dorothy Smith, Probyn emphasizes the historicity of the uses of the self. Stuart Hall's concept of articulation enables Probyn to conceive of experience "as an element of an enunciative practice." (1989:28) In Hall's terms, "[a]n articulation is thus the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions." (Hall quoted in Probyn, 1989:28) The connection she calls a "conjunctural moment" can be apparent when the autobiographical is theorized both at ontological and epistemological levels.

This means that

as a realm of being is proposed, it is grounded in an historical conjuncture. Images of the self arise from the 'livedness' of the interaction of individual and social and then return as a critical tool to analyze and cut into the specificity of the social formation. (1989:32)

This is reminiscent of Michelle Citron's words in describing how, in her essay "Women's Film Production: Going Mainstream" (1988), she uses both a historical/political angle as well as an analysis of her own development as a film-maker. She writes: "I use myself not to suggest that my development was either particularly unique or common, but rather as an entry into certain ideas about the relationship of the personal and psychological to the social and political." (Citron, 1988:46) The ideas of "cutting into" and points of "entry" are also similar to Dorothy Smith's description of her project. Smith seeks to use "the everyday world as problematic" "as an opening in a discursive fabric through which a range of experience hitherto denied, repressed, subordinated, and absent or lacking in language, can break out." (Smith, 1990:11) Smith emphasizes the denial of women's experience, specifically in research situations. Working in academia at a sociology department, she realized that

[t]he 'established' sociology ... gives us a consciousness that looks at society, social relations, and people's lives as if we could stand outside them, ignoring the particular local places in the everyday in which we live our lives. It claims

objectivity not on the basis of its capacity to speak truthfully, but in terms of its specific capacity to exclude the presence and experience of particular subjectivities. (1987:2)

In particular, the claim of "objectivity" is one which assumes that the experience and views of white, middle-class men are universal and the standard upon which everything is based. Thus, "the everyday world as problematic" is posited in order to locate and enunciate a historical moment: to give voice not only to experience but to the context in which the experience/ articulation is formed.

Although Smith talks about the reification of the objective voice, I am not certain that she is suggesting a use of the personal so much as a foregrounding of material conditions, in a specifically Marxist sense. (see Smith 1990) The material conditions she believes have been ignored are the varieties of maintenance work that women (and the poor) have performed in order for the ruling classes to be free to create. In other words, women have done the everyday tasks (cooking, cleaning, typing) that are indispensable to creativity and the production of knowledge, but undervalued and essentially rendered invisible in the discourses that structure conceptions of reality accepted as knowledge.

Although Smith's theoretical framework is important and bears some relevance to my work, it does not structure my project as well as Probyn's proposition does. Or rather: having searched for a theoretical frame to guide my work, it is Probyn's suggestions for an enunciative position that I have attempted to follow.

One of Probyn's most important concerns is raised in the question: "Can a feminist insistence on the autobiographical sustain a critical and political speaking position without privileging an ontological category of 'femaleness'?" (1989:184) This presents a particular challenge to my work on teen films and adolescence because it is my contention that the structuring of gender in the discourse on adolescent sexuality hails girls and boys as

"ontological categories." In other words, the way that teen films "talk about" girls and boys in their presentation of adolescent societies, and also the way that liberal sociological descriptions lump girls and boys into their respective sexualities, conveys the message that girls and boys are relatively homogeneous groups. The success of Western society's division of gender along essentialist lines can be measured both by our acknowledgement of sexism and by what Sue Lees points out:

[t]hese myths about the naturalness of masculine and feminine behaviour are very difficult to challenge because they are so embedded in common sense ... The difficulty of challenging such assumptions is that evidence for naturalness is usually drawn from the observation that some behaviour is more typical of girls than boys ... this merely shows how effectively the social norms work. (1986:17-18)

The effects of a majority of people who view sexual difference as biologically essential should be noted because it means that females and males, as groups, will be treated differently. In terms of sexuality this means, among other things, that girls experience sexual harassment. This does not mean that all girls will experience the same kind of sexual harassment. Nor will this necessarily determine their sense of identity. It is, however, a factor in daily life powerful enough that one could say that all girls and women in North American society run their lives (consciously or unconsciously) in order to avoid sexual attacks. The same cannot be said about boys. With this in mind, in order to speak meaningfully about the possible repercussions of discourse that posits essentialist ideas about sexual difference, I have pulled out assumptions that may affect the way girls and boys behave and assume positions of identity that are physically or psychically damaging.

Probyn's concern with "women" as a category is raised because she fears that in privileging "femaleness" one risks silencing the variety of voices of different women. Her question is posed in the context of a struggle within the women's movement that has become

apparent as racism, classism and heterosexism are articulated. Although I agree with the practice of continually acknowledging one's privilege (my whiteness, my class, my access to education, etc.), there are, nonetheless, moments when one must be able to identify oneself with others. If I am to speak of sexual harassment and abuse that is directed specifically towards women, it is vital that I discuss it as pervasive, and not incidental. One of the problems women have faced is that they are perceived as individual targets, treated as if the attack were done by some "maniac," and that the problem is the individual woman's problem. Until recently I did not see the connections between my feeling assaulted (lacking privacy and space and respect) and the mechanisms of how I am positioned as "female." This realization is not easily accepted; I have to constantly remind myself that my awareness of misogyny is something outside of me, and not some "dirty" part within me. This is my experience, but it is situated within a context in which others are also placed.

This is not to say that I can speak for other women, and perhaps this is where one can draw the line: in arguing against essentialist ideas of sexual difference I assert that these ideas were dangerous for me because I placed the sexist categories upon my sense of self. I compared myself to how a girl/woman was supposed to be, and found myself lacking. I also identified with the representation of "sexual female," and this positioning made me feel vulnerable and ashamed.

Can I take this "image" of my (adolescent) self and use it as an analytic tool? Ideally I would like to offer this image as another level of discourse, to meet the teen films and the sociological discourse and "make[s] something appear which can be considered a conjunctural document of the self and of the times." (Probyn 1989:208)

### Where do I Fit in the Filmic Image?

Her eyes got enormous as she looked into the camera, begging us to save her. The girl resisted the thief, broke away from him, and began to run up and down the avenues of rose bushes. The camera cut from her running, stumbling, running again, to the thief standing perfectly still, laughing silently. Only then did I stop enjoying it. She could run and run, but she couldn't escape ...

The girl tore the thief's white shirt off his shoulders and clawed long gashes in his back. His head was buried in her breast, his hands wrenching away the ballooning sleeves from her arms. The camera only caught the top of his curly head to reveal her face above it. The maiden being ravished. Terror gradually replaced by passion ... A small secret smile played across her lips ...

Thinking it was over, I reached down for my book bag, and reality rushed back when I saw the note. Something clicked in my mind then, very gently. Some connection between the fantasy trip of the movie and the trapped feeling when it was over. (Peck, 1976:88-89)

This long excerpt is taken from a teenage novel by Richard Peck entitled *Are You in the House Alone?*. It is a novel about acquaintance rape. In this passage, Gail is watching a silent film. The scene takes place before she is raped, but after she has received threatening notes telling her she is being watched and is going to "get it." The reason I am including this description is because of the way Gail experiences the viewing of this film. She identifies with the character on the screen, but only to a point. Gail knows that she would not enjoy being raped, unlike the way the "fantasy" in the film describes it. She knows the difference because she is able to see through the fantasy to a real experience. She expresses feeling trapped; later we discover that she is trapped: for after Gail is raped by a boy she knows, the society around her does not believe her, and protects the boy so that he is able to rape another young woman, almost killing her.

In the above passage, Gail expresses a recognition of how rape is distorted by her realization that she has something in common with the heroine. She sees something hidden by the ending in pleasure: she can see that this is false because she knows the ending would

not be pleasurable for herself. Her feeling of entrapment can also refer to the experience of viewing the film itself, for the story that it tells is that women really end up enjoying rape.

I chose this example to begin a discussion of the relationship between experience and cultural artifacts because it points to part of what my experience of watching films has been. Too often, I sit in the audience of a theater, feeling trapped by what I am being shown.

The film that Peck describes above is an example of a film that contributes to the legitimization of the myths surrounding violence against women. As I will explain in later chapters, the teen films also propagate myths about sexual relations. How they do that is not easily explained; so many elements make up any given film. But part of what this means to me, as a viewer, is that some films can make me feel terrible about myself. I have come to realize that I take those feelings home with me, and they accumulate to create certain notions about who I am. Clearly, film is not the only form of communication that affects my self-perception. It is, however, part of a larger tableau. In choosing to talk about films, therefore, it is possible to say that some of the observations I make can be applied to other forms of media. I have chosen to look at teen films because of the peculiar relationship that I have to the media, and also because it explicitly tells stories about adolescence, the time when our sexual bodies begin to take on particular shapes.

### Memories of the Body

As an adolescent girl, I constantly felt that I was being watched. This feeling made me want to shrink. As my breasts developed, I found myself trying to hide in baggy clothing. I have photographs of myself in which I am slouching as I try to conceal the evidence. This was not paranoia; I was being watched. Men and boys would catcall, sometimes with so-called "compliments" of "hey beautiful" or "nice ass"; sometimes with insults (this one directed to the man I was walking with): "Fuck her good—I did" (indicating I was common property.)

This attention is aggression, whether it is couched in the form of compliments or not. I had no way of stopping men from yelling things at me about me. They identified my sexuality and they defined me—and I could not impede that.

When I was attacked on the street at the age of 15, I was completely defenseless. I had no skills to protect myself, nor even to protest what occurred. I was in Vancouver, it was a summer evening, and the streets were crowded. A group of University or college boys were walking towards me and my cousins. As they passed, one of the boys reached out and grabbed my crotch. The action was over in a flash, and I do not know if I even saw the boy's face. They were all laughing, boisterously. That action was a powerful blow to my self-esteem. I felt embarrassed and ashamed because he had invaded my body and in that one, swift moment told me he had a right to do that to me. On some level, all crimes are like that: there is a perception on the part of the criminal that the victims deserve it. (Scully, 1990) Once that action was done, I could feel that: I knew he thought I was a "slut," or a "cunt"; he believed I deserved to be touched like that. Or perhaps he did not care how it might affect me—he may not even have thought it would affect me. In which case I was "just a cunt" to him. In that action he told me that I was unworthy of respect; that he could touch me whether I wanted him to or not, without any consequence for himself. The attacks are like punishments for being a "bad" girl. The power of this lies in that it does not matter if I believe I am bad or not, I am still going to be punished by these boy-men as if I deserve to be punished. Meanwhile, they derive a sense of power from their actions. Their ego is reinforced at our expense.

Many people "forget" sexual traumas, either because the experience occurs at a very young age and the person does not know how else to deal with it; or because s/he is compelled to "forget" it because the people around her tell her s/he is lying; or because s/he



is told that what happened to her is not *really* an assault (Danica, 1988; Warshaw, 1988; W.R.C., 1989). Sexual violence is a form of torture that is cleverly concealed in our society. It is clever because systematically, those who endure it are made to feel guilty; survivors are made to feel that they somehow deserved what happened to them. They are told by their aggressors that they deserve it. They are often called liars if they try to tell others they experienced it. (Danica, 1988; W.R.C., 1989) If survivors try to take their torturers to court it is the survivor who is usually put on trial. Conviction rates are exceptionally low in rape prosecutions, and the amount of time rapists are sentenced to spend in jail is also minimal (unless the victims are also murdered.) A woman or girl or child who is raped (sometimes over a period of years, when it is a relative or husband) is left with the knowledge that Law and Justice do not believe their torturer has done anything wrong. The aggressor is also left free to continue harming people. In these ways we learn to "forget" we were raped. Our society compels us into silence by making it impossible for us to remember.

As Warshaw found in her study of acquaintance rape, many girls and women are unable to articulate that they were raped: "only 27 percent of the women [interviewed] whose sexual assault met the legal definition of rape thought of themselves as rape victims." (Warshaw, 1988:26) In other words, 73 percent of the women can say that they had sex against their will but they blame themselves for "letting" it happen or for (supposedly) "precipitating" it. This means that women have been taught to accept assault and harassment as natural, as something that is unavoidable, as something that just happens to women. Instead of viewing harassment as a problem that men have, our society has turned it into a woman's problem that women have to deal with. (Scully, 1990; Whatley, 1991)

How could I stop these boys and men from harassing me? I was frightened to express my anger; I was afraid they would counter-attack. They depend on my self-censorship; they depend on our believing we somehow deserve it; they depend on our silence.

My defenselessness and powerlessness is constructed for me to live in a male-dominated, patriarchal society. I have very little recourse to respond to the aggressions I encounter. Women's anger is considered irrational, over-emotional, unattractive, unfeminine. Our expression of rage at injustice is ill-received in this society. I have built-in censors that control my anger: I want to be a "good" girl; I want to be liked. I even want to be "sexy." Teenage boys are expected to rebel against authority; it is part of what it means to develop into "manhood." Teenage girls are not supposed to rebel. Women are supposed to be sensitive, quiet; we are supposed to be the peace-makers.

### Rage

My interest in cinema on a theoretical level began when I became aware of how films were capable of generating an incredible anger inside of me. Sometime during my first years at university I identified that one of the strongest reactions to films occurred at the level of my body. Some films (or scenes) triggered memories of vulnerability and defensiveness directly on my body. I started to connect a feeling of being invaded to the women on the screen who were displayed and whom I felt were surrounded by a gawking group of voyeurs (the audience—and of course, that included me). Watching certain scenes, I found a rage inside myself. These scenes were usually shots of heterosexual encounters or of women being sexualized by a camera angle that stood in for a male character or what seemed to be a male spectator. Often they were scenes in which a female character was posed in vulnerable positions. But sometimes I cannot explain it that way; there is no blatant threat of violence or degradation to point out. Sometimes I have even wondered if I am simply "seeing things."

But what is it that I am seeing that makes me feel at times fearful for the safety of my body and at times disgusted by it?

As I identified the tension and anger that scenes aroused, my first reaction was to feel violated by the images. The woman's body somehow became everywoman's body, and in consequence, my body. Learning to dismantle and name my feelings has aided in diffusing the discomfort and rage images provoke. Nonetheless, it is not enough to simply name what one feels.

Part of the goal in cultural theory is to understand the connections between the individual and the social. (Allor, 1987) I wanted to understand why I attributed powerful meaning to some films I saw; in other words, I wanted to understand why film was affecting me the way that it was. Because of the strong reactions, I wanted to know what the social implications might be. The memory on my body gave me two clues: I knew that film was capable of affectivity, of creating emotional responses that could remain with me after I left the cinema; and I knew that this memory would determine how I made sense of the films I saw—at least some of the time.<sup>3</sup>

By explicitly engaging this response as a valid line of inquiry, I was able to trace the memory back to my adolescence, and to my experience of developing a gendered sexual identity. Since the articulation of women's experience of sexuality has recently been encouraged as an important step in breaking a silence surrounding female pleasure, I have attempted, in this thesis, to use "memories of the body" as starting points to a discussion of the context in which girls and boys learn about sexuality and sexual difference.

### What Role Can the Media Play?

Bearing in mind that my experience of the media is not the same as all women's, it is still possible to discuss common cultural symbols as *common*—as signifiers that signify

because some of us do share language and experiences. The potential for difference and change however, rests in the fact that discourse has the potential to reveal contradictions and to offer spaces for pleasure in texts that appear closed. The difficulty with the medium of film is that it is made up of so many elements (music, image, dialogue, set, scenes, stars, etc.), it is not easy to pinpoint what factors will determine an individual's overall response. I know that in focussing on the parts that I do, I overlook other parts that may stand out more for other viewers. Part of my purpose is to point out parts of the teen films that remind me of my position as a woman in society. I think many of the films accept and encourage a way of viewing girls and sexuality that is harmful to women. I can make connections between my feeling of vulnerability, and the actions or words that are taken for granted in these films. How can I translate these connections I make so that others will understand why I think discourse is powerful?

I want to point out how selective the camera is; how choices are being made to show the audience one thing, in one way. I want to show what the films can tell us (show us) about sexuality; I want to deconstruct the narratives and point to the places that make me feel vulnerable. In my discussion of these films, I want to remind the reader of the phenomenon of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is so widespread that one could posit an ideal audience member and include the experience of a sexual trauma in her or his background. I want to react in words to scenes I consider threatening to women—threatening because the images or scenes disregard us, our experience, and effectively serve to humiliate us in subtle ways without our having recourse to protest. I also want to open up a space to begin speaking about female pleasure, and what that can mean in a society that punishes women through their sexuality.

My interest in this project is, in large part, an attempt to assert power over my body: while I cannot stop men from harassing me sexually, nor can I stop the media from expressing ideas about women's bodies that I disagree with, I can try to express in words what I see and learn from the medium of film, and relate this back to my life. By using this space in this way, I can rewrite the scripts so that I am no longer erased, but present as a force to be reckoned with.

## Chapter II Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I especially respect the work being done in the Canadian journal *CineACTION!*.

<sup>2</sup> Although in using the sociological discourse I may generalize about girls and boys, it is because the tendency of girls and boys to behave in certain ways or to display certain character traits is learned from society. However, because there is this tendency, there is a danger of taking this tendency to be biologically essential. While I may use these generalizations as evidence I do not in any way intend to use them as evidence of biological nor social necessity.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Dyer (1985) has noted how certain kinds of films have an affect on viewers' bodies. I discuss this further in Chapter III.

## CHAPTER III

### WHAT IS A TEEN FILM?

[Genre:] a body, group, or category of similar works, this similarity being defined as the sharing of a sufficient number of motifs that we can identify works that properly fall within a particular kind or style of film. (Kaminsky, 1985:9)

Genres are not simply bodies of work or groups of films, however classified, labelled and defined. Genres do not consist only of films: they consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema, and which interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process ... They offer a way of working out the significance of what is happening on the screen: a way of working out why particular events and actions are taking place, why the characters are dressed the way they are, why they look, speak and behave the way they do, and so on. (Neale, 1990:46)

When I began my study of teen films, I had not considered what genre studies were, nor, indeed, why some films would fall into "genres." I knew what I was looking for without actually having defined what a "teen film" was. My only criteria were that a film be marketed for teenagers and have teenagers as its main characters. This does not, of course, explain what motifs are shared by teen films. And as I began the process of exploring the material, I realized that to study a genre is not a simple task of cataloguing and categorizing. There are so many elements in teen films that could be examined, it is a genre that has existed for approximately 35 years and seen various changes.

Genres are more or less recognizable: we can identify "a western" or "a musical." This is something we have learned to do in part because commercial cinema packages its films in order to appeal to those who are interested in seeing "a western," "a love story," "an action film." Some genres evolve as a result of the success of one particular film: attempts are made to recreate the initial success, and in consequence, others are produced to resemble (but not too closely) the first. The success of *Animal House* in 1978, for example, brought about the creation of other films that can be seen to incorporate similar elements, such as *Porky's*

(1982) and *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984). These two points reveal the economic basis of genre: certain types of films are produced and reproduced because the industry perceives that it can sell a certain type to an audience.

According to Doherty (1988), the teen film was born in the 1950s as a result of the particular economic context of the American movie industry. In very simple terms, film production in the 1950s, threatened by the collapse of the Hollywood studio system and the advent of television, was desperate to boost its theater attendance. "The Family" was no longer going out to the movies, and the industry needed to find another audience. As early as the 1940s "teenagers" were noted as a viable group to be hailed by film advertising. It is only in the 1950s, however, that strategies were employed to address adolescents directly through the production and advertising of movies created specifically for them. This resulted in an abundance of low-budget movies with weak plots and poorly written dialogue that were slapped together within weeks. [For example, *Teenage Crime Wave* (1955), *Rock, Rock, Rock* (1956), *Bop Girl Goes Calypso* (1957), *Teenage Caveman* (1958), *High School Confidential* (1958).] These early teen films tended to capitalize on sensationalist topics related to juvenile delinquency, drugs, sex; or trends picked up by teenagers such as drag racing and rock'n'roll. They also brought out the first of the horror/weirdie films. From this start as popular, low-budget fare, teen films have been part of the "exploitation" tradition; films that offer titillating, "mindless" entertainment in order to capitalize on a market that either had "no taste" or did not care about such a criterion.

As time passes and current issues and fads change, so do teen films. For example, beach movies [*Gidget* (1959) and its sequels; *Beach Blanket Bingo* (1965), *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965), etc.] and Elvis Presley movies characterize the Hollywood teen films of the 1960s and each could be examined as sub-genres. In confining my study to films from the 1980s, and

looking at particular types from this time frame, I am also narrowing how I define this group of teen films. In a broad sense "the teen film" has modified its format to adapt to the changes over the years. In what sense, therefore, can teen films be discussed as a genre?

As I mentioned in my introduction, very little critical work has been done on specific teen films. To my knowledge there are only three books on teen films as a group: McGee and Robertson's *The J.D. Films--Juvenile Delinquency in the Movies* (1982), David Considine's *The Cinema of Adolescence* (1985), and Thomas Doherty's *Teenagers and Teenpics* (1988).

While Considine's book gives a general history of what has been produced about adolescents since the 1930s, he does not do a genre study of teen films. He looks at the changing face of adolescence and its relationship to adulthood, the family, and society over a period of 50 years. He divides his book thematically into chapters that look at the family, the school, juvenile delinquency and sexuality. He therefore includes films that dealt with young characters but were not marketed for teenagers, such as *Mildred Pierce* and *Ordinary People*. In this way he is able to address the changing concerns of adolescence that have been represented in the history of film. By focussing on general themes rather than specific narrative conventions, Considine's analysis does not provide the terrain for a study of teen films as a specific genre.

McGee and Robertson's book *The J.D. Films* is on films about juvenile delinquents that were produced mainly in the 1950s and early 60s. They do include films from the 1970s, but in their view the heyday for J.D. films has passed—or at least significantly altered—with the change in the political climate. Doherty's work also centers on the 1950s; he has focused not so much on the content of teen films as on the historical (economic) context that created the "teenpic."



The task I set for myself in examining teen films was to watch a hundred films that had teenagers as main characters and appeared to be presented as teen films in the video store. The industry has been so successful in creating this genre that I could tell, just by looking at the covers and reading the small blurbs, which films were directed towards adolescents. The covers offer ("illicit") sex, women in skimpy clothing, romance, parties, fraternity hijinks, "spring break" vacations; or teen stars (Molly Ringwald, Andrew McCarthy, Rob Lowe, Judd Nelson, Ally Sheedy, Anthony Michael Hall, etc.). Relying for the most part on videos narrowed my research to films produced primarily in the 1980s in the United States. I was able to find a few of the "Beach" and "Gidget" movies; I also watched some of the films that have become "classics," such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and *Splendor in the Grass* (1960). The films began to fall into sub-genres: sex comedies (*Porky's*); romances (*Sixteen Candles*); juvenile delinquent pics (*The Warriors*); nostalgias (*American Graffiti*). (see Appendix C for a complete breakdown). Because of my interest in sexual representation, my focus quickly moved toward the sex comedies and the romances.

Ultimately my approach is quite different from the books I consulted on the "teenpic." McGee and Robertson, Considine, and Doherty all discuss the historical context affecting the production and themes that evolved at particular time periods. They do not evaluate the implications of the statements that are made through the medium; they do not discuss the power involved in representation. Although Considine shares my concern that the films' depictions of sexuality can have negative effects on an audience that lacks the knowledge and experience to evaluate what is being shown, he does not discuss what he means by "negative effects." He notes that it is important for teen films to reflect "reality," but does not say what this "reality" is, nor whose definition of "reality" will be the test.

In approaching the genre, I was less interested in why it depicted certain themes than in looking at the ideas and images in the context of the kind of experiences girls and boys actually have. The "reality" to which I compare them to is based on my experience, the experiences of my friends, and sociological studies on adolescence. If a film viewing involves an interaction between a text and an audience member, I wanted to see what happened to the text when it was juxtaposed with the possible experiences of viewers.

Not surprisingly, the aspects of the teen film that stand out for me are related to identity and the body. In defining teen films in the manner that I do, I may overlook aspects that other genre critics would find essential. I do not propose this to be an exhaustive look at the genre. The main characteristics I have chosen to discuss are those that affect the relationship of the viewer to the text. As such, they may also be applied to other genres. This need not detract from their usefulness in creating a picture of teen films.

#### The Idea of the Teen Audience

The teen audience as conceived by the American movie industry is both divided and homogeneous. The industry divides this audience into girls and boys, since there are "girls' films" and "boys' films." At the same time the industry projects an image of homogeneity because the characters are virtually all middle class, white, heterosexual and "beautiful." Whether or not the industry perceives its audience to be white, middle class, heterosexual and beautiful, it expects the teen audience to expect to see this as a standard of normalcy. And, as I will discuss in the chapters to follow, the gender division is actually part of a larger whole that fits into a view of "normalcy" that impedes any challenge to the values of the status quo.

### Basic Characteristics

When the industry and critics talk about "girls' films" and "boys' films," they are referring, in general, to two types of narratives. In one type, a male and female character are at first apart and finally come together; in the other, one or more teenagers are in conflict with some form of authority (other fraternities, gangs, teachers, parents, bully) and they succeed in overthrowing or humiliating the restrictive force. The films centered around a relationship between a girl and boy ("romance") are called "girls' films," while the films centered around a conflict between youth and some form of authority ("action," "adventure") are called "boys' films."<sup>1</sup> These categories overlap (romance and conflict with authority can be found in both), but the distinction between boys' films and girls' films reveals a fundamental assumption held by our society (in general) about the division between the sexes during adolescence. Two sub-genres have evolved in the 1980s as a result of the division; sub-genres directly related to concepts of girls' and boys' sexuality: the romance (for girls) and the sex comedy (for boys). This is the main characteristic of teen films that I will elaborate on in the chapters dealing with specific films. However, the overall appearance of the teen films is worth discussing because the aspects I enumerate below are ultimately interconnected.

### Heterosexuality is the Only Sexuality

Teen films never have characters who are lesbian or gay.<sup>2</sup> The terms "fag" and "lesbian" are used in the films as insults. One of the reasons that homosexuality and lesbianism are so taboo in adolescent society is that they interfere with the rigid division of sex roles. Many of the traits that society considers to be "natural" sexual differences are held in place by violent threats against the female body and psyche, and against other individuals who disturb the division of sexual behaviour (lesbians and gays, "feminine" boys/men and "masculine"

girls/women, for examples). Although I am focusing on how girls are defined and confined sexually, lesbianism and homosexuality are aspects of human sexuality that can disturb sexual difference. Homosexual men and lesbian women are not considered "real" men and women. They bend the behaviour expected of their gender in more senses than in their choice of sexual partner. Children and teenagers are accused of being "fags" or "dykes" when they step outside the boundaries of behaviour determined as socially acceptable for their sex—regardless of whether or not they appear interested in members of their own sex. A sensitive boy and an aggressive girl are suspect because they display character traits out of sync with the assumptions society holds about their gender. It is this display that immediately puts their sexual preference into question. In other words, when individuals "gender bend," they threaten the binary opposition that is implied by the heterosexual dyad. If one person in the couple behaves one way, it is assumed that her or his partner will behave in the opposite way. If the boy is perceived as sensitive, the assumption is that he must be looking for his opposite, who can only be a man. In this world-view, sexual difference is actually sexual opposition. There is no room for positive images of lesbians and homosexuals because these upset the division of power assumed to exist in all sexual relations. Although this is not the only reason homosexuality and lesbianism are taboo in teenage society, it is clear that when societies base differences of gender on sexual relations poised in opposition, there is no room for a woman to be with a woman, or a man to be with a man. Who would get on top?

There are "sensitive" male characters in teen films. In my fifth chapter I discuss the role they play in some of the teen romances. Their masculinity, however, is never in doubt. Lloyd (*Say Anything*) is a kickboxer; Johnny (*Reckless*) is a football player, rides a motorcycle, and is angry and aggressive; Jon Cryer's characters in *Hiding Out* and *Morgan Stewart is Coming Home* are assertive heroes. If the male characters in the sex comedies are at all "wimpy," by

the end of the film they prove their "manliness." (Although Gary in *The Last American Virgin* is very sensitive, this is his downfall; ultimately he is a loser because he is not macho enough.) Conversely, there are no "butch" female characters in the teen films with the exception of Miss Balbricker in *Porky's*. Miss Balbricker is unattractive, sexually repressed, unbalanced, and clearly an enemy to "the gang." The one female character who is a tomboy, Watts in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, is ultimately feminized. (see Chapter V).

Just as there is only one kind of sexuality apparent among teenage characters, only one race is visible.

### The Comforting Illusion of Options

It is rare to find mainstream films on videotape in the large video stores that have people of color in their casts. Films are being produced specifically for black and Asian audiences (you can find them in small ethnic grocery stores, for example), but until recently with the release of *House Party* (1990) and *Boyz in the Hood* (1991), films with Black characters, these films were not widely distributed in video stores, let alone in theatres. Whether or not blacks or other people of color can identify with the teenagers on the screen, their experience of the long (and continuing) history of racism will never be acknowledged in our society as long as white people's experience predominates in our cultural discourse. Class is a slightly different issue because class conflict quite often plays a role in teen films. (As in *Breaking Away*, or *Dirty Dancing*).

One of the recurring themes in teen films is the conflict between youth and authority. The face of authority surfaces under various guises (although rarely male over female), and one of the most common is that of the rich kids lording over the "poor" kids. The significance of this portrayal of conflict is that people of color in North American society are often those who are ghettoized by poverty (as immigrants, or as targets of a racism that is built into the

economic system) and yet the films, by avoiding all racial conflict, use "poor" whites in the conflict between rich and poor. I put "poor" in quotation marks because the examples of what some filmmakers present as "poor" I would call "lower middle class." *Pretty in Pink* is the best example of this phenomenon, where we can find one "poor" girl driving her own sports car.

There is often an assumption of togetherness or sameness in the films; a sharing of values and a way of looking at the world; a presupposition that what is represented about teenagers is capable of speaking across barriers ("what barriers?", they seem to say) of sex, race and class, thus blurring these differences, rendering them negligible, and serving to naturalize them so that they can be taken for granted. This attitude was highlighted in a comment made by the male lead in a film (now a t.v. series) called *Beverly Hills 90210*. It is a show about the children of the very very rich, and about peer pressure to compete monetarily (who can drive the most expensive cars). In an interview for "Entertainment Tonight" the actor commented that the film is good because the teenage characters have problems "just like" teenagers from anywhere else. This idea makes it more difficult to bring out the problems inherent in a classist (racist, sexist, heterosexist, ageist) society: everyone being "equal," there is no need to address the violence within the structure. In the films about class conflict, the poor guys win, thereby proving their "equality"; in the films about love between rich and poor, the love conquers all. In both these cases, obstacles of class are overcome, thus promoting the idea that everything is possible as long as we try.

Heterosexual, white, middle class (or able to become self-made girls and boys); these characters even look good. Many, in fact, look "great."

#### Teen Characters Do Not Have Pimples

Teenage characters are all "beautiful." They have no pimples, they are not fat, their teeth are straight. They are not handicapped or disabled in any way. They do have more wrinkles

than they should because the actors and actresses are usually too old to be teenagers—but they are almost always recognizably "attractive" by North American standards. This is less true for male characters; but you will not find a teen film that does not have a female character who is at least "pretty." This rule is particularly noticeable when the teen films are compared to the Canadian t.v. series *Degrassi Junior High* or *Degrassi High*, where actual high school students were chosen to portray teenagers. They look different. Their "attractiveness" takes on a different shape. Again this uniformity belongs to the presentation of a world where everyone looks the same, lives the same way, has the same view of the world. Although it may be worthwhile to try to emphasize what people share in common, rather than denigrating differences, the result of this levelling out in the teen films is that people are erased.

Thus far I have been discussing the surface of the teen film, positing the idea that part of what makes it generic is at the level of the characters who are presented with the same faces and backgrounds. If we step into the viewing experience itself, another characteristic of teen films can be discerned. At this second level, we move further into the realm of "expectation and hypothesis" (presented by Stephen Neale at the beginning of this chapter).

#### The Expectation of Pleasure

Part of the pleasure involved in watching teen films comes from their "affectivity." They belong to the type of entertainment that Richard Dyer describes in his articles "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms" (1985) and "Entertainment and Utopia" (1985b). He writes that

Two of the taken-for-granted descriptions of entertainment, as 'escape' and as 'wish-fulfillment', point to its central thrust, namely, utopianism. Entertainment offers the image of 'something better' to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide ... entertainment does not, however, present models of utopian worlds ... Rather the utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies. It presents, head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized. It thus works at the level of sensibility, by which I mean an effective

code that is characteristic of, and largely specific to, a given mode of cultural production. (1985b:222)

Teen films operate in the same way that Dyer has described the genre of what he terms "porn." (1985:27) He writes that porn, like other genres such as the thriller and melodrama, "is supposed to have an effect that is registered in the spectator's body--s/he weeps, gets goose bumps, rolls about laughing, comes." (1985:27) Both sex comedies and romances structure their narratives around moments that appeal to the audience at the level of "feelings." Teen films are expected to affect a viewer in the body, in a visceral/emotional sense.

This affectivity, or "effective code," ties into the sameness of teen films. Because they create feelings rather than provoke questions, what they present is more easily accepted by viewers—providing, of course, that the feelings are more pleasurable than discomforting.<sup>3</sup> What is likely to occur, however, if the feelings provoked are discomforting, is that a viewer will simply not go to see "that type" of film again. This may explain why the industry is able to talk about gendered films. In teen films, one of the most common elements used for "affect" is the naked or semi-clad female body. But is it the so-called boys' films, in particular, that circulate the exposure of the female body throughout their narratives.

### The Hypothesis

Stephen Neale uses the word "hypothesis" to describe what viewers do when they watch a film that belongs to a particular genre. Before a viewer sees a film, s/he brings with her/him notions about what "why particular events and actions are taking place, why the characters are dressed the way they are, why they look, speak and behave the way they do, and so on." (Neale, 1990:46) In my discussions of the films, it is the use of the female body that I find intriguing. It is used for "effect/affect," but it must also be "hypothesized" by both male and



female viewers such that whatever meaning it possesses by its very use as a tool for effect is rendered acceptable or normal.

When I write about "girls'" or "boys'" films I am not saying that I believe the film audience is necessarily divided along gender. Although the industry and critics generally assume that some films are of interest primarily to girls, while others are marketed for and geared to a male audience, it must be remembered that girls and boys see both types of films and may enjoy or dislike some from both categories.<sup>4</sup> There is no guarantee that all boys will like or identify with what we call "boys' films." This is equally true of "girls' films." One result of emphasizing the fact that girls *tend to* watch certain types of films while boys *tend to* watch others is that this boundary is then taken as a given, and both sexes are discouraged from seeing (and enjoying) what the other sex enjoys. As far as I know the industry bases its data on theatre-going audiences and not video rentals or television, which might also yield different results because these viewing practices take place in private.

Another point relating to the sexual division of teen films is that there are many that are advertised to appeal to both sexes. It is teenage boys who are viewed as the prime target, however, which may explain the proliferation of sex comedies. Indeed, the sex comedy is the highest rental teen film at the box office. (I.e. many theaters rent sex comedies because they expect to draw large crowds). That it is teenage boys who are the prime influence in what is produced may also explain why the female body is so liberally used for "effect/affect" in teen films. The industry assumes teenage boys want to see the female body.

At the outset, teen films present us with the invasion of female body as a given. It is taken for granted by the camera that women's bodies should be displayed. In fact it is built into the script: many producers of teen films require that directors include a quota of "skin scenes." This does not mean the skin of male bodies; it means shots of women's bodies. In

all the films I watched, I noted seeing only two films that showed nude male bodies. [*Porky's* (1982) and *Reckless* (1984)] Female breasts are frequently shown, sometimes a woman's/girl's full body with her pubic hair somehow obscured.

Although the romances do not use the female body to the same extent as the sex comedies, it is not unusual for shots of girls' breasts to be included. When Martha Coolidge was asked to direct *Valley Girl* (1983), it was stipulated that she have four scenes that showed the female body. (Coolidge, 1984) *Valley Girl* is a romance. John Hughes' films, as well, will sometimes have a shot of a woman's body, clothed or unclothed, as a character (sometimes female) looks at a female character's breasts or crotch.

In the chapters that follow I take this characteristic of teen films—the use of the female body—and discuss how it is used in sex comedies and romances. I trace the use of the female body through the "boys' films" and link them to the way John Hughes deals with female characters' experiences in his romances. Like the sex comedies, John Hughes films have become synonymous with the teen film of the 1980s. This writer/producer/director is known not only for the incredible amount of work he has generated but for the sustained box office success he has maintained for the past seven years (beginning in 1984 with *Sixteen Candles*). Although not all his films have been successful (and not all his successes are teen films, for instance 1990's *Home Alone*) he has nonetheless received attention for his efforts. (see Appendix D for a filmography).

John Hughes' films could be divided into "girls' films" and "boys' films," into those that focus more on romance and those that are more action-oriented; however, his work has elements that appear to try to appeal to both sexes. I focus only on three of his "girls' films": *Sixteen Candles*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Some Kind of Wonderful*. With the sex comedies I try to expose the artificiality of the images; with John Hughes' work I attempt to reveal the oddness

in his choice of events that occur to the female body. In both cases I discuss the implications for female viewers, for female adolescents growing up in North American society.

In the romances, another kind of affect is employed to entice its viewers. These films use what Cora Kaplan called a "process of seduction." (quoted in Ang, 1988) This is quite different from the titillating images found in the sex comedies, but the romances do not question the use of the female body. They offer a "feminine" pleasure that fits quite conveniently with their "masculine" counterparts in the sex comedies.

Ultimately I argue that most teen films offer only one world-view, one that pretends there are no problems of race, class, or sex. In this world-view, the female body is a pawn.

Because teenagers are so frequently portrayed in the same ways, it may be difficult to see how limited the positions actually are. Also, because the scenes and narratives are structured to evoke pleasurable responses in viewers, it is possible to overlook aspects that on closer examination are disquieting. Because the films in general offer "entertainment and utopia," feelings supposed to titillate or comfort, the images may bracket off dissenting views or contradictory knowledge by appealing to a level of knowledge that is already coded as "normal" from living in a racist, sexist, heterosexist society. Uncomfortable feelings may simply be bypassed in a process of adapting to live without conflict.

As we shall in the next chapter, *Porky's* in particular is a film that offers a vision of "community." The promotion of a myth of belonging serves to weed out those who have views that do not correspond. By presenting certain values and attitudes as normal and acceptable, opposing views are rendered abnormal.

### Chapter III Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> When I write about "action" or "adventure" films, I distinguish them from the genre of "action/adventure" unless I specifically state that they belong more to that genre than the genre of teen. For example, the sex comedies (*Animal House*, *Porky's*) have elements of

action/adventure, but they are not primarily action films. On the other hand, *Top Gun* and the *Back to the Future* films I consider to belong to the genre of action/adventure.

<sup>2</sup> There is a lesbian character in *Secret Places*. She turns to a heterosexual relationship by the end of the film.

<sup>3</sup> One of the things I noticed as I watched some films more than once was that the repetition affected the way they were experienced. I was able to isolate the parts I liked and enlarge them so that they overshadowed the parts that jarred. I still noted the problems, but they did not diminish the pleasure. The familiarity of the moments I did like enhanced the moment of viewing.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, all the adults I have met who seek out teen films for entertainment (usually on video or t.v.) enjoy the films that are called "girls' films."

## CHAPTER IV

### WHOSE DESIRE IS WHOSE? MALE SEXUALITY AND THE SEX COMEDIES

Whereas increased sexual drive is a universal physiological concomitant of adolescence, the forms that it takes and the manner in which it is expressed vary, depending on the sex of the adolescent and on a wide variety of psychological and cultural forces. There is little question that for most boys the rapid increase in sexual drive that accompanies adolescence is difficult, if not impossible, to deny. In the adolescent male this drive is "imperious and biologically specific ... He must confront [it] directly, consciously, find within himself the means of obtaining sexual discharge without excessive guilt, and means of control without crippling inhibitions." In contrast, among girls sexual drive is likely to be more diffuse and ambiguous.<sup>1</sup>

#### Bigger Is Not Necessarily Better: Why Does the Penis Always Come First?

Boys' sexuality is considered more pressing an issue than girls' in the discourse on adolescent sexual development. In all the "talk" about sex, the phallus is always much larger than the clitoris. When the clitoris is discussed in sociological discourse it is usually to point out that some girls are not even aware of its existence (Lees 1986; Ussher 1989). In general, the way that boys' sexuality is presented in the socio-medico discourse seemed to stress the same points: that the erect penis is a "driving force" in boys' lives, and that boys frequently masturbate. The frequency of boys' masturbation is always compared to the frequency of girls', and girls, in contrast, apparently do not masturbate very much during adolescence. (Conger 1973; Herold 1984; Rogers 1977)<sup>2</sup> Girls are also compared to boys in their relative interest in sex, and are found to be more interested in "romance" than sexual activity. Reading about boys' and girls' sexuality can create the impression that the world abounds with large (such a driving force!) erect penises just barely hidden from sight; that boys are constantly thinking about sex, while girls are fantasizing about candlelight dinners and a marriage proposal.

This preoccupation with erect penises is also apparent in the teen films, which tend to recreate the division described above between girls' and boys' sexuality. As I will elaborate, films marketed for boys show male characters interested in getting laid ("seeking discharge") and it does not matter all that much with whom they have sex as long as their partner is female. Films for girls, on the other hand, show girls involved in mainly romantic relationships. The difference is striking: in films for boys, boys are again and again depicted trying to find girls willing to have sexual relations with them. When the male characters do find the girls, they (the boys) are not interested in the "relationship" aspect of the encounter, nor do they appear at all concerned with how the female body or mind actually feels before or during sex. There seems to be a general lack of interest in what girls experience (on the part of both the male characters and the filmmakers). Sex is shown to be very straightforward (once you get it). However, while male sexuality is depicted as one-dimensional, severely limited by a simplistic vision of arousal and pleasure centered on the penis and its need for "a cunt to fuck," the female body is presented as a "natural" and accepted site upon which a variety of action occurs.

Although the attraction the teen romance films depict is usually a form of lust<sup>3</sup>, the films downplay the sexual element and create an aura of magic and passion that is at once unique (the stories present the coupling as if it is something special and apart from other relationships) and ordinary (the romances are recognizable; in essence they are all the same).

The romances do not depict first intercourse.<sup>4</sup> If they include sexual acts, they refer only to vaginal intercourse (rather than cunnilingus, fellatio, mutual masturbation or anal intercourse—this emphasis on intercourse gives the penis a primary role, again reinforcing the status of the male organ), but not as if the intercourse is a sexual debut for either partner. First intercourse is often present in the sex comedies. However, while sexual

intercourse is apparent in some of the romance films, they do not depict sexual initiation. The romances avoid touching upon anything that could hint at sexual awkwardness (such as contraception, impotence, nervousness, inability to reach orgasm, menstruation, etc.). This further mythologizes the notion that romantic involvements are above the messy aspects of human sexuality. The romantic dyad seems to be immune to sexual problems. If there are problems with the couple, they are generally due to outside forces such as parents or other friends (as in *Say Anything* or *Pretty in Pink*).

My purpose in attempting to link experience to representation is to point out the contradictions and gaps between how teen films portray adolescent sexuality and how sexuality is actually experienced by girls in our society. In interviews with and studies on girls a silence surrounding female sexual pleasure clearly exists.<sup>5</sup> Too many girls do not masturbate; too many girls do not know they have a clitoris; too many girls are not interested in sex and are encouraged to sublimate their sexual desires into a desire for romance.<sup>6</sup> Filmmakers follow this trend by creating films for girls that focus primarily on romance. But this is not the whole story: girls are sexually harassed and abused in their daily lives, and our society has only just begun to acknowledge this problem of outstanding proportion. Girls are discouraged from seeking out sexual pleasure on two levels. They are impeded from learning about their bodies by the assumption that girls are not really interested in sex (a myth that serves to teach the girls not to take an interest in their bodily pleasures and to label them "sluttish," "fast" or "nymphomaniacs" if they do). They are also controlled sexually through sexual harassment and rape. Teen films barely touch upon any of these issues, even though sexual development in adolescence can be an incredibly traumatic experience for girls who, in becoming women, learn that their bodies are threatened with rape and humiliation simply

because they are female, and who often have to give up independent and courageous or active behaviour in order to fulfill their "femininity."<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, despite girls' lack of knowledge about their sexual bodies and our society's refusal to encourage discussion about female pleasure or female experience of sexual abuse, the media constantly uses the female body to display certain kinds of sexuality. Although it is male sexuality that is supposed to be so forcefully (omni)present, it is the female body that is used to represent sexual "being"/experience. Teen films (and most mainstream media) appear to have a plethora of things to say about the female body and sexuality, and yet, there is a silence surrounding female pleasure and pain in girls' actual lives. In the following sections I will discuss what some teen films seem to be saying about female sexuality and hypothesize as to why these films may serve to perpetuate ideas that impede articulation of female experience as well as normalize and/or encourage the violence endured by girls and women in their everyday lives.

In order to describe some of the ideas that are written onto girls' bodies in teen films and discuss what the images can mean in the context of girls' lives, I have organized my examples from the films into two groups to show:

- a) the routine invasion of young women's bodies in teen films by the camera or the scenario<sup>8</sup>
- b) how heterosexual romance channels girls into assuming feminine positions that are vulnerable and that may necessitate radical changes in their personality/behaviour

In grouping my examples in this way, I found that the sex comedies contain the best examples of how the young female body is invaded by the camera and the narrative that frames her. After describing in general how the sex comedies use the female body, I look more closely at *Porky's* (1982) and illustrate how the film includes violence against women in its depiction of male sexuality.



In the second group of examples that deal with romance, we also witness a kind of invasion of the female body and psyche. I decided to use John Hughes' work because of the forms of sexual abuse I found in two of his popular works: *Sixteen Candles* (1984) and *The Breakfast Club* (1985). I link them to a third creation, *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987), by positing that each female protagonist accepts destructive (to themselves) conditions in order to be involved in a heterosexual union.

### Teen Sex Comedies<sup>9</sup>

*Animal House* (1978) and *Meatballs* (1979) are screwball comedies that appear to have influenced the development of the 1980s sex comedies. The original *Meatballs* (as opposed to its two sequels) has more to do with relationships, and is less sexist than the sex comedies of the 1980s. *Animal House* was the first of a kind of "gross-out" comedy about fraternity boys going wild, breaking loose. It depicted masculine rebellion and sexual "liberation" (liberation for boys, not girls) characterized by fighting with rival fraternities and the eternal quest for "pussy" or at least the sight of breasts. *Porky's* (1982) and its sequels [*Porky's II: The Next Day* (1983) and *Porky's Revenge* (1985)], and more particularly *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984), [*Revenge of the Nerds II* (1987)] followed *Animal House's* lead, both surpassing the original in their crude sexual jokes and activities. There are many others that fit into this category of teen film: one can tell the type from the titles (to do with partying, surfing, or including a sexual innuendo) and from the video box cover, which usually features a "voluptuous" scantily-clad woman.

Although teen films in general are easily dismissed as "juvenile" or "in bad taste," it is the sex comedies in particular that are referred to when the genre is considered a "lower" form of film. They are frequently identified as "sexist" (by critics or individuals in conversation), but this too dismisses them without further examination. Many people censor

them from their lives; but many also go to see them. Sex comedies are among the highest rental films in the cinemas. In other words, many theaters book them for showings because they are expected to draw audiences. Of the ten that I saw, all were big rentals, and four were box office hits.<sup>10</sup> Because these films are easily dismissed the issues they raise are also shelved. Questions that could be asked are: How are they sexist? What kind of impact might they have? Why is it boys who predominantly like them? Why are they so popular when they make some people feel uneasy or angry? In the following paragraphs I will attempt to address these questions by discussing how male sexuality is depicted in the teen sex comedies and how this depiction relates to the discourse of the female body.

The sex comedies I saw from the 1980s were *Animal House* (1978), *The Last American Virgin* (1982), *Porky's* (1982), *Porky's II: The Next Day* (1983), *Risky Business* (1983)<sup>11</sup>, *Spring Break* (1983), *Class* (1983), *Hardbodies* (1984), *Revenge of the Nerds* (1984), and *A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon* (1988). All these films have their similarities and their differences. They are alike in that in each film, the main protagonists (boys) have very cavalier attitudes towards sex. These boys all want to "get laid" as frequently as possible; sex permeates their conversations, and their stories include various episodes of sexual encounters and voyeurism. Overall, sex is not serious in any of the films, and there is a separation between sex and emotional involvement.

As a genre within a genre, the sex comedies function in specific patterns. The sex occurs within the context of adventures: a series of events that are "fun" (or funny), exciting, and strictly detached from emotional considerations. On the rare occasions when a boy seems to "love" or care for a girl, this aspect is secondary to the action and excitement of some illicit adventure. In *Spring Break*, for example, the "love" scene takes place off-screen and the only way we know it occurred is by the crashing of the waves on the beach. (The sex just for

sex, however, is simulated for our view.) Sex in these films is also usually secondary to the main story, which is often a conflict with authority or a conflict between peers. *Spring Break* deals with a conflict between father and son; *Porky's II: The Next Day* deals with liberals combatting racism; *Revenge of the Nerds* has "nerds" pitted against a group of jocks in fraternity warfare. Sex for boys (according to the film industry) is primarily recreational, and relationships with girls are secondary to other issues such as asserting one's independence and proving that one is "a man."

#### A Real Man is a Slut

The term "slut" reveals the most blatant contradiction in how teenage sexuality is currently defined. In adolescent society, "slut" is used by both girls and boys to control female behaviour. The greatest impediment to girls seeking out sexual encounters is the fear of losing their "reputation."<sup>12</sup> The use of this label has more to do with gender than with sexuality per se, for a girl can be called a slut whether or not she has sex. She may be called a slut if she is seen flirting with boys; if she refuses to sleep with a boy; if she is assertive in other realms of activity.<sup>13</sup> The consequences of this stigma are not negligible: if a girl is deemed to be a slut she is perceived to be "fair game" and anything that happens to her, including getting beaten up or raped, is perceived by both boys and girls as deserved. (Lees 1986; Kostash 1987)

The irony of this stigma is that, although it does not apply to boys, the "ideal" sexual boy, one who is viewed with respect among his peers, is a slut: someone who sleeps with lots of partners without emotional involvement. For boys this behaviour is a sign of virility, expertise and authority. This is why "sleeping around" is the biggest taboo for girls: if a girl takes initiative to sleep with boys she does not love *she is behaving the way a boy is supposed to behave*. The danger is that the most sacred rule of gender difference is broken. The way

that our society defines boys' sexuality as so direct, so "obvious" to the boy himself and to everyone else as well (it is a common sense assumption that boys have a "strong" sex drive—that it is *forceful*) seems to endow boys with a kind of status and sexual authority. Boys' needs come first. Boys must find a way to "discharge" themselves. One never hears about women having to find sexual release; if one does, the woman is oversexed, a nymphomaniac.

Without wanting to oversimplify a phenomenon that is extremely complex, I think that a fundamental locus of power and control has developed from society's ability to enforce gender roles so that only men are able to behave in ways that assert their autonomy and control over their own lives. The power imbalance between the sexes in adolescence is located in a definition of sexuality that allows only boys to seek out sex for the sake of the bodily pleasure it provides. If this were not true, adolescents would not be able to ruin girls' lives with the stigma of "slut."<sup>14</sup>

Given the importance of sexual reputation in adolescence, it is not surprising that the epitome of the "boys' film" would emphasize a gigantic male sexual libido. "Getting laid" is presented as incredibly fulfilling, no matter what or whom it involves—providing it is with someone of the opposite sex.<sup>15</sup> It is also not surprising that the female body is at once desired and disdained. Who can the male characters desire if girls are not allowed to be interested in sex? In the following pages I will discuss how some of the sex comedies use the female body as if "it" is a slut (i.e. anything can be done to it), existing for male pleasure/activity, and also, how the films use the image of the female body to signify male arousal.

### Only Girls are Sexy

Before I focus on specific examples from the sex comedies, I want to discuss how the image of the young female body is routinely used in these films. The display of young women's breasts is commonplace in films generally. It is so common that most people

probably do not think about this display as meaningful in any way. It is so habitual to see "the breasts": the perfect, young, thin, pert and medium-sized breasts, with medium-sized nipples, that the context of their appearance in the structure of the film is not questioned by most viewers. They are slipped in, as usual. Sometimes we are taken off guard, perhaps even shocked, but the sight of such loveliness and the pleasure they can arouse, as they function as a sign, eliciting our pleasurable response, is not conducive to questioning. To try to examine why they appear in the films at all is a difficult task. We can see them, but not talk about them (it is taboo for women to discuss breasts except in circumscribed ways, such as comparing our own to someone else's). (Young 1990) In the city of Montreal (where I live) they appear constantly, everywhere I look. And in one sense, why should they not, since they can be a noticeable part of women's bodies? Yet they are *presented*; they are costumed and staged. Female actresses and models are often photographed to reveal a low neckline with cleavage. Over the past few years I have noticed an increase in the number of bared breasts on the covers of (non-pornographic) magazines.

This obsessive use of images of women's breasts is significant and powerful. They function as signs in at least three ways. Breasts signify women's sexuality, virtually obliterating the vagina and clitoris. Although the penis is concealed, we are aware of its presence. The clitoris is not even present implicitly. The vagina and the clitoris are hidden and the onus of female sexuality is placed on the breasts. (Ussher 1989; Young 1990)<sup>16</sup> The absence of discourse on the clitoris, combined with how women's bodily pleasure is presented in circumscribed ways, is part of how female sexuality is controlled and contained in the media. The display of women's breasts also functions to signify "sexiness," and while it appears as if we are being shown female "desire," "sexiness" has much to do with the displacement of

male desire onto images of the female body.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the display of girls' and women's breasts function, for me, to point out my vulnerability as a female in this society.

The invasion of women's bodies could perhaps be said to begin with the fact that the bodies displayed to signify sexiness are young female bodies. This applies to all kinds of films; we are shown only young-looking breasts, never breasts that sag, never skin that has cellulite or looks "older." We are also shown young female bodies that have breasts and nipples that are neither "too big" nor "too small"; never do we see nipples that are not the same kind of nipples we have always seen. [Where are the pale or hairy nipples? The ones that have areolas the size of raspberries, or that are larger than dollar coins?] We are presented with "models"; one type of model. There is never a variety of bodies to be seen except when the script has specifically chosen a woman with large breasts or a large body to play a nymphomaniac, a prostitute/stripper, a mean bitch or an ugly girl. (For example, Camilla the nymphomaniac in *The Last American Virgin*; the stripper in *The Wild Life*; Miss Balbricker and "Blubber" McNeil in *Porky's*).

Sexiness is therefore typified by thin, young female bodies that are of a specific type. The "invasion" begins on a psychic level: female viewers are invited to measure our own imperfect bodies with these staged models. Whether we do compare ourselves or not may be debatable (there is convincing evidence that most girls/women do), but these are practically the only images we are offered of "the sexy woman."

In the sex comedies (and much mainstream media) the way that the female body is displayed as "sexy" conflates the idea of "sexiness" with the depiction of female arousal. (Coward 1984; Root 1994; Dyer 1987) Female arousal is intimately associated with exhibitionism; there is no need for the clitoris because it is enough for women to display themselves in order to be on the verge of orgasm. We are rarely shown a male character

sexualized for a female character's pleasure in the teen films. And a "sexy" male is never "sexy" because he appears aroused. In the sex comedies the position of the male characters as sexual beings seems to be very "unsexy." Sexiness seems to reside in the girls, who provide pleasure because of their appearance, and who seem to experience pleasure just by appearing. The burden of sexiness upon female bodies has a variety of implications for both male and female viewers.

A typical indication of male arousal will show a woman as if we are watching her from the male character's point of view. The vision we are frequently presented with is a woman who appears aroused—whether or not she is even aware she is being watched, the actress is directed to assume postures that are "sexy," and these "sexy" images are of women who look as if they are ready to have sex. In this formula, the man's desire has changed shape: we know he is aroused because we are looking at a "sexy" woman. The woman's desire has no shape at all: she is always "hot," there is no beginning or end to her arousal; the man just looks at her and she's "sexy."

This situation is best illustrated by the phenomenon of the "Peeping Tom." The sex comedies abound with Peeping Toms, looking into girls' bedrooms while the girls are undressing or undressed. This is an ideal situation to present passive female "sexiness" as inherent to our being female. This moment creates the illusion that the girls are unaware they are being watched, and that we (the audience) are catching girls in their natural state of being. The reality, of course, is that we are watching models or actresses who are getting paid to be told by a director how to move. This action is taken for granted as normal, while from the woman's point of view it would be invasive, an assault. The best example I have seen of this situation is in *Stripes* (which is not a teen film but will have teens as part of its audience). In one scene a general is looking through binoculars into the bathroom where a

woman is soaping herself in the shower. She is running her hands over herself in exaggerated sweeps, while gyrating her body. I think of this example because it is particularly absurd—it is so contrived it verges on parody. This type of example can be found in *Animal House* and *Revenge of the Nerds*. Both have female characters who just happen to be feeling sexy while they are being watched. The girls also enjoy hanging out in the dormitories without their tops on, totally unselfconsciously.<sup>18</sup> In *Animal House*, one young woman begins to caress herself in front of the window where John Belushi's character is looking in. *Revenge of the Nerds* uses a "simulation of reality" effect by having the boys watch girls in a dormitory via hidden camera all night. This gives more credibility to the inclusion of a girl's gyrating masturbation on her bed. The camera is still conveniently able to catch her ass at just the right angle. The shots of semi-clad young women are intercut with the boys gawking gleefully, making jokes about the girls' bodies. The shots are titillating, and the context in which viewers may become aroused is one where the girls we are offered to get off on are ridiculed.

Boys, it would seem (unlike girls, according to popular belief) spend a lot of time seeking out peepholes. The way that these scenes are set up allows the audience to see female characters totally at ease in the exposure (they are at ease because they supposedly do not know they are being watched). But unlike real women, who cannot be depended upon to exhibit themselves sexually (for free), these actresses can be directed to move provocatively, at ease, as if when they are alone, just being themselves (i.e. female), they parade their bodies in sexually provocative ways. This kind of scene is a very convenient device for titillation.

Another type of image of the "sexy" woman shows her addressing her audience. The example I want to use is taken from a recent film by John Hughes: *Career Opportunities*. Although not a sex comedy, this film was marketed in Montreal primarily as a teenage boys'



film while, in an attempt to capture a wider audience, being identified with Hughes' extremely successful 1990 film *Home Alone*, a family type comedy/adventure.

*Career Opportunities* (1991) is about a voluptuous girl named Lorin (played by Jennifer Connelly) who accidentally falls asleep in the dressing room of a department store where the hero of the story is a night janitor. Both characters are locked in the store all night, and get to know each other. The ad for the film is taken from a scene after two lecherous burglars break into the store and hold the couple hostage. Lorin tries to trick the thieves into thinking she has the hots for them in order to gain their trust. To do so she perches on a mechanical horse and rides it provocatively.

The most striking aspect of the ads for this film was the image of Jennifer Connelly's breasts. Connelly is wearing a tight white tank top and has breasts that are surprisingly large for the fashion of the 1980s. [It may be, as Young (1990) suggests, that we are witnessing a new trend in the 1990s]. Connelly is framed by the camera so that her breasts seem to take up three quarters of the shot. It is impossible to not notice them: almost every frame features her body so that the size and shape of her breasts are in the center of each shot. Her breasts remind me of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* photographs, and she is posed in a similar way, riding the mechanical horse. We cannot see the horse in each shot so she is moving up and down, looking into the camera with her breasts pushed forward with an inviting look on her face—in effect, simulating intercourse.

The young woman presents herself to the burglars within the film, but because we are placed in the viewpoint of the burglars, she presents herself to us. By looking into our eyes (the camera) and flirting with us, she invites us to ogle her body, and she appears to be sexually aroused by the fact that we are looking at her. We are invited to believe her

presentation of her sexual desire. Because we (may) respond physically, the line between fantasy and "reality" can be blurred.

These two types of images, the one that shows girls who appear aroused when they are unaware they are watched, and the other that shows girls aware of their audience, are elements of a sexuality that involves arousing and titillating someone else; putting on a show of "sexiness" or sexual desire for an audience. The girls signify that now is the time for the man (male character, male viewer) to get an erection. Part of the power of this image resides in the woman being already aroused. The male character does not have to do anything to arouse her. Intercourse can therefore be depicted in films as being very simple: the man sticks his penis in the woman's already wet vagina and humps her. She moans in ecstasy, and they have a simultaneous orgasm. This is the most common scene of intercourse I have found in mainstream films. Not only do films (in general) not include the use of contraception in their depictions, (even with widespread knowledge of AIDS), the difficulty that many women have achieving orgasm through missionary sex is completely bypassed. Statistically, many women find it easier to achieve orgasm when they are on top (most films I have seen enacting sex have the women on the bottom); and many women require manual stimulation of their clitoris. (Hite, 1976) Despite all these factors, the media implies that the ultimate of female pleasure resides in the act of exhibition (and missionary sex).

The implication that desire and pleasure are very simple aspects of female sexuality finds a counterpart in the way female characters are depicted as voluntarily exhibiting their bodies. In *Spring Break* the two main characters attend "what makes America great": a wet t-shirt contest. Everyone is having a wonderful time. The girls laugh and sway their bodies, screeching when the cold water is poured over their chests, but reveling in this strange ritual. They like it so much, in fact, that they eventually take off their t-shirts. As if to show that

it is not only the "contestants" who like showing their breasts, one girl in the audience also removes her top while sitting on a boy's shoulders swaying to the music.

The idea that baring one's breasts is fun and easy is constantly presented in the media images of women who do display their breasts. The ease with which Madonna (or actresses such as Kim Basinger) flaunts her breasts; and the way that models in magazines appear self-confident, relaxed, and even defiant, gives this act a subversive "value," while it is instead the same old posture women have always been directed to assume. It is as if this embodiment is liberation simply because women are consenting, choosing, and even enjoying their exploitation. The economic relationship is hidden beneath the myth that women are now liberated because they are choosing to display themselves. In an interview on "Entertainment Tonight," (televised in winter 1991) a stripper from the Italian game show "Colpo Grosso" said that "it's fun" to take off one's clothes. This obscures the fact that taking off one's clothes in the media is a big business. The strippers (and Madonna) are not exhibiting their bodies for free. The presentation of women who assert they are liberated because they can take off their clothes in front of a camera also negates the reality of the many women who would not feel at all comfortable for a variety of reasons (not the least of which because they feel inadequate about their bodies) disrobing in public and reduces all opposing views to a form of prudishness: an inability to have a "good time," a sexual repression, a "hang-up."

In *The Last American Virgin*, there is an uncomfortable edge to this "liberation." One girl, who seems filled with "joie de vivre" as she gallops naked into the living room (galloping, I assume, so we see her breasts bouncing) is presented as a "bimbo." Earlier, the dialogue has positioned her as "one of those girls" who says "no" when she really means "yes." She is also a "dupe": when she tells her partner she is not on the pill, he responds: "Neither am I," and

they continue to have sex. This character is common—sexiness in the media has been equated with lack of brains, at least since Marilyn Monroe, and has not disappeared with Madonna's "cunning" appropriation of Monroe's image.

Another illustration of breast baring, where a girl is not so thrilled to have her breasts revealed, is not only invasive, it is designed to ridicule her character. In *Class*, during a tea party, the main character somehow manages to "accidentally" rip the front of a pompous girl's shirt. "Naturally" she just happens not to be wearing a bra, and she does not notice her shirt opening just long enough so that we can all get a lovely view of her lovely breasts. This scenario is convenient, slick, and degrading. Everyone in the scene laughs hysterically at her being "put in her place." When juxtaposed against the girls in the other films, she is, in contrast, too talkative, too uptight, and thus, unsexy. She is punished by being forced to show her breasts. Displaying the female body is not therefore just a question of who is liberated sexually, it can also be used to embarrass or humiliate women who are viewed as not behaving "properly." Audience members do not have to acknowledge this effect, however, because the display is intended for our titillation. The film does not position us to sympathize with either the bimbo or the pompous girl. We do not care about them, and therefore (by implication) it does not matter what happens to them.

The behaviour and attitudes of male characters in *Revenge of the Nerds* and *Class* are disturbing to watch, not only because of how they talk about girls and the female body, but because their attitudes are then used by the filmmakers as excuses to display actresses bodies in derogatory and invasive ways. Male characters' fantasies are fulfilled while the viewer of the film is simultaneously placed in the position of the character who has such fantasies. When the "pompous" girl's breasts are revealed in *Class*, the girl is exposed not only to the view of the characters, but to our view. A similar scene also occurs in *Revenge of the Nerds*

when the nerds spend all night watching the girls via hidden cameras. We too get "revenge" on the girls. As viewers we are offered the space in which to judge the image of these women. They are offered for our titillation, but also for our contempt, because that is how the film is narrated: from the point of view of adolescent boys (played by adult men) who view women in terms of the size of their "tits" and the shape of their "ass," in terms of how much they can get from them, how much they can dupe them into "putting out."

I find myself in a peculiar position vis-a-vis the sex comedies. I do not fit into their intended audience; I also derive more discomfort than pleasure in watching them. I can only guess at their appeal. Like pornography, sex comedies are viewed/experienced beyond their target audience. And like pornography supposedly "for men," some women or girls, even if experiencing discomfort, will be titillated by the sexualized images found in the sex comedies.<sup>19</sup> I do not have the space to detail the complexity of the possible responses that women have towards the images presented to arouse men. It is perhaps useful, however, to note that my own general response to images of "sexy women" is characterized by both arousal and contempt. In trying to understand the misogyny inherent in my response I must conclude that I have learned to associate sexualized women with beings I do not respect. This element is often present in my reaction even when there is a pleasurable physical response.

This said, it must also be noted that daily negotiations with real women, with women I find "sexy" and whom I respect, problematizes the associations with the images of "sexy women." The effects of "pornography for men" on women viewers should neither be overestimated nor underestimated; they should, however, be recognized as potentially damaging to both women and men—not because everyone necessarily reacts the way I do but because the potential is there; the images offer such associations. It must also be remembered that any text including sexualized women is part of a continuum: one does not

exist in isolation from all the others—particularly those that belong to the same genre. The images will be understood in connection with the rest. It is in this context that *Porky's* should be placed.

### Porky's: Male Sexuality?

Unlike most mainstream films and most of the other sex comedies, *Porky's* does not use "sexy women" to indicate male arousal. Male desire is present in the form of the main character, Pee-wee, who vocalizes his horniness in a continual tirade about how he needs to get laid. Female characters, however, are shown naked; a stripper reveals her breasts to Pee-wee (who asserts, giggling, "That broad is hot, boy is she hot"); and female arousal and pleasure is caricatured by a gym teacher who is tricked into having sex and then ridiculed behind her back. Because the story takes place in the 1950s and part of the action occurs in the gym, female characters parade around with pointy breasts in tight shirts and very short shorts.

Male sexuality as epitomized by Pee-wee, combined with the cavalier way that female characters are acted upon and portrayed as completely accepting of whatever happens to them (the girls find all the jokes very funny and are not at all threatened when they catch the boys watching them in the shower), presents some of the most disturbing myths about male desire and pleasure as natural, acceptable, and normal.

*Porky's* is a "classic" within the genre of teen films. It is widely available in video stores and is known by most people my age and slightly younger, at least by reputation or as a title if they have not actually seen it. When it was released, it found an audience among teens and the "over-thirty crowd." Two reviews after the film's release found it to be quite benign:

*Porky's*, smutty as it is, has a good-natured streak. The movie's endless dirty jokes are not really at anyone's expense, and its few elements of nastiness are

wildly out of place. The ambiance is that of a fraternity hazing in which nobody gets hurt. (Maslin, 1982)

Another critic commented that the film "isn't vulgar or rude or funny enough to provoke strong reactions pro or con." (Canby, 1982) While the reviewer may have felt no strong reaction, he noted that his audience responded with foot-stomping and explosive guffaws.

In spite of that audience's enthusiasm, the tenor of the film is even and flat as it presents events as everyday occurrences. Unlike action adventures, the action in *Porky's* does not mount to great heights of excitement. Each scene is pervaded with a quality of banality. It is strung together by a series of practical jokes that characters play on each other. *Porky's* appears to offer its viewers a "good laugh"; and judging from the response of Vincent Canby's audience, it succeeded. Yet underlying its "good-natured" facade, this film presents a humour rife with violence towards women.

*Porky's* takes place in 1954. Like many nostalgia films, it harks back to some mythical era when life was simple(r). Even problems are simple, with good guys and bad guys clearly identified. The film opens with the main character, Peewee, waking up and measuring the size of his erection. He does this every morning. His mother opens the door to his room and as he tries to hide his penis he hurts himself. This "joke" paves the way for an endless series of jokes that the boys play on each other. They will often go to great lengths (even paying people) in order to set up their friends. There is no apparent malice; everything is presented as "good clean fun."

The film's central story begins with Peewee's desperate need to get laid. After a few unsuccessful attempts, the boys try to gain access to some prostitutes who work at *Porky's*, a stripclub in the next county. Porky takes the boys' money and then sends them into the water through a trap door. While the rest of the boys decide to forget about Porky, Mickey vows revenge. As the film continues with its jokes, off-screen Mickey returns again and again

to Porky's, only to be beaten up. When he returns one night severely hurt, the gang decides they have to devise a successful plan of revenge.

Interestingly for a teen film, the teenagers in *Porky's* are united. The only tension among these teenage characters is that which exists between Tim, a racist, and Brian, a Jew. This tension is neatly resolved as Tim realizes Brian is one of the gang (just like them). Tim's racism is attributed to an evil father, and when he finally rejects his father it is implied that he also disposes of his racism.

Although the film ostensibly deals with anti-semitism, it is peppered with racial slurs about blacks. The one black we see has been paid ten dollars to play the part of a murderous jealous boyfriend in a joke set up by the boys. The only thing we know about him is that he agrees to do so even though he does not understand what Tommy was talking about (i.e. he is stupid). The film appears to find it necessary to include racists because it takes place in Florida in the 1950s. It excuses the racism by having characters call each other "rednecks." Whatever the motivation behind the filmmaker's use of racism, its depiction is highly problematic. Conveniently, however, the film does not feel it necessary to fit its attitudes about girls' sexuality into a repressive 1950s context: the girls are all very comfortable with all kinds of sexual jokes and activities.

In keeping with a narrative that is paced by jokes, sexuality is presented as one more thing to laugh about. There is no soft core in *Porky's*. Male genitals are made fun of, as is obsession with size. Girls play jokes on boys. One male character, having put his penis through a peephole to the girls' shower, is caught in the clutches of the evil Miss Balbricker. (This "joke" is caused by Tommy's male friends who do not warn him of her approach.) Some interpretations of this film would no doubt argue that the female characters are given as



much freedom to make fun of boys as vice versa. Sexual violence, however, appears in at least two places to unsettle the idea of equal opportunity jokes.<sup>30</sup>

One of the characters who is set up for a joke is a gym teacher named Miss Honeywell. The only intercourse we actually witness in *Porky's* occurs in order to show us why Miss Honeywell is known as "Lassie" behind her back. Honeywell "goes wild" at the smell of boys' sweaty gym clothes, so the coach takes her to the equipment room where the boys' dirty laundry is hanging. Honeywell grabs him and he begins to hump her missionary style in a grotesque motion that fits the descriptions conjured up by the words "porking," "banging," and "humping." She is nicknamed "Lassie" because she howls like a dog during this repulsive act; everyone in the gym can hear her and they all laugh at her. The situation is even more disturbing when the man stuffs a sock in her mouth to quiet her. How often have I heard about a rape victim having something stuffed in her mouth?

The scene with "Lassie" is a disturbing echo of reality. For years the media has used women's sexual voices in a way that could make women uncomfortable. Human beings do make noises of pleasure, but in the context of most media situations, it is the woman's voice (like her body) that is used, and the above-mentioned scene mocks women's vocalization of pleasure. Jokes exaggerate reality; this scene takes what women do, and by enlarging it, says: "doesn't she sound stupid? What a nymphomaniac!" Meanwhile, the male character/viewer exacts his pleasure, at her expense. In effect the male character's part is virtually obscured as everyone focusses on the female. If he adds any grunts of pleasure, they are hidden by our mocking laughter.

This scene presents female pleasure as very simple: once a woman is turned on all that is necessary is for the man to bang away. Miss Honeywell is the ideal partner: as her last name suggests: deep down she is dripping with desire. Her lying about her virginity ("you

know I don't go all the way") is grossly contradicted by her alter ego: underneath her protestations lurks a nymphomaniac.

Miss Honeywell is actually a dupe. As the only female character who is "hot," she is tricked into having sex and exposing her pleasure. In a conversation between two male gym teachers, it is revealed that she has been pretending to be a virgin (to the man who eventually has sex with her). The older coach assures the other that the way into her pants is to take her up to the laundry room. This implies that her desire to have sex is not of her own will but rather the effect of an "aphrodisiac" that turns her into a wild animal. Honeywell's complete lack of concern about exposing her sexuality to everyone in the gym suggests an obliviousness to the fact that she is the target of humour. Like "Little Annie Fannie," the cartoon character in the *Playboys* I remember from my childhood, who is always the last to know that she has lost her top (and exposed her marvelous large breasts for the reader's titillation), there is something pathetic and contemptuous about a character who is unaware that she is the "butt" of the joke. Since Honeywell does not know what is happening to her, it is implied that it does not really matter that she is set up to be used. What is the harm, after all, if someone does not realize they are being abused?

While Honeywell seems to caricature female desire, the male sexual libido is epitomized by Peewee. After a few minutes of watching *Porky's*, a friend turned to me and said: "That guy is psychotic." She was referring to the way that Peewee whines about how he needs to get laid. He displays all the symptoms of the "penis as a driving force." Everytime a woman glances at him he asserts, excitedly, that she is "hot." He uses this word repeatedly throughout the film, and what he means is that he thinks the woman is sexually aroused. He says this about a gym teacher, an exotic dancer, and a stripper. Peewee wants "pussy," any pussy, it makes no difference whose it is, or even if she's dead—"as long as she's not too

cold." The desperation that he articulates is not disturbing because he wants to have sex so badly; it is disturbing because there is something very creepy about the way his desire is articulated. Like most of the male characters in the sex comedies, he is very unsexy. He is also cold, self-centered, untrustworthy and dangerous. He belongs to a class of "guys" who constantly refer to women as sluts; guys who enjoy "beaver shooting" and who can't wait to "pork" or "hump" girls' "brains out."

When Peewee and ten or so other boys go to an "exotic dancer's" house to have sex with her, Peewee announces who gets "sloppy seconds," "filthy fourths," "sprawling fiftths," and he informs the last boy that he "can scrape her off the mattress." Although Peewee is embarrassed (the exotic dancer turns out to be a joke set up by his friends) and is caught running down the street naked by the police, this does not change the impact of the attitudes towards the women in this film. The expression he uses to describe what he imagines will happen to the exotic dancer conjures up images of her being bashed and banged until she is bloody. The image that Peewee paints refers to the practice of gang rape, euphemistically known as "pulling a train" and "a gang bang." The existence of these expressions and their casual use by Peewee indicate that they are an integral part of the boys' vernacular.<sup>21</sup>

Both Peewee and Miss Honeywell are the butt of jokes, although in highly disparate ways. Peewee knows when a joke has been played on him. His sexuality is also active, not the passive result of an "aphrodisiac." He is also unambiguously part of a privileged group that can afford to play jokes because their integrity is never in question. Peewee may be a nerd, but like Tim who is a "prick," Peewee is one of the guys. His vocal expressions about women and sex reveal the same attitudes as his friends, only they do not speak them as loudly as he does. At the end of the film Peewee's prize is Wendy, who rewards him with her "cunt" because the boys' plan to humiliate Porky was successful.<sup>22</sup>

In *Porky's* the one person who opposes the boys' sexual behaviour is not opposed to the behaviour, but to the sex per se: Miss Balbricker is sexually repressed. In *Porky's*, everyone thinks the same way. The cop ("it runs in the family") and the coaches are just older versions of the boys. As one coach points out: he has a scar on his forehead he earned from Porky six years before. In the end, everyone is there to celebrate the triumph over Porky. This community is also present in *Porky's II: The Next Day*, as the opponents are racists, the Ku Klux Klan, and of course, the (still) sexually repressed Balbricker. Aside from the fact that the actors are much too old to be playing high school students, what is striking about the male characters in *Porky's* is that they represent "normal guys." They all share the same values and sense of humour (female character: included, who laugh at the jokes too), and the tenor of the films is one of acceptance. Even while there is tension between Brian and Tim, the conflict is neatly resolved when Tim realizes that Brian is just like them. Although Tommy agrees with Brian that Tim is a "prick," he says: "He's still our buddy." Brian says he understands; what does he understand? That Tim is part of "the gang."

In spite of all the male characters who supposedly sport an eternal hard-on, sex comedies reveal very little about the male body and male desire. The depiction of male sexuality is disturbing but it is also incredibly boring. The play of fantasy, masquerade, seduction and excitement is inherent to the image of the female, to the exclusion of the male. The heterosexual male participates as voyeur and as the wielder of the phallus that seeks discharge. As Richard Dyer points out:

Such representations help preserve the existing power relations of men over women by translating them into sexual relations, rendered both as biologically given and as a source of masculine pleasure. What is perhaps more surprising is that these images should, by and large be so unattractive, so straight and narrow, so dreary. Men too are fixed in place by this imagery, and if theirs is a place of superiority it is nonetheless a cramped, sordid, compulsive little place with its hard-edged contours and one-off climaxes. (198:42)

The power of these films rests in their repetition (over and over again we see the same images) that serves to familiarize and finally render "natural" images that on closer inspection are quite strange. This familiarity can impede a questioning of what they represent. Especially because these films are considered to be entertainment, "low brow" and therefore not worth thinking about, their assumptions are all the more effective.

#### Chapter IV Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Conger 1973:240; his quotation is from Dowan, E.A. and Adelson, J. (1966) *The Adolescent Experience*, New York: Wiley, p. 10. In a later edition of the same volume (Conger and Petersen (1984) 3rd Edition, New York: Harper and Row) the quotation from Dowan and Adelson is omitted. Conger and Petersen do write, however, that male sexual desire is "difficult to deny, and tends to be genitally oriented," and "while some girls experience sexual desire in much the same ways as the average boy, for a majority sexual feelings tend to be more diffuse, as well as more closely related to the fulfillment of other needs, such as self-esteem, reassurance, affection and love." (1984:273)

<sup>2</sup> Conger and Petersen (1984) (see endnote above) note that there has been a change in the frequency of girls masturbating. They attribute this to easier access to sex education.

<sup>3</sup> The teen romances often describe "love at first sight," which, to me is a nice way of saying "lust at first sight." Everytime I watch the scene from *Pretty in Pink* where Blane says to Andie: "I love you," it jars. He's only been on two dates with this woman and he knows that he loves her? If we could value lust, and desire, for the complexity of what that means, perhaps love would not have to be offered as if it could promise some kind of safety from harm.

<sup>4</sup> An exception to this is *Seventeen* (1984), an Israeli film.

<sup>5</sup> Studies on girls and sexuality were by Bibby and Posterski (1985), Herold (1984), Hite (1976), Konopka (1976), Kostash (1987), Lees (1986), McRobbie and Nava (1984), Stanko (1985), Ussher (1989), Warshaw (1988) and Women's Research Centre (1989).

<sup>6</sup> Parental fear of teenage pregnancy is one of the reasons girls are discouraged from considering sex as something enjoyable. I think education about contraception would be more fruitful than perpetuating lies that ultimately serve to keep girls from having control over their bodies.

<sup>7</sup> In a review of Gilligan's *Making Connections*, Lindsay Van Gelder describes her change from prepubescent tomboy to feminine girl/woman as feeling "like putting a gun to my own head just before the enemy army burst through the ramparts." (1990:77) I think her description could be applied to both boys and girls, since both develop under the pressures

of "femininity" and "masculinity" and are severely criticized or even threatened with physical abuse if they do not conform.

<sup>8</sup> Julian Wood also uses the term "invasion" in his article "Groping towards sexism: boys' sex talk" (in McRobbie and Nava, 1984:66). His study of interactions between girls and boys in a special centre for "disruptives" set up within a London secondary school is a very informative and thoughtful article.

<sup>9</sup> I found two films that could be called girls' sex comedies. The film that most resembles the boys' type is *The Princess Academy*, a film about a girls' school. *Where the Boys Are 1984* is a "spring break" type of film about four girls who go to Florida to find sex and/or romance. I found that neither offered anything new about female sexuality; both relied on stereotypes of male and female sexuality.

<sup>10</sup> The sex comedies that were box office hits are: *Animal House*, *Porky's*, *Revenge of the Nerds*, and *Risky Business*.

<sup>11</sup> *Risky Business* is not a typical sex comedy in that it is not structured episodically, and the sex for the most part revolves around a central couple: Joel and Lana. Joel seems to have some feelings towards Lana; he also appears to respect her shrewdness. The sex is depicted "seriously," as very passionate and enjoyable for both partners. I include the film with the others, however, because some of the humor is similar, and the language and attitudes are representative of those found in sex comedies. The difference between this film and the others is that this one was well-received critically as well as at the box office. Attention was paid to the cinematography, pacing, and set-up. It is a "clever" film. In spite of the seemingly mutual attraction between Joel and Lana, however, there is a great distance between them because of gender and class differences. Joel is the "pimp," and even if Lana becomes a "madam" (rather than a prostitute), she is still the one in the relationship who can be sold. Like the other sex comedies, *Risky Business* is a fantasy-adventure that refuses to acknowledge the problems inherent in the sexist and male self-centered attitudes it upholds as "exciting."

<sup>12</sup> Herold (1984), Kostash (1987), Lees (1986). This is true in North American and British societies, at least. In the studies Herold looked at, girls feared the loss of their reputation more than they feared pregnancy.

<sup>13</sup> The most disturbing story I heard about the use of "slut" to punish a girl came from an interview I did with a friend of mine. She remembers a girlfriend of hers in grade nine being peed on at a football game by a boy who was berating her for being "a slut." This occurred after the girl had refused to sleep with him.

<sup>14</sup> *Puberty Blues* is the only film that has a realistic portrayal of some of the consequences of the label of "slut" for girls.

<sup>15</sup> *The Last American Virgin* is the only sex comedy whose main character is never successful sexually.

<sup>16</sup> Vaginas are mentioned in the sex comedies. They are referred to as "beavers" and they are sought out to "shoot" as in "Let's go beaver shooting." At first I thought this referred to intercourse, but in *Porky's* it meant the boys were going to sneak peeks at girls in the showers. This language is strange. "Pussy" is also used, but usually not to refer to a vagina. It is frequently used to insult a boy. For example: "What are you, a pussy?" in *Just One of the Guys* is used by a coach to a boy who displays (in the coach's estimation) weakness. It is worth noting that Lees found that "virtually all of the terms of abuse available [in teenage society] are ones which denigrate women." (1986:167)

<sup>17</sup> Taking from Mulvey's ideas in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), Stephen Neale notes that although both a male and female figure can be "the direct object of scopophilic desire," "they tend, in particular, to be differentiated according to the degree of eroticism with which they are explicitly marked ... the look at the male is de-eroticised, rendered 'innocent' by inscribing him as the relay point in the looking structure, the point at which the looks are turned towards their ultimate destination, the woman." (Neale, 1982:57). He adds that "patriarchy does not so much institute the woman as sexual object in the cinema as offer the female body as an accepted and acceptable image on to which to deflect the erotic component in the scopophilic drive." (1982:57)

<sup>18</sup> This supposed ease of girls being naked with other girls is not something I am familiar with. If anything, I have more often heard of girls feeling uncomfortable because they feel their bodies will be compared to other girls' bodies.

<sup>19</sup> Very little has been written about girls' interaction with pornography intended for men. My girlfriends and I regularly viewed *Playboy* at the age of 8. It was never difficult to find these magazines. There was clearly fascination and pleasure involved in our seeking out "magazines for men." This was our initiation into ideas about sex and "sexiness."

<sup>20</sup> Although Tommy's getting his penis stuck may be a representation of the supposedly archetypal fear of castration, I have never heard of a man ever experiencing such aggression, which makes that scene different from the ones with female characters.

<sup>21</sup> I will never forget attending a wedding reception where the master of ceremonies, a good-looking (white, educated) young man, was directing groups by tables to the buffet. He commented, via microphone, that the crowd at the buffet looked like a line up for a gang bang. He quickly went on to say something else; but in those few words he revealed that this was a common expression among his peers.

<sup>22</sup> Wendy is the school "slut." Peewee has tried unsuccessfully to get to bed with her (previous to the beginning of the film). An interesting detail is revealed in the sequel to *Porky's*. In *Porky's II: The Next Day* Wendy admits to Peewee that she does not really sleep around; he is only her second lover. Peewee is relieved, and in this way he is able to have his cake and eat it too. He is able to benefit from Wendy's reputation as a slut by pressuring her into having sex, but is then able to keep her to himself because she does not really want to sleep with many partners.

## CHAPTER V

### ALL IS NOT WELL IN ROMANCELAND

"I love you and I'll do anything to make you want me" Samantha, *16 Candles*

In choosing to discuss teen romances, the work of John Hughes' quickly became a key component. Unlike any other teen film director from the 1980s, John Hughes' stamp is recognizable. Not only is he the most prolific teen film-maker of the 1980s, his work has been very successful. Hughes has been involved as either a producer, director and/or writer of at least eight teen films since 1984 with the release of *Sixteen Candles*. His romances and relationship films, are better, I think, than his more action-oriented movies. Films like *Sixteen Candles* (1984), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *Pretty in Pink* (1986), *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987) are less superficial, and less reliant on gags to keep the audience interested than *Weird Science* (1985), *Ferris Buellers' Day Off* (1986) or *Career Opportunities* (1990). In general his films are well-paced so that he is able to successfully insert fairly lengthy pieces of dialogue. *The Breakfast Club*, in fact, has very little "action": most of the action occurs through verbal confrontations between characters. Hughes is an important director, not only because of his success and the many productions he has been involved in, but because his products are well executed. There may always be something to criticize in his work, but he can create pleasurable cinematic moments. He has an eye for details, his actresses and actors are generally very capable, and his command of teenage language is strong.

I wanted to look specifically at three of his romance/relationship films, namely *Sixteen Candles*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *Some Kind of Wonderful*, because similar problems recur in each. Since these films are glossy and at times quite smart, the problems they pose are not blatantly apparent. In this discussion of romance and teenage society Hughes' work lends



itself to an exposure of the little ways in which the teen romance discourse promotes heterosexuality as a limiting force in girls' lives.

In our society, the fantasy of romance is held up as a reward for the right kind of girl. Romance is offered as something to aspire to (and indeed, girls' magazines offer countless advice on how to get a boy), as an indispensable part of girls' and women's lives. This is not surprising since romance is presented as the only space in which girls and women find respect and care in a sexual relationship.

This idea is encouraged by the sexual double standard I discussed in Chapter Four; it is also, however, presented in literature for girls, and in the teen films I studied.<sup>1</sup> Why do teen films present romance as the only legitimate and rewarding place for girls to have sex? Are girls really less interested in sexual activity, and more in need of a boy to reassure them that they are lovable?<sup>2</sup> Looking at the genre of teen films, the only female characters who had sex outside the bounds of romance were girls/women in the sex comedies: prostitutes and "loose" women. In a few films where girls did have sex without romance, the sex was unfulfilling or painful. (see *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Little Darlings* (1980), *Puberty Blues* (1981). It is worth noting that these were all films that dealt with first intercourse).

I am not suggesting that teen films should encourage girls to have sex when they are not "in love." I want to complicate the presentation of romance and disrupt the assumption that girls are more interested in romance than sex. Romance is presented as an ideal relationship, as if "being in love" guarantees emotional and sexual satisfaction. Unfulfilling sex, it is assumed, only occurs because the couple is not in love. Perhaps unsatisfying sex (for girls) can be overlooked *if* the girls are in love, and therefore the fulfillment found in the "I love you" rather than the sexual activity—or perhaps the sexual activity is only important in that

it reflects the "love." In studies carried out with teenage girls, there is a prevailing attitude that divides sex from romance, elevating the latter. The teen romance films do not refute this separation. While they may refer to the couple having sex, they do not for the most part depict sexual relations. The intense sexual desire the couple has for each other is not consummated before our eyes. The sex remains hidden, mysterious and private. Is the excitement sexual? Or is it romantic—the excitement of finding "true love"?

In all the studies I consulted, girls felt "safer" when they knew (or believed) a boy was in love with them. This meant they could be assured some measure of respect, which ultimately meant they would not be talked about behind their backs. Having a "bad" reputation is very dangerous: in adolescent society, a girl identified as "sluttish" is considered, by boys and girls, to be deserving of anything that happens to her—including battery and rape.

Romance, however, is no guarantee of being safe from unloving or abusive behaviour. Romance, like marriage, has been offered as a place where a woman is protected from rape and harassment. This fails to take into account the whole cycle of abuse against women, which includes men who murder the women they are supposedly "in love with." I believe that in North American society the myth of romance as a special reward for girls has developed in such a way that girls are persuaded into passive, submissive behaviour that serves to contain female anger and power. This is not to say that all girls behave passively and submissively. I do think, however, that the continual threats to our body and our integrity coerce us into behaviour that keep us silent about our needs, and curb us from moving into domains that have been reserved for boys and men. Romance is offered as a reward, a compensation, for the loss of girls' autonomy. Girls may be more willing to sacrifice aspects of themselves in order to join the couple because romance is supposedly the only safe place

to find sexual pleasure. Romance functions, therefore, to channel female sexual desire into a form that serves to reinforce the status quo.

*Sixteen Candles* (1984) was John Hughes' first successful teen film. It is a comedy about a young girl (played by Molly Ringwald) whose fairytale romance wish comes true. Samantha is infatuated with the most popular boy in school. Although Jake appears completely unattainable (he is dating the most popular girl), the film chronicles how they manage to come together in a romantic union by the end of the film. Threats of sexual abuse hover at the edges of this presentation of ideal romantic happiness. Hughes has inserted two moments which indicate that Samantha's body is not safe. She is threatened by her grandmother, and by Jake (the perfect boy) himself.

Although Hughes' 1985 box office success *The Breakfast Club*<sup>3</sup> is not strictly a romance, it has a romantic resolution, and it is important because of its depiction of sexual harassment exacted upon Claire (another character played by Ringwald). This harassment is John's way of expressing his attraction to Claire. While in *Sixteen Candles* Samantha could be said to be unaware of Jake's potential abusiveness, Claire is fully aware of how John might abuse her when she makes sexual overtures towards him. Most of their interaction involves John's verbal harassment and humiliation of her. Hughes is aware enough to portray sexual dynamics that have elements of the kinds of experiences girls actually have. Because he seeks to maintain the films on the level of fantasy, he is incapable of taking the elements to their logical conclusion. Everything that occurs, no matter what happens, is always benign.

The second element of *The Breakfast Club* leads into an examination of a third Hughes' film, *Some Kind of Wonderful*. In the former film, one of the female characters (played by Ally Sheedy) undergoes a covergirl make-over so that the "jock" (Emilio Estevez) can find her attractive enough to legitimate his attentions. In a different yet similar fashion, the

tomboy in *Some Kind of Wonderful* symbolically becomes a woman by putting on a bra, and Keith is finally able to recognize that he really loves her. With the first examples I place the fantasy of romance in the context of a danger to the female body. I use the second examples to show that the pressure on girls to behave and appear in feminine ways for the reward of romance has become a myth of female transformation.

In *Sixteen Candles*, the first example of a sexual threat posed towards Samantha is not directly related to the romance within the film. Samantha's experience will nonetheless affect her sexuality. In a scene where she encounters her grandparents, one of the first things Samantha's grandmother says is: "Fred, she's gotten her boobies." The grandfather responds: "I'd better get my magnifying glass." In this scene Samantha is completely objectified; her grandparents talk about her body as if she is not there. Something else occurs that is extremely invasive. The next thing her grandmother says is "Oh and they are so perky" and she moves in towards Samantha. The camera cuts and Samantha has fled to another room where she says: "I can't believe my grandmother actually felt me up." The horror of this molestation is masked by the tone of the film: this is a comedy, and what occurs is "funny." This incident is dismissed as "one of those annoying things that grandmothers do" and conceals the sexual abuse to which it refers. Hughes was clever enough to have the grandmother do it; if the grandfather had done it, would it have been so "funny"? Hughes' choice downplays the abuse, and assumes that, because it is a woman doing it to a girl, it is not really a traumatic event. For some girls, in real life, this "incident" would leave scars. The film portrays this violation as something dreadful, though not criminal (as it actually is: in real life, Samantha could press charges against her grandmother), and in making it into something terrible but humorous (the grandmother is like a vulture, her claws stretching out to grasp Sam's breasts) the film obscures the experience. It can be forgotten because (the

film tells us) it is not really so terrible. Yet, what is the grandmother doing? How often has she done this? The grandmother clearly believes she can touch Samantha in any way she pleases. Here is a portrayal of sexual abuse. But the film ignores what it is showing, and in so doing it relays the message that girls are supposed to expect and accept the invasion of their bodies. This trauma is translated into "normalcy"; something that can even be made into a joke: "I can't believe my grandmother actually felt me up."

The assumption that girls bodies are "up for grabs" is further asserted when Jake, the boy with whom Samantha is infatuated and with whom she is happily paired at the end, comments that if he felt like it, he could violate his girlfriend ten different ways. Having tired of Caroline (his girlfriend), Jake hands her over when she is drunk to a younger boy (Ted, played by Anthony Michael Hall) who is desperate to have sex. When Caroline wakes up, aware that she has had sexual intercourse with Ted, she is (of course) not displeased: she says "You know, I think I did [like it]," and proceeds to kiss this boy she has never met before. Her vulnerability (that her boyfriend believes he has a right to violate her, and that she can be passed around) is not different from Samantha's. Although the two girls are juxtaposed as virgin/whore, and it is Caroline who is reduced to a drunken "slut," Samantha is not immune to Jake's assertion of his right to his girlfriend's body any time he pleases. Because he wants "romance" (he is tired of superficial relationships, he wants something "deep"), his sexual authority is temporarily masked. He has "good intentions," and his assumed "right" over his girlfriend's body is therefore legitimated.

In *The Breakfast Club*, one of the best-known and most popular teen films of the 1980s, Molly Ringwald plays another character who is sexually harassed. Because the film is constructed with a central character (played by Judd Nelson) who provokes the other characters, the way that Claire is singled out is not immediately apparent. More importantly,

however, is the fact that the antagonistic character (John) is an aggressive male whose abusiveness is not really abnormal (the other boys follow his bait). Although he is "the criminal," the film itself tells the story of how the stereotypes (princess, brain, criminal, athlete and basketcase) ascribed to teenagers are not accurate. Ultimately, John's violence is attributed to an abusive home-life, and he is presented as using aggression as a shield. This message is not in itself without merit. The film, in fact, is interesting and clever, with poignant moments. However, Claire's decision to make sexual overtures towards John recuperates the sadism as if it is innocuous. John's abuse is translated into an expression of attraction; Claire accepts it as such, and her experience of sexual harassment is thereby erased.

Claire is verbally harassed on at least ten occasions in *The Breakfast Club*. Most of the harassment is sexual in nature and is led by John. It begins with his suggestion, at the beginning of the film, that they (John and the two other male students serving detention) close the door to the library and "get the prom queen impregnated." The harassment continues throughout the film, and in four scenes Claire is visibly shaken. In an early scene John stands over the desk at which she is sitting and taunts her with "Are you a virgin? I'll bet you a million dollars that you are." He proceeds to ask her if she has ever been in various sexual situations. He verbally undresses her by going through a description of possible scenarios that gradually involve less clothing and more intimate contact: "Have you ever been felt up over the bra, under the blouse, shoes off ... hoping to God your parents don't walk in." He says this very slowly, pausing frequently. She says, weakly, "Do you want me to puke?"; he continues: "Over the panties, no bra [at this point he looks at her breasts], blouse unbuttoned ... Calvin's in a ball on the front seat past eleven on a school night?" Meanwhile shots cut between his looking down at her and her looking up at him with a very vulnerable,

unhappy expression on her face. Finally Andrew breaks the tension by yelling "Leave her alone!"

Claire is defenseless against the verbal abuse that John, and on one occasion the other characters, put her through. Claire yells "Shut up!" over and over again, and is twice reduced to tears. She kicks John, and yells "I hate you!" After all this, she goes into the room where he has been banished by the vice-principal and kisses his neck. "Why'd you do that?" John quite rightly asks. She replies, "Cause I knew you wouldn't."

John's behaviour towards Claire may well indicate that he is attracted to her. Why is Claire attracted to John? Because he is good-looking? Because she feels sorry for him? Because he is attracted to her? The answer, for me, is irrelevant. I can believe her attraction to him. John is positioned by the film in sympathetic ways. Numerous shots find him with pain on his face. The other characters discover that he has been physically abused by his father. I am not interested in whether Claire's attraction to John is believable given the parameters of the story. The significance rests in the implications of Hughes' coupling.

*The Breakfast Club* is not primarily a romance. Yet, in the last five minutes of the film, Hughes takes his comedy/drama and turns it into a double love story. He could have had the teenagers bond as a group, since the film revolves on both individual and group interactions. Instead, he has his female characters behave in ways that bring about a heterosexual match. In the case of Claire, she decides to initiate a relationship with John, even though he is violent and has been verbally abusive to her. In the case of Allison, she allows herself to be physically transformed into a feminine-looking girl.

Claire's behaviour is problematic because her anger is flattened in order to give John what he wants. If his aggression towards her stemmed from his desire for her (and his anger that her wealth and privilege make her unattainable), then his abusive behaviour succeeded

in "getting her." At the very least, his behaviour made it clear to Claire that he was attracted. How is this at all credible (how does the film pull it off?) unless viewers can accept that John's aggression is a sign of his attraction? If it is credible, what is being said about how boys (and men) are allowed to communicate their desire?

Like that to Samantha, the threat to Claire's sexuality and integrity is rendered benign. The threats still exist, but the films gloss over them as if they make no difference to the romantic coupling, or to the individuals. Romance is free from question; problems do not matter because the situation is, after all, "romantic."

Everyone I talked to who had seen *The Breakfast Club* criticized the ending, although not because Claire makes a pass at John. Friends of mine objected to the transformation of Allison (Ally Sheedy), who gets a covergirl make-over (performed by Ringwald) so that the Athlete (Emilio Estevez) is able to be legitimately attracted to her. From a person wearing dark make-up and dark clothing, Allison is turned into a very feminine "girlie girl" in white lace, bows and pink make-up. Her original costume and demeanor was rebellious—almost punk with its dark colors, raggedness, and lack of attempt to appear attractive. Her transformation is a familiar Hollywood (and romance novel) story: she is a girl who rebels against the prescriptions of femininity until the right boy comes along to tame her. The message of this metamorphosis is that boys can only be attracted to girls if they are feminine. This idea is also present in another film by Hughes, *Some Kind of Wonderful*.

One of the first teen films I took out on video was John Hughes' *Some Kind of Wonderful* (written and produced by Hughes; directed by Howard Deutch, the director of *Pretty in Pink*, another Hughes' production). I enjoyed this film tremendously the first time I saw it, and have continued to enjoy parts of it even after ten odd screenings. It is an extremely affective story with two main characters, a boy and a girl. It is a "love story"; it is



a story about underdogs who succeed in humiliating a brute; and it is a story about liberation and femininity. It is a film that is problematic, but I enjoy it nonetheless. I think it is Hughes' best effort.

*Some Kind of Wonderful* succeeds because it has an extremely likable female character named Watts, played by Mary Stuart Masterson. She is a tomboy who plays drums and who wears boys' underwear. She arouses our sympathy because it is established early on that she is in love with her best friend Keith, who is infatuated with Amanda, the school's "feminine beauty."

*Some Kind of Wonderful* fails because Watts gives up her boys' underwear and puts on a bra. This action occurs on the same day that Keith finally recognizes that it is Watts whom he loves, not Amanda. The discussion of underwear and bras is a current that runs through the film, and it serves to map certain stages in the development of the relationship between Watts and Keith, and Watts and Amanda. I do not think it is an accident that Hughes has Watts put on a bra the day that Keith finally notices her. The complexity of this element should not be underestimated. A variety of struggles related to gender, femininity and sexuality play themselves out in this film. It is a teen film filled with contradictions that unsettle ideas about heterosexual love while simultaneously asserting that the perfect romance is possible.

There are two "love" stories in *Some Kind of Wonderful*. There is the one between Amanda and Hardy, the two most popular and attractive teenagers in the school. It is very public; they are part of the rich, hip crowd. It is a romance that interferes with school work and causes Amanda to miss classes. When Keith starts watching the couple interact, the shots are filmed through a soft lens, creating a misty aura around the two. Quite quickly it is revealed that Hardy is cheating on Amanda. He also calls her his "property."

The second "love" story is between Keith and Watts, who are best friends. It is at first an unrequited love, with Watts painfully watching Keith seek Amanda out and finally secure her from Hardy. What is special about this unrequited love is that it is not really unrequited; Keith just does not consider Watts as a potential girlfriend. I think that Keith realizes his attraction to Watts when he recalls kissing her (she gives him a lesson in kissing to prepare him for his date with Amanda). The only memory flash in the film occurs when Keith sees Watts after he has succeeded in humiliating Hardy: we are shown a flashback of the two kissing. This could be viewed as Keith's recognition of Watts' sexual potential. In this earlier scene, Watts and Keith are apparently aroused by each other as they kiss, and Watts breaks away from him and leaves the garage, saying: "Lesson's over; you're cool." Keith notices that she is blushing—an indication of excitement.

Hughes' does not capitalize on this moment of desire and excitement. Instead he has Watts change something fundamental about her character, regarding her underwear.

John Hughes is aware of feminist issues. Amanda's story is one of liberation not only from an oppressive man, but from her position as "beautiful object." Although she wreaks revenge on her abusive boyfriend through the intervention of a tough gang of boys, she asserts her independence at the end of the film by explicitly reassessing her views on what is "right" for her. Amanda decides she needs to stand alone, relying on herself and not the shallow support of empty friendships or men she does not want to be with.

*Some Kind of Wonderful* explicitly acknowledges the women's movement on two occasions: Watts asserts to a male student that "This is 1987 ... a girl can be whoever she wants to be." A kind of feminist discourse is also employed when Amanda speaks up against her objectification. She confronts Keith who has painted her picture by saying: "What's hanging in that museum? My soul? No, it's my face." Watts' position as a tomboy is also

clearly established from the start. She is given a powerful space to open the film: as the credits begin, the music playing has a strong pulsating beat. The first shots we see are of a drum set playing the music we hear. The camera cuts back and forth between the drummer, Keith, and Amanda with Hardy. Keith is playing "chicken" with a train. Amanda and Hardy are embracing. The music, combined with the shots of energy, danger, and passion, invest the life on the screen with an aura of importance. But for me, it is the drummer who is powerful. Women are usually singers, pianists or violinists. Since drumming is a male-dominated activity, Watts is thereby placed as different from other girls.

The problem with *Some Kind of Wonderful*'s depiction of the character of Watts is linked to desire and femininity. Watts desires Keith sexually, but she cannot make an overture. She does not believe he can be attracted to her since he expresses an interest in Amanda. Amanda, the feminine/female sexual ideal, is posed against Watts, the rebellious, outspoken tomboy. Even though Watts is not masculine-looking (and is actually very attractive with feminine features) the film positions her as unsexy because of her "masculine" behavior. Her behavior, as seen by her peers, calls her sexual identity into question. "How long have you been a lesbian?" is directed as an insult to her. Lesbianism is seen as abnormal: "a lot of guys I know think you're confused." She appears "confused" because she does not conform to outward gender roles—roles specifically required for the heterosexual relationship. Because she will not conform she is harassed and supposedly kept out of the realm of romantic involvement. As one boy comments: "I know you could be a girl just like that," (snapping his fingers), implying that she needs to change something. While Watts reacts against the insults, she still feels unattractive and unfeminine, unable to compete with Amanda.

If we follow Watts' journey, we see a metamorphosis that comes from a genre of film narratives about women who go through a period of rebellion before finally accepting their

feminine role and obtaining the man they desire. The part of the film which supports my view that the narrative necessitates Watts' feminine transformation in order to attract Keith is the way the film describes her attitude towards bras.

The rejection of the bra has been the symbol of women's liberation since the early 1970s. Watts supposedly does not wear a bra. Her breasts are defined as being small: near the end of the film she remarks to Keith that her grandmother had told her that when she grew up she would have "big boobs." Keith asks: "What happened?," to which Watts replies: "I dunno; I guess I just got lucky." And yet she does not feel lucky; she feels as if Keith could not be attracted to her. She even says, when she suggests that Keith might want to practice kissing: "Pretend I'm a girl," as if she is not quite sure. As I have already discussed, breasts are given much attention by our society. Girls' sexuality and sense of desirability as female center around their breasts. In this film, not wearing a bra is presented as an action connected to being "confused" about one's sex and outside the realm of desirability. In the end, the night that Keith finally realizes that he's in love with her, Watts gets dressed up and tells Keith that her grandmother would be proud: she is "wearing a bra." When she announces this, Keith pauses and looks at her as if she has done something significant. He looks both surprised and pleased, as if it is something Watts should be proud of, as if she is finally doing what she should have done before but resisted.

Why has she now decided to wear a bra? Is this wearing of the bra Watts' assertion that she is, in fact, a heterosexual female? Or a sexual female? Or a non-feminist? It is mentioned as if it were some kind of liberation while in fact bras are uncomfortable and symbolize our society's cult of youth (pert, "undroopy" breasts as the standard of beauty) and also our inability to respect breasts that "jiggle." Most women do not have a choice about wearing or not wearing a bra.

This issue of bras and breasts is further confused by the actresses who play Amanda and Watts: in a locker room scene Amanda's breasts appear to be the same size as Watts', and she is wearing a camisole, not a bra. If you look closely at that scene, the actress playing Watts seems to be indeed wearing a bra. What is the significance of this trivial inclusion about bras? It is so trivial that Hughes does not bother to have his actress play the part consistently, and yet, why include it at all? Watts' change of behavior towards bra-wearing is ridiculous unless she is finally accepting the rules of femininity and "desirability."

In a similar vein, one aspect that continually disturbs me everytime I watch *Sixteen Candles* is Samantha's wardrobe. Particularly in the scenes at the dance, where she is wearing a pink dress that is layered with leaves of material that look as if they have been torn into pieces and then put back together to cover her body. (As one colleague put it: "the just-attacked look.") She is wearing white pumps, and when she runs down the hall she is constricted in her movement by the dress and the effort to keep her shoes on her feet. When she sits down on the floor in the empty hallway and cries, she has to sit so that her underwear does not show. In consequence she sits with her legs together but bent at the knee, her long legs coming into a point at her feet because of the shoes. She looks uncomfortable.

Why is Sam dressed this way? To look attractive to Jake? Why does Watts put on a bra (that is bound to be uncomfortable)? To look attractive to Keith? Why does Claire "make-up" Allison? So she will look "better." And in this last instance, it has direct results: Andrew does think Allison looks a lot better—he even tells her so.

How girls/women appear is not an insignificant issue in our society. Clothing and cosmetics make a difference in how we are viewed and treated. Whether we wear comfortable shoes with flat soles, or are perched on high heels can also make a difference

in how we feel about ourselves. Girls are called tomboys because of how they dress, but the clothing refers to the behaviour they then assume. Tomboys are not just "wearing boys' clothing"; they are dressed in a way that gives them freedom of movement, freedom to climb trees, to jump off balconies, to run as fast as they can. They are also expected to be tough, and to speak loudly whatever is on their minds—in short, they are likely to take up space, initiate action, and defend themselves. This is a powerful image to wield. Watts and Allison have this potential, and it is taken away from them.

In these last two chapters, I describe heterosexual encounters as adversarial, and argue that the female characters are ultimately "disarmed": they lack protection from abuse. Whether a girl is involved with boys who are interested in sex for recreation, or with boys who are interested in romance (John Hughes style), I believe that she is vulnerable given the parameters of the heterosexual relations proposed in these teen films.

My impressions from the films correspond to studies done on adolescent girls and boys (Wood 1984, Lees 1986, Kostash 1987, Warshaw 1988, Gilligan 1990) which found that girls are trapped in a system that punishes them for taking initiative for sexual pleasure and for standing up for themselves and/or protesting against abuse and discrimination. Girls are offered the reward of "romance/love" as compensation for being passive, for behaving and dressing in "feminine" ways, for looking "pretty." Although they are offered this reward, it does not always pay off. As long as girls find sex unsatisfying or uncomfortable, and as long as a "romance" can present a hero like Jake who believes he has a right to violate his girlfriend ten different ways, girls in relationships are not immune to neglect and abuse.

The myth that sexual power relations are "natural" has much to do with ideas about masculinity and femininity; power and strength is a characteristic of masculinity; to be a man is to be masculine, therefore, strong and powerful. Weakness and vulnerability is a

characteristic of femininity; a woman is supposed to be feminine, therefore weak and vulnerable. These categories, however abstract and outmoded they may sound, guide the order of the sexes in adolescent society (and by extension, the whole society). That we are identified as male and female teaches us our "correct place." Power relations are all about learning where we fit, how we are supposed to behave, which position we should assume so that we will be accepted into the social world.

If John's extensive harassment of Claire is his attempt to seduce her, it is also an action that lets her know her place. In each case, with Claire, with Sam, Watts, and Allison, they learn their correct "place," how to "place" themselves. Jake's statement places both Caroline and Samantha. Can Sam really trust Jake to not act on his belief? Whether he acts or not, it will always be a threat.

Girls in sex comedies do not have to learn their places; they are continually placed by the narratives in the same positions. They are present to titillate us; they have nothing to offer, otherwise. In Stephen Neale's scheme of expectation, the presence of these female characters promises its audience that breasts and perhaps other body parts will be shown, as well as sexual comments and situations. The desire to see girls and women in this way precedes the viewing; it would be surprising and disappointing if this expectation were not fulfilled. In Hughes' romances, the expectation will be placed on the consummation of romance. Hughes is very adept at creating enjoyable films that are engrossing in their alternating wit and poignancy. Nonetheless, by including female acceptance of violence towards their bodies, as well as promoting the idea of feminine transformation (in effect both aspects are part of "femininity") as behaviour expected of girls, Hughes has created a pattern of romance that is destructive to girls.

## Chapter V Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Lees 1986 and Christian-Smith 1990.

<sup>2</sup> I would have liked to include a discussion of the female character who is *The Sure Thing*. In the male character's fantasies she is portrayed as sexually insatiable, constantly begging for "more." When he meets her in real life he discovers she needs to be told "I love you" before she will have sex.

<sup>3</sup> This is the only teen film where I had an opportunity to read the screenplay. I found it very interesting that the film is quite different than the final screenplay. All the changes improved the film significantly; the screenplay is more sexist and less intelligent. (It made me wonder how much the actresses and actors added to the script.) What is of particular interest are Hughes' directives to his characters: he clearly is obsessed with women's breasts and the "Male Sex Drive." In the first version he also has Claire do a "sexy" dance.



CHAPTER VI

FEMALE DESIRE-ABILITY  
WHERE EXACTLY IS THE CLITORIS?

The teen sex comedies routinely display the young female body as if this action is unproblematic. If we on any level believe the films (or think we will be measured by men in that way), sexy girls are those who are very comfortable with and excited by displaying their bodies. Sexy women in films do not fear sexual assault; sexy women in films have no sexual "hang-ups." Where do actual teenage girls fit in these sex comedies?

Sue Lees' study of teenage girls in England is the most comprehensive look at female desire and the social use of the term slut that I encountered. Like the North American studies, teenage girls in England are impeded from seeking out sexual encounters in fear of the stigma of slut. Lees concluded that this stigma rendered it impossible for girls to talk about their sexuality. She writes that "female sexual experience is constructed in terms of male action and girls have no vocabulary or language in which to formulate their sexual experience, the very expression of which threatens their social standing." (Lees, 1986:54) In other words:

The girl has to deny her sexual desire to remain respectable, but should she in any way indicate that she is open to advances she is regarded as fair game ... Any indication of desire, whether in the form of the way a woman dresses, speaks, looks or flirts is taken as grounds for the man to assault a woman. A slippage has occurred whereby the assumption of desire in a woman turns her from the "good" virgin into the "rapacious" whore who will go with anyone anywhere. (Lees, 1986:150)

In the larger context of teenage society, "sexy" female characters in teen films who appear aroused, who appear to be interested in sex, are associated with sluts: girls who can be used in any manner without consequence.

What does female pleasure mean in a society that punishes women through their sexuality, often directly onto their genitals? Is it any wonder that many girls and women find it difficult to derive pleasure from their bodies? How can a woman find pleasure when everywhere she turns she risks pain and humiliation? I think the difficulties many women have being sexual is underestimated by the apparent ease female performers have in displaying sexiness. Most women I know have expressed difficulty in not only being sexually assertive but in showing their arousal at all, and therefore, in allowing themselves to experience their arousal. Many women I know have spent periods of time unable to have sex even with men they were in love with. It is as if the scars on their bodies suddenly split open. Some women described disassociating themselves from their bodies during intercourse, sometimes quite unconsciously. One friend recounted how it was her lover who noticed that she had left her body, and he tried to find out what was wrong. What was wrong? What incidents in her past had brought her to that point? She had a wealth of incidents to explain her behaviour.

As I elaborated in Chapter II, part of female sexual desire entails manoeuvring to avoid or impede sexual assault. Whether women consciously consider this or not, we are all aware that the flip side of female sexual fulfillment is not just absence, lack of fulfillment, but harm, we can separate rape from "making love" but the experience and threat of rape affects our "love-making." And sexual violence does not just hurt our physical bodies, it affects our self-image, our identity, our sense of ourselves. It can make us feel ashamed, guilty, dirty, stop us from having sexual pleasure for extended periods of time, make us want to change jobs, change cities, or even commit suicide.

While the difficulties women have in achieving orgasm have been documented, little is known about studies on how women identify their sexual arousal. Fransella (1977) cites a

study done by Heiman in 1975 which "found that about 50 per cent of the women studied who were highly aroused by erotic tape recordings reported that they felt no physical response." (1977:141) Heiman came to this conclusion by monitoring vaginal responses of a group of 77 college women to erotic and non-erotic materials. The vaginal responses were determined by the insertion of a small photocell registering changes in vaginal blood volume and pressure pulse. Heiman compared the physiological responses recorded by the photocell to the verbal responses of her students. Interestingly, "Heiman found that the women who made the most mistakes about their state of sexual arousal were the ones who were listening to the non-erotic tapes. She says it was as if these women were denying or ignoring their physiological changes in the absence of a good reason as to why they should feel sexy." (1977, 142) This reminds me of my first response to Conger's study (1973) of teenage sexuality (quoted at the beginning of Chapter Four) in which he writes of female desire as being "diffuse and ambiguous." I thought: does this not provide an alibi for rape, since it implies that women do not know when they are aroused? What is ambiguous? Do the women say "no," but their bodies say "yes?" (The irony of the myth of "no" meaning "yes" is that it is much more common for women to agree to have sex when they do not want it.)

Although Conger's observation and Heiman's study are almost 20 years old, they are not out of date. They point to a fundamental problem that still exists with respect to how our society deals with female sexuality. Girls are taught to ignore their bodies, to avoid noticing what is happening to them. We are discouraged from touching ourselves and from thinking or talking about our "private parts." This disempowers us. At a time when teenagers are being told by politicians and educators to "Just Say No" and to "postpone" sexual relations, girls more than ever risk being out of control of their own bodies. Invariably this promotion results in a withholding of any information that might be seen as encouraging teenagers to

have sex. Already efforts to provide safe sex education have been hindered in both Canada and the United States; of necessity this censorship includes any discussion of pleasure.

The structural silencing of representations of women's desire in the public sphere is also apparent in the teen film. I have yet to find a teen film that adequately depicts female desire as a central issue. It is difficult to find female desire or female arousal from the point of view of girls in any of the teen films I watched. The depiction of female genital desire in the "girls' films" is usually controlled or channelled, but never controlled by the heroine herself. *Say Anything*, *Little Darlings*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Dirty Dancing*, do contain female characters who seek out sexual encounters. In *Little Darlings*, losing one's virginity is presented as a contest, a ritual line to cross, an initiation into maturity. The fact that the eventual intercourse is so disappointing for Angel distances physical desire from actual intercourse. It is not clear that she is aroused physically, and the experience is a moment of extreme vulnerability and disillusionment. Angel learns that she was not emotionally prepared for the sex, and there is some indication that she learns that she should wait to be in love. In *Fast Times*, Stacey is also disillusioned by her cold encounters, and finally, after two unfulfilling experiences (the last resulting in pregnancy) she decides to put off sex and engage in a romance. Although the film hints that the romance will eventually take the couple "all the way," Stacey's desire for physical sexual intimacy seems to have been subsumed into "romance." In *Say Anything*, Diane (by her own admission) "attacks" Lloyd, but her relationship to her father is somewhat incestuous. Until Diane discovers that he has betrayed her, her father controls her like a jealous lover, withdrawing his affection until he has successfully manipulated her into breaking off with Lloyd.

*Dirty Dancing* is a film that seems to allow its heroine the most sexual freedom. Patrick Swayze (the male lead) is eroticized by the camera, as Jennifer Grey's character ("Baby")

spends a lot of time watching him. The relationship is highly romanticized however: I assume he is her first lover, but there is no apparent awkwardness, no question of pain or discomfort (which is fairly common for girls' first sexual experience), and there is no sign of contraception. The film's release in 1987 certainly warrants an inclusion of condoms (although the story takes place pre-AIDS, in the 1960s, it could easily have included a condom since that would have been a form of birth control appropriate to the time). Even if condoms did not need to be promoted for safe sex, any film that purports to depict female sexual experience should have some mention of contraception. (In *Dirty Dancing* contraception would be especially appropriate given the abortion of another girl that is included!) Most girls I knew growing up were preoccupied by a fear of pregnancy. Of course contraception (especially if it "interrupts" the sexual act) is not considered romantic.

Where is female desire-ability? Where exactly is the clitoris in these teen films? Hidden among the folds of romance, I discovered another form of sexual excitement.

### Memories of the Body Part II

The fantasy of romance is sexual. Although this may seem self-evident (some romances have been called "pornography for women"), the relationship between romance and sexual arousal has not been developed in discussions of the romance genre. Romance as an idea is associated with "love," not lust; with emotional and not physical needs. Romance is distinguished from sex by girls in studies who indicate that they are more interested in romance than sex, as if sex can be excluded from romance. When sex is included in the depiction of a romantic coupling, the romantic aspect serves to elevate sex, as if the physical element of sexual intimacy is indecent. Romance, fundamentally equated with love, is set apart from sex between strangers or between two people who are not in love, and the very distinction carries moral weight: sex without romance can be called "sleazy" or "cheap."

Both Lees (1986) and Christian-Smith (1990) noted the similarities between girls' obsession with love/romance and horniness. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to turn the idea of romance inside out and discuss the implications of identifying it as a physical sexual fantasy.

The idea of romance as sexual originates with an experience I had when I watched three films with Jon Cryer as the main character. In order to understand the significance of what occurred, I want to take a few steps back to my adolescence.

As an teenager I fit into the film industry's current conception of the female adolescent audience. From the age of about thirteen until perhaps as late as age seventeen, I refused to read books or see films unless they promised a romantic reunion between a heterosexual couple. At the time, this penchant embarrassed me for two reasons. Like Janice Radway's Smithton romance readers, I was aware that the society around me considered "romance" to be emotional pabulum, lacking in depth and value in the grand scheme of art and life. (Radway, 1984) My interest in romance also embarrassed me because it was connected to my obsession with finding a boyfriend. I thought about it incessantly and I imagined that "he" would change my life for the better. This very powerful "need" for a boyfriend made me feel weak and powerless. (Due in part, no doubt, to the fact that the boys I met were immature, self-centered, lacking in basic social skills and utterly incapable of having exciting sexual relationships with me.) I felt as if there was something particularly wrong with me, that I should be so needy.

When I watched the Jon Cryer films I found myself developing a crush on his character. He tends to play the same kind of young man: sensitive, witty, slightly wacky, exuberant, and definitely interested in falling in love with someone. Although I have criticisms of all of his films, Cryer's presence still fascinates me. I began watching *Morgan Stewart* (1987) followed

by *No Small Affair* (1984). By the time I had seen *Hiding Out* (1987), I was so infatuated with him I was laughing like a child. Something very exciting was happening.

When I went to write about my reaction to the last film, I tried to explain how excited I had felt while I was watching it. By the end of the viewing I was thrilled that he had gotten together with the female lead. I was excited even though I knew in advance that that was how the film would end. I recognized this reaction: it was an old response, one that I had experienced when I was a teenager, reading the novels or seeing films that had a romantic involvement. Again, like the *Smithton* readers, I was always sorely disappointed if the romance failed. (Radway, 1984) As I tried to explain the sensation I felt, I noted that I was reacting to the story on a physical level. Interestingly, I wrote: "I was excited ..." only to return to that sentence a few seconds later, to add: "I was excited not so much sexually as physically." I looked at this a moment, and suddenly realized I was trying to hide the fact that it had felt sexual to me. Until that moment I had never thought of it as sexual, only "romantic"—the typical idea of female sublimation. Suddenly the elements were clear: I desperately wanted Cryer and his female attraction to kiss; I could feel excitement in my chest, as if he might kiss me; and I remembered that sometime during the screenings, I had thought of my lover sexually, anticipating seeing him later. I had thought this in passing, not recognizing that the films had struck some chord of familiarity.

In writing about Cryer's films I realized that scenes of romantic seductions are affective in a sexual sense even though no sexual acts or naked bodies are shown. This opened a door I had not noticed before: the idea of identifying romance as fundamentally sexual suddenly explained the apparent absence of female sexual desire in our cultural discourse. The idea of girls sublimating their desire is unsatisfying because it again erases the desire, forces it to change shape so that the girls are not sexual, are not physically implicated. A more useful

political strategy is to turn this inside out so that we can see the physical desire rather than to pretend (all over again) that it has disappeared. We are so busy showing where it is not that we have not articulated the spaces where it is.

One of the most common defenses of romantic fiction as a "legitimate" type of pleasure/entertainment for women is that underneath the seemingly conservative and patriarchal texts is either a liberating subtext or one that reveals how the readers may be trying to deal with the oppressiveness of patriarchal culture and the heterosexual dyad. (Modleski 1982; Radway 1984) The pleasure that female readers derive can therefore be separated from the masochistic pleasure other critics of the romance genre have attributed to readers of this genre. For me, the pleasure to be found in the teen romances is more closely connected to individual elements that the films possess, or to the pleasure that comes from what Ien Ang noted in her critique of Radway's *Reading the Romance*—what Cora Kaplan called "the process of seduction": "a pleasure that is oriented towards the *scenario* of romance, rather than its outcome." (Ang 1988:186; her emphasis). Ang means "the variety of the ways in which two lovers can find one another." (1988:187). This is a useful way to begin to describe how romances function sexually. The most successful romance films are those that present a "scenario of romance" that defers the consummation of desire. They do so by drawing (seducing) the viewer into an anticipation of the first kiss. Most romances prolong sexual tension by postponing their promise. A common scene is similar to that in *Say Anything*, where Diane and Lloyd are standing facing each other, ostensibly talking about what dress Diane should wear. What we see, however, is their bodies responding to each other's proximity. Their faces are hesitating; they are held apart but their bodies hover over the inches that separate them. At any moment the space might collapse from the force that



draws them together. But they do not kiss; they separate because they have to join the dinner guests downstairs. They do not kiss until many scenes later.

With the possible exception of *Risky Business*, the sex comedies do not offer a female actor for its audience's infatuation. It is very common, however, for heterosexual teenage girls watching romances to develop a crush on a male actor. Numerous women I spoke to mentioned male actors when they recalled films they enjoyed. In this way, teen romance films are crucially different from the romances described by Radway and Modleski. The male hero of most teen romances is not villainous. In the ones I liked the best [films such as *Dirty Dancing* (1987), *Reckless* (1984), *Morgan Stewart's Coming Home* (1987), *Hiding Out* (1987) and *Say Anything* (1989)] the male protagonist is gentle, vulnerable, and unambiguously in love with the female protagonist. These films take care to establish their male protagonists as sensitive boys, and it is their sensitivity, their capacity to be nice, gentle, and loving, that is fundamental to their desirability. The characters are distinguished in the texts from other male characters—often types of boys who are usually main characters in the sex comedies.

The female characters complement these sensitive males by being assertive, strong, and independent. None of them is ever placed in positions of humiliation or vulnerability by the camera or the narrative. They do not alter themselves in order to enter a heterosexual union. In each case, in fact, the male characters appear to be more emotionally implicated than their partners. The seduction for the female characters is therefore non-threatening, and there can be no question of a viewer's identification with masochistic desire. The sensitive male characters portrayed by Jon Cryer, John Cusack (*Say Anything*), Aidan Quinn (*Reckless*), and Patrick Swayze (*Dirty Dancing*), are not, however, "wimps." They are very active physically, either through sports or through the adventure in the story that calls on them to perform heroic feats.

*Say Anything* appears to be a conscious effort to offer a different kind of teenage male character. This romance is about a boy who becomes infatuated with the school "brain." While Diane is also positioned as beautiful, the film does not exploit her looks, and as problems surface with her father she is frequently shot without make-up, with hair that is not perfectly coiffed, and dressed in clothing that is comfortable rather than fashionable. Her intelligence and ambition to study in England are contrasted to Lloyd's lack of ambition. What he wants to do with his life, in fact, "is be with" Diane. In a reversal of traditional plot resolutions, the film concludes with Lloyd following Diane's career to England.

Lloyd's difference from other "guys" is explicitly discussed by the characters. Early in the film Lloyd's character as a "great guy" is established. He is told this by his friend Cory. He is also discussed by Cory and two other female friends, who wonder if Diane actually likes Lloyd. When Cory asks, "If you were Diane Court, would you honestly fall for Lloyd?," each girl answers affirmatively. A preoccupation with Lloyd's personality continues throughout the film. Cory later tells him: "You've gotta show her that you're different from Joe." (Joe was Cory's lover, a boy whose insensitivity caused her to attempt suicide.) Later, after Diane breaks up with Lloyd, he wonders if he has lost Diane because his best friends are girls.

The scene that follows this musing is one of the most memorable from all the teen films. Lloyd is talking out loud in his car, and he wonders if his male friends have any answers. As he says: "I dunno, do guys like that really know the answers," the voices of his friends begin before we see their faces. Their voices overlap, almost echoing. The camera then moves from one face to another, as they sit in a row and speak to Lloyd about their "Bibles of truth" about women. The scene is comically filmed with five other male characters. They sympathize with his having been "dumped," and assert that everything will be fine now because "walk with us and you walk tall." The "walking tall" is ironic since the camera moves from one boy's face

to another, and lands at last on short boy of about twelve who looks at his watch and has to "bail" or he'll get in trouble with his parents.

As the boys comment on Lloyd's situation, he suddenly turns to them and says: "I got a question: if you guys know so much about women how come you're here at like a Gas and Sip on a Saturday night, completely alone drinking beer with no women anywhere?" There is momentary silence as the boys ponder this thought, looking taken aback and somewhat sheepish. Suddenly one says: "By choice, man" and the others agree, echoing: "Yeah, conscious choice"; "Choosin' to be"; "I'm choosing it." The solutions offered for Lloyd's plight are caricatured, making fun of the boys without malice, revealing the macho mentality to be absurd. Finally three of the boys break into a rap song about Lloyd, and with a cut to the next scene we find Lloyd admitting "that was a mistake."

Lloyd's vulnerability is made especially clear in a scene after the couple has had sex for the first time. They emerge from under a blanket, and Lloyd is petting Diane's arm, kissing her face. Their faces are close together, intimate. Diane asks him is he's cold because he's shaking. He responds "no," and she asks him why he's shaking. He tells her, "I'm happy." As one of my friends commented, Lloyd genuinely seems to like Diane. The moment is lovely because John Cusack is able to express a tenderness that appears genuine.

*Morgan Stewart* is a very different film from *Say Anything*. It is a comedy adventure that satirizes American politics and the army. It is unusual among teen films in that the premise of the story is that the main character, Morgan, really wants his family to be more of a family. Most teen films dispense with the parents; in this case Morgan wants them to be a central part of his life. His father is a senator, both parents are ambitious and only want him to help present "family values" to the public eye.

Morgan is also a different character from Lloyd. There is a tension within the film between presenting Morgan as "typical guy" and presenting him as sensitive and caring. Certain devices are used for comic effect that are inconsistent with my overall impression of Morgan's character. For example, in one scene Morgan has gone to a political party for his father, a senator. Morgan is found ogling a statue of a nude woman. Instead of the response one would expect, Jake (his father's aide) says: "Try acting like you're having a good time sport." Morgan then puts a silly grin on his face, meanwhile continuing to stare at the statue. Cryer, the actor, is comical. But not in this instance, when he is asked to assume a posture that is reminiscent of a character from a sex comedy. This behaviour does not suit either Cryer's persona as an actor, nor Morgan.

What is particularly interesting about this film is Morgan's relationship to a girl he befriends. Morgan is a devoted horror film fan. Not surprisingly, the film makes reference to Hitchcock: it has an evil mother figure (comic evil), and later parodies the shower scene from *Psycho*. Morgan is thrilled to meet another horror film fan in Emily (Vivika Davis), and he unabashadly does a song and dance routine on the sweeping staircase of his parents' mansion to the words of "I'm in love." He is comical and endearing. Emily is a strong and intelligent female character. She rides a small motorcycle and has a part-time job in a hamburger joint. The film acknowledges her personality—she does not get flattened into a paper doll for the viewer's titillation. The couple are friends; the film respects this friendship.

The shower scene is a crucial moment in their friendship. The scene is precipitated by their both having fallen into his parents' pond. They had been standing on the edge talking and suddenly they both lean over for the first kiss, only to lose their balance. When they run to his room, Emily announces she is going to take a shower. She peels off her clothing to a

bra and underwear; Morgan is watching her, surprised and pleased, but the camera does not zoom in so the audience can inspect her nipples. This distance serves to respect her autonomy; she is not, at any point, turned into a coy sexpot. She is also aware of Morgan's gawking; she challenges him by saying "What are you going to do just stand there and catch pneumonia?" and flinging her nylons at him. This was an important moment for me: the camera catches her face smiling and aware of his attraction, but also challenging him to meet her on equal ground—which he does, by proceeding to take off his clothes. While he is undressing and saying "Thank you god," Emily goes into his bathroom, puts on one of his horror masks, and hides behind the door to startle him. When he comes in she jumps out and shrieks: "I need a shampoo." The mask has long matted hair; the play is very effective. He puts on another mask and joins her in the shower.

I was able to appreciate the elements of play, of sensuality and sexuality, without feeling as if the scene were the same tired excuse to use the female body for titillation. This scene is pleasurable because it is also idiosyncratic: I have not seen it before, and it surprises me. This could have been yet another exploitative moment, and perhaps it was intended to titillate its audience. But it does not succeed as titillation. I enjoy it precisely because it does something different with a girl's body.

Having discovered the sexual titillation of romantic structures-- in particular the "scenario of romance" and the tease of the first kiss-- I wanted to affirm romance as more than emotional. I wanted to assert the physical aspect, to point out that the viewing of romance is presented as a non-threatening way for girls/women to experience sexual pleasure. What I could have added, perhaps, is that in being non-threatening this does not mean that romance films are necessarily better than the sex comedies. Although I enjoyed them more, I don't think they address the issues that need to be addressed about adolescence.

When Morgan's mother arrives to catch the couple in the shower together, we see the two absorbed in discussion about films, still in their masks. They enjoy talking to each other; their pleasure is largely based on an intellectual knowledge of each other. Sexuality stops short at physical contact. It seems impossible for the teen films to represent both emotional/intellectual and intensely physical sexual relationships between characters.

Furthermore, I was compelled to divide the romances into two chapters because I wanted to discuss elements that can be disturbing within the romantic structure. The female body is not necessarily safe from harm in "loving relationships," (as we saw in the John Hughes romances) and girls are frequently pressured into changing fundamental aspects of themselves before they can play the part of the desirable feminine girl. The lack of aggressive, assertive and rebellious female characters is apparent. Sexual activity is also romanticized, at the expense of informing female and male viewers about particulars they should know about, such as contraception, the clitoris and sexual pleasure, and encouraging forms of sexual activity other than intercourse.

As Hollywood teen films, *Say Anything* and *Morgan Stewart* contain elements that stretch the boundaries restricting female characters. The scenario of romance, however, can be enticing in the same way as the images of "sexy women," offering feelings that are pleasurable within a context that may be derogatory or limiting for female viewers to identify with. The enticement of pleasure may foreclose a questioning of the values on offer. In particular, the inevitable heterosexuality of the union obscures the possibilities of arousal and desire in adolescent girls. Although in adolescence I was obsessed with heterosexual romance, it is not clear to me that my identification is directly with the female of the pair. Since I was not offered lesbian romances it is impossible to assert that it was the heterosexuality that was

offered lesbian romances it is impossible to assert that it was the heterosexuality that was desired.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, neither teen sex comedies nor teen romances offer female or male viewers the space to identify with a range of sexual pleasures.

#### Chapter VI Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In watching *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991) recently I found that the sexual tension between the two female characters was just as powerful as scenes I have seen between heterosexual characters. Once again I desired to see the two kiss, and felt frustrated that they do not.

CHAPTER VII  
MEMORIES OF THE BODY PART III  
MAKING WAVES

The universal teen-age condition, once again represented as a passel of worries about sex and parents and popularity, is given no new dimension here. And the heroine's struggle for independence culminates in nothing more drastic than her decision to breach the protocol of the waves, since her friends regard surfing as a thrill reserved exclusively for boys. (Maslin, 1983, on *Puberty Blues*)

Thus Janet Maslin dismisses the only teen film I was able to find that admits there are problems between the sexes and explicitly criticizes the power imbalance during adolescence.

*Puberty Blues* (1981), an Australian film directed by Bruce Beresford.

*Puberty Blues* tells the story of two girls, Debbie and Sue, who decide they want to join the popular crowd. They are successful in this endeavor, but as time passes they gradually realize that the restrictions placed upon them as girls in order to be accepted are not worth the popularity. Within the genre of teen films *Puberty Blues* is an anomaly. Like *Foxes* (1980), *Puberty Blues* is one of the more non-romanticized and starker teen films. It is not glossy, and it portrays teenage girls in various milieus: at school, at home (with parents who are present), and with their peers. The question of conformity, of being either "in" or "out" of the popular crowd, is central to this story. While dealing with popularity and partying, even including a spoof fight between the surfer boys and the much brawnier lifeguards, as well as showing a shot of naked breasts, the film stands out because it is critical of boys' attitudes towards girls. The heart of the film explores the existing power imbalance. It is narrated by a girl and shows the most realistic portrayal of girls' experience I have seen.

*Puberty Blues* takes surfing as the central divide between the sexes in this adolescent society. Girls tan; boys surf. This division is symptomatic of the overall relationship between the teenagers. As Debbie points out, in voice-over: girls are also not allowed to eat or go to



the bathroom in front of the boys. "It was unladylike to open your mouth and shove something in it"; and going to the bathroom "was too rude for girls." In consequence they were always starving and/or busting their guts. They are not allowed to discuss their own sexuality; they are expected to "root for" (have sex with) the boys, whether or not they enjoy it. Parallel to the story of Debbie and Sue and their experience with the in-crowd is the story of Freda, the school "moll" (i.e. slut) who is gang-raped. Freda's rape is linked to the girls' prohibition from surfing. By creating a connection between not being allowed to surf and a vulnerability to rape, the film suggests that the rules of gender also allow boys to rape girls with impunity.

As I pointed out in Chapter IV, teenage girls are controlled by the stigma of "slut." *Puberty Blues'* inclusion of the story of Freda acknowledges the sexual manipulation involved in this stigma. Her place in the film is a central current, thus establishing the importance of her experience. From the beginning we are aware that she is ostracized from her peers. When she says "hello" to Sue and Debbie, they roll their eyes and ignore her. During the course of the film she reappears, but we only get to know her when she is the target of three boys who decide to rape her. The power play employed in her abuse is effectively portrayed. After having been pressured into accepting a ride home by three boys in a van (three of the popular surfer boys), Freda is driven to a deserted area, and the boys stage an argument. One of the boys pretends to protest that he will not let the other two use Freda for sex. He is dragged to the back of the vehicle, out of Freda's sight. They then pretend to beat him up, while he cries in mock pain. Freda, distressed by what she thinks is happening, tells them to stop, she'll have sex with them. The boy who had supposedly been defending her then complains that he never gets to go first: "I'm always slops."

Although Freda does not realize that she has been manipulated into a passive acceptance of her rape, the audience is very aware of the boys' behaviour. Beresford frames this scene by ending with a shot of Freda abandoned downtown. In case we missed the import of what has just occurred, the film spells it out: the camera focusses on the sign for a store called "BOYSWORLD."

### "It's No Use It's Too Big"

Sexuality in *Puberty Blues* is representative of studies done on teenage girls and correlates with some of the experiences of my friends. Sex is not very pleasurable for the female characters but is seen to be necessary in order to keep their boyfriends. As Sue confides to Debbie: "Danny'd drop me if I didn't root for him." There is no discussion about sexuality between the girls and boys, and no attempt to make the sexual experiences pleasurable for the girls.

Debbie's initiation to sex with her first boyfriend Bruce is unromantic, cold, and mechanical. Bruce ushers her into the back of his van and begins to undress, wordlessly. He puts a condom on his penis and climbs on top of her. There are no kisses, and no sounds except the bouncing of the van and her protestations of discomfort as he tries to force himself inside of her. After a few seconds he sits up and bangs his head on the roof. Later Debbie confides to Sue that there must be something wrong with her because Bruce could not get inside her. She asks Sue not to tell the others she is still a virgin. A subsequent scene finds Bruce trying once more to enter her body, this time with the help of vaseline. "It's no use it's too big," Debbie says, and he retreats from her.

Bruce's penis is of no use to Debbie; his ego is too big, he is too self-centered to be able to arouse her. Bruce's attempts to have sex with Debbie are very disturbing. He is one of the same boys who later rapes Freda. He does not rape Debbie; he does not succeed in getting

his penis into her vagina. After she concludes that "It's no use, it's too big," Bruce breaks up with her. What a relief!

Debbie's reaction is exhilarating because it refers to the myth about women adoring large penises and deflates it in one fell swoop. What Debbie needs is for her boyfriend to be less preoccupied with this own ejaculation/pleasure, (the penis needs to be brought down to proportion) and more aware of the fact that he is involved with another person, not "just a cunt."

The difference between the sexual intercourse in *Puberty Blues* and many of the other teen films is based on the portrayal of female arousal. The sex comedies present female characters who are already aroused and who are very simply satisfied by men who approach them the way Bruce approaches Debbie. A male character has an erection; he climbs on top of the female character, enters her vagina and they both come. In the romances there is a form of seduction that implies a development of arousal between both sexes. Sexual intercourse, however, is still depicted as very simply satisfying. The reality of female arousal is much closer to *Puberty Blues* depiction of girls who do not know how to ask to be pleased, and boys who do not wonder if the girls need to ask.

#### Making Waves

Gradually, Debbie decides that change must occur. Although the event that seems to alter everything is the death of another boy with whom she had been involved, the scene that is most significant occurs just prior to this, as the gang is congregated at someone's house on a rainy day. The boys are playing poker and the girls are sitting around, bored. Two of the girls bake a cake for the boys, and the girls watch as they devour it without a word of even "thank you." Debbie appears increasingly restless. Finally she suggests they go to see a film or a band. The boys respond by glaring at her, and stating, as if she should know better,

that they are playing cards. Debbie receives no support from the girls, but she begins to criticize the boys by telling them they make her sick, and she repeats, twice, that "there's more to life than surfing." In this interchange it is clear that it is the boys who make the decisions. There is no dialogue, there is no consideration for the girls' views; in effect their thoughts are completely irrelevant.

The scene that follows opens with the camera watching the girls from the inside of a jewelry store window. The girls are pointing out the rings they like. The camera focusses on Debbie who is standing off to the side, again looking bored and restless. Her boredom and impatience are a form of strength; all she needs is a catalyst to propel her into action. The scene is interrupted by a commotion down the street. Debbie's former boyfriend has just died from a drug overdose.

The death of Garry is the catalyst. When the boys send his surfboard out to sea, Deb attaches to it the friendship ring he had given her. Letting go of the ring separates Debbie from the girls who had been so interested in the jewelry store display, and takes her a step away from the rings' symbolism of being "married" to boys.

In the last scene, Sue and Debbie return to the beach. The first sign of change is that they are carrying a surfboard. As they walk down the beach they say "hello" to Freda. The joy this brings to her face is poignant. This action signals the possibility for female solidarity, for girls to protect each other and impede male violence. Again, the film links the treatment of Freda to the action of surfing.

As the two girls proceed into the water, the boys call them "Gidget," and yell "Girls don't surf!" and "You chicks are bent, fucking bent!" Debbie and Sue shrug them off. As Debbie tries to stay on the board, the boys and girls from the gang watch her. Their faces and comments are at first critical, and then, they are more silent. Finally Danny (Sue's boyfriend)

cheers as Debbie catches a wave and rides it. This public display of her body is very different from the usual displays of the female body. Debbie is wearing a bikini, but the camera watches her from a respectful distance. The lyrics from the song on the soundtrack compliment her progress: "I don't want to suffer these conditions no more, haven't I the right to say ... Nobody takes me seriously anyway." The final shot of Debbie and Sue leaving the beach at twilight after a "great day" is the beginning of something new. Sue says: "I bet we're dropped [from the gang]." Debbie's response of "Who cares?" and their laughter reflects both a realization that their actions may make their life difficult (since they may be ostracized by the gang), but their laughter and pleasure reveals a defiance that is hopeful for change, for difference.

In *Some Kind of Wonderful*, it is a problem that Watts is not enough like a "girl"; in *The Breakfast Club*, Allison's dark make-up and baggy clothing are responsible for her ostracization. Only one aesthetic exists: femininity in the form of pink make-up, bras, and white lace. In John Hughes' world the female characters' individuality or difference is abandoned. Claire accepts a romance on John's terms. She does not question his assault on her; she understands it to be his way of showing desire. Samantha, too, accepts that Ted needs her underwear to prove something to his peers. She relinquishes it in spite of the risk to her reputation so he can not only win a bet but gain the status of a stud. Although in *The Breakfast Club* each character is supposed to be different one from the other, they are actually part of the same persona. As Ted declares in a voice-over at the end of the film, each of them is "a brain, an athlete, a basketcase, a princess, and a criminal."

Debbie and Sue, in contrast, assert their identities in contradiction; the teen rules themselves are brought into question. Janet Maslin's assessment of *Puberty Blues* (quoted above) suggests to me that there exist an abundance of films from the 1970s that deal with

sexism and the sexual manipulation of girls. Since video stores do not carry many teen films from the 1970s, it is possible that Maslin is comparing *Puberty Blues* to films of which I am not aware. Her remark, however, about Debbie's breach of the protocol of the waves as not being "drastic" suggests that when Maslin wrote the review she was neither knowledgeable about teen films nor about teen society. Certainly, in comparison to teen films of the 1980s, and in light of the sexual division in adolescent societies, Beresford's film about two teenage girls is remarkable.

*Puberty Blues* exposes sexual abuse against girls in very sympathetic ways and encourages girls to take initiative to combat the sexism they encounter in their daily lives. Not only does the film confront male violence and the distance between the sexes, it questions the boundaries that impede girls from taking action and taking pleasure. When Debbie learns how to surf she is not simply learning how to surf: she is making it possible for all girls to try; she risks being labelled "unfeminine" (i.e. unattractive); she risks ostracization from her peers; she is developing her body physically; she is acquiring self-possession and power. She is doing something in front of everyone that everyone has told her she cannot do.<sup>1</sup>

In Hughes' films, "coupledom" is sought out and embraced very naturally. He romanticizes to the point of ignoring the possible ramifications of sexual harassment and abuse in Samantha and Claire's lives. He also depicts feminine transformations as if they should be celebrated as some kind of gain or even liberation from repression to sexual maturity. *Puberty Blues*, on the other hand, shows how girls are pushed into heterosexual relations. When Deb is chosen by Bruce to be his girlfriend, she is streamlined into the position—since he "likes" her (likes what he sees of her; they have not spoken to each other), she must accept his overture. This includes accepting that she is expected to have sex with

him. Sue also accepts that she has to "root" for her boyfriend Danny even though she finds it unsatisfying.

In essence, *Puberty Blues* shows what would happen if Samantha from *Sixteen Candles* were to meet Pee-wee from *Porky's*—or more precisely, what happens when the girls who like the romance films meet the boys who like the sex comedies. This is an impossible combination. The result is girls who are expected to do what the boys want, denying their own needs. In promoting sex comedies for boys, and romances for girls, the Hollywood film industry promotes values that reinforce the idea that boys have rights over girls' bodies, and girls must be accepting of how boys treat them. Sexual liberation for boys in the sex comedies means greater access to female bodies. In *Puberty Blues*, sexual liberation means liberation from boys, and bonding with girls. There is an inverse relationship between male and female characters in the teen films, overall. As boys are more liberated, girls are more oppressed. As girls are offered more freedom, the heterosexual dyad is threatened.

### Memories of the Body Part III

The first memory of the body I described in Chapter II was a memory of physical assault. It was placed in the context of a general sense of violation, of being watched and talked about that was combined with an awareness of sexual assaults that happen to other girls and women. That memory informed my response to both sex comedies and some romances. The second memory of the body from Chapter V involved memories of pleasure and excitement that were aroused by watching romantic reunions that had female characters who were with non-threatening male characters. This final memory is about desire and threats to the body, and brings me ultimately to *Puberty Blues*.

*Puberty Blues* is a film that starts its female protagonists in a position of vulnerability, where they have little control over what happens to their bodies and little say in being able

to obtain what they desire. From that low point the characters take control and achieve some measure of power through their bodies. Until I began this research into adolescence and my past, I had forgotten that I once felt power through the physical use of my body. Although the chain of memories begin before puberty, when I was nine years old, it is my adolescence that is at the center.

I was an athletic child, and derived a great deal of pleasure from using my body to run, to climb trees, to do all kinds of sports with a group of friends who lived in my neighbourhood. Sometime in grade three I began to join boys at my school who played sports at recess. I remember feeling excited about being accepted by these new friends; I do not know if I considered the fact that I was the only girl to play with them. I have only three memories that relate to this activity: the happiness I felt when I was accepted at a table in the library with a couple of the boys; this memory is later tinged with a terrible feeling of guilt. The guilt came after a group of the most popular girls from my class cornered me and told me I was a "sex maniac" for hanging out with boys. I did not know what a sex maniac was, but I knew it was bad.

This is slightly different from being called a "slut," but in this context it was used in the same way. The power of this condemnation was strong enough to prevent me from sitting at the boys' table in the library. I did not stop doing sports with my friends (boys and girls), but I am not sure if I continued, at that time, to join the boys at recess.

It is not clear if the girls objected to my being athletic, or if my simply associating with boys was somehow objectionable. They did not attack me because I was athletic; instead, they accused me of having an ulterior motive. They could not accept (or did not want to) that I was with the boys because I liked sports. They wanted me to think I was doing something reprehensible, and what was reprehensible was for me to be interested in sex.



This idea, that girls are always only interested in boys for romance/sex above all else, was mobilized by these eight and nine year old girls. They could attack me on this point because it was an assumption readily at hand. Already they had learned enough to know that girls could be criticized for taking sexual initiative-- this was indecent.

What is significant, for me, is that this whole situation occurred because I was gaining stature in the eyes of the boys through the use of my body, and I ended up feeling guilty for daring to think I was accepted by them as an equal. In my memory, although I did not feel guilty for being athletic, I did feel guilty for feeling pleasure and pride that the boys would allow me to sit at their table. It did not suit the girls that I should be accepted as an equal to the boys. What the girls told me, in fact, was that I was not an equal: by calling me a sex maniac/slut they informed me that I was accepted by the boys only because I was willing to have sex with them. This is not something I understood at the time; if anything, what registered was that my behaviour was under scrutiny and I might be judged and punished if I stepped outside the invisible boundaries (of gender) others were placing around me.

The most painful part of this memory is that I actually did believe I was an equal, physically, to boys. At that age I was equal; I could compete at their level and was not relegated to a separate category of "girls' sports." Before puberty, my greatest source of pleasure and accomplishment came from using my body physically. I had no idea what was going to happen to me, to the identity that was linked to a sense of physical power.

I began this research because I had some "things" from my past I was trying to trace. Adolescence was an "event" in the development of my identity that shattered the person I thought I was or could be. It was such a shock to me that I did not know what had happened until ten years later. When I looked back to pick up the pieces, I saw a young tomboy who could not accept that she was supposed to be "feminine." She did not feel feminine, she did

not feel that she looked feminine, and she could not respect "femininity." Part of her wanted to be feminine because she knew that the way to achieve status was by being attractive to boys, even though she could not respect the essential characteristics. She was consequently split in two. She felt like a freak.

When I began high school and my body began to mature, I felt very uncomfortable physically. I felt as if I was being watched; I felt vulnerable; and ultimately I stopped doing sports for three years. I ran, alone, but that was the only sport I pursued. I did not feel comfortable with my physical identity; my athleticism did not fit in with the idea of "feminine attractiveness." I found myself retreating, wanting to disappear. I can attribute this "shyness" to a variety of factors, but something quite specific was happening. I was no longer physically "equal" to my male peers. Not only were they stronger, they were intimidating. In retrospect what I learned from my experience of puberty was that I would never again be equal to boys. This realization was not just that girls were no longer able to join boys on the same ground in sports. Our bodies were threatened by male violence, and it was our sexuality, the very thing that identified us as female, that made us a target of male aggression.

I therefore learned several lessons upon entering high school: that my body would never be as strong as my male peers; that it was undesirable, unfeminine, unwomanly for me to be physically aggressive (which is what I felt in being athletic; I felt I had an energy that was powerful and which acted outwards); I learned that boys and men could act upon me, could say things and do things to me that were physically harmful; and finally, that I would be unable to protect myself from this abuse. I felt as if I had lost my body; or as if it had betrayed me in becoming "a woman."

At the same time, I was aware of being identified as "a sexual female." I learned, somehow, that "sexy women" were unworthy of respect. They were desired, but

simultaneously disdained. I made connections between my feeling dirty about my body, and the pictures of "sexy" women I saw all around me. Because I was aroused by the images I saw, I felt dirty about my arousal. I learned to feel uncomfortable whenever I became aware of my breasts or genitals. I learned to divide myself into sections in order to feel pleasure. For long periods of time I was unable to walk down the street without feeling as if my body was so dirty I wanted to cut it away. This feeling was compounded by the way that boys and men would look at me. Their eyes weighed upon me. I felt trapped.

"Feminine" sexuality is passive, receptive, does not take initiative, and is characterized by a pleasure that is emotional, spiritual, to do with love, and not the body. Consequently many girls are not comfortable with the idea of masturbating, and girls who enjoy sex without love are perceived to be "sluts." Related to this idea of what girls are *supposed* to be like are characteristics of gentleness, quietness, never raising one's voice, never becoming angry or enraged, never lashing out. The perfect little woman is one who is utterly vulnerable to sexual abuse.

My reluctance to be "a woman" had much to do with these aspects of femininity. I felt guilty for feeling sexual pleasure, but perhaps even more profoundly, I felt guilty for feeling "aggressive." My athletic carriage seemed "masculine." The voice in my head sounded "male." It was opinionated, self-assured, and capable of great anger. I learned to defer to the masculine boys around me. I learned, effectively, to censor myself.

I subsequently regained some measure of power and strength from my body through fitness. When I can be physically active, it is easier for me to move among other people. Physical strength is also a mental space: I can correlate my level of self-confidence to my level of fitness.

There is a scene in *When He's Not a Stranger* (1989) that frequently came to mind as I tried to understand my fascination with physical action. Lyn is a first year university student raped by her best friend's boyfriend. When she attempts to press charges through the university she finds the system more willing to protect her rapist, a star football player. After receiving notice of the university's negative judgment of her case, she is depicted striding out onto the football field where her assailant is practicing. She accosts him and tells him that he will not get away with his lies, with his abuse. Lyn pushes him with her hand; her energy, her anger, fill the screen. In spite of his size as a football player, she dwarfs him with her incredible strength. The satisfaction involved in watching her action is heightened by the fact that she is trespassing into two male-dominated spaces: the football field, and the terrain of anger. Her courage is exhilarating to watch.

It is apparent that my wariness of John Hughes' films is linked to the female characters' physicality; their ability to move, where they are placed, how they are able to deal through their bodies, and ultimately, how they seem to be acted upon or restricted physically. These restrictions are liabilities. Not surprisingly, the films I found pleasurable had some of the few female characters who are athletic: in *Dirty Dancing* "Baby" dances; in *Reckless* Stacey is a gymnast; in *Morgan Stewart is Coming Home* Emily is very active physically (she rides a motorcycle; she is placed in situations where she jumps on and off steps or benches) and her body is very muscular. *Puberty Blues* deals directly with restrictions on the female body and ends the film with Debbie learning how to surf.

Everything girls/women do with their bodies is scrutinized. I do not promote the idea that it is necessary for all teenage girls to be athletic, for not everyone is suited to sports. Since physical fitness became fashionable women have been pressured to be athletic because this will get rid of "unsightly fat." This is especially apparent in the propaganda directed at

women over the age of forty: with exercise programs like Jane Fonda's, women are expected to use fitness to keep a "young woman's" body. Such an endeavor is another form of oppression, another demand on us to change our "unacceptable" bodies. My own experience has revealed how significant a role my body has played in establishing my self-image. If sports are useful to women, it is because they keep us in touch with how our body feels ... and because they help us use our body for ourselves, for our own pleasure, for a sense of accomplishment directly related to how we feel physically.

If girls and women were not viewed with disdain, sex without romance would not threaten our integrity, our ability to find sexual pleasure, and our lives. The solution is not "romance" with its promise of "love." The problem is that our bodies do not command respect. We need to be feminine in order to be attractive, but femininity is not respected in this society; it is a sign of vulnerability. Rapists look for "easy victims," they look for women who look as if they will not resist, as if they will not fight back, women who look as if they are vulnerable. With the over-valuation of romance that positions girls passively into feminine postures, the reason that sex without love is in some ways threatening to girls is eclipsed.

As indicated in my second chapter, my goal is to engage three levels of knowledge and textual interpretation so as to reveal the interconnections, the points at which one level refers to another and makes the films meaningful in the context of their viewing. These levels are:

- 1- My history/autobiography: my memories as I make sense of them, combined with stories my friends told me;
- 2- sociological studies of teenagers and sexuality: researchers ordering information gathered from adolescents;
- 3- teen films as fictional or fantastic stories about teenagers produced in the context of big business

Each level offers a textual interpretation in the sense that each has a narrative structure that orders knowledge and experience into a logical sequence, like a story.

Discomfort in viewing emerges when the references connect to another level and reveal a link between the production of the image (how it is offered in a specific context) and the harm/pain that is inflicted by the experience to which the image refers. Hence my response to the scene with "Lassie" in *Porky's* is one that does not see any humour because the scene reminds me of the contempt our society has for women. And in a specific sense, the shoving of a sock into her mouth reminds me of the first time I heard about rape: a teenage girl was found dead in my neighbourhood. Her hairbrush had been stuffed into her mouth.

The division between the sexes in our society prevents boys from knowing anything about girls' experience. How do boys learn that the abuse of girls and women is not abuse? Where do boys get the idea that they have the right to violate and talk about our bodies as if we are by nature made to be used with contempt? Part of the problem is that boys do not know or do not care to know about our experience.

The sexuality depicted in the sex comedies is not incompatible with the sexuality in the romances because they occur on separate levels, in spaces where one need not acknowledge the other. Romance elevates the female above her body. Love is offered as a guarantee of pleasure once removed from the physical so that the actuality of her body as a site of abuse and neglect can be overlooked. Meanwhile, when a boy "humps a girl's brains out," the female character as a character has vacated; she is just a body, no "brains," no feelings. It is understood that she is satisfied; in effect there is nothing to satisfy. Girls can go see "girls' films," boys can go see "boys' films," each can derive their distinct pleasure in viewing. If a girl watches a "boys' film" and does not enjoy it, her displeasure can be explained by her sex.

Yet, if a joke does not work in "mixed company" the joke must be sexist or bigotted. Boys do not connect the stuffing of a sock in Miss Honeywell's mouth to the horror I see because it refers me to my knowledge of rape. The boys who laugh at that scene are not concerned because it has no such meaning for them. Humour is not a matter of taste; it is a question of values. That "male" humour involves the disparagement of women indicates that we are not valued. Otherwise the jokes would not work; they would have no meaning, and they would not exist. If most girls do not like to watch boys' films (sex comedies) there is something wrong and potentially dangerous about boys' films.

There is a connection between the liberal display of the images in mainstream media and the liberal way that men and boys constantly barrage girls and women with verbal harassment and physical assault. The texts should not be viewed in isolation from the context in which men and women live and relate. In a sense the goal is not so much to point out how "bad" the images are as what they can mean juxtaposed against actual experiences. If we incorporate stories we see and hear into the way we tell stories about ourselves, those stories in the teen films affect us in potentially damaging ways. As much as physical threats are a form of power, the images pose psychological threats to our integrity by telling us over and over who we are or how we should be, what is acceptable, what is "normal."

Recently an acquaintance wondered how it could be that strong women who rejected the "beauty myth" could still be affected by it. He found it hard to understand that power worked on many levels; that we are taught very early what a good girl is, who a sexy woman is, and the punishments to expect should we step out of line. This is true of race and sexual preference as well. We internalize the misogyny, the racism; we learn to despise ourselves. Some learn this lesson harder than others. But the rules are there to be seen. Entertainment is particularly powerful because it can include elements of pleasure simultaneously as it

presents ideas that are painful or destructive. The trick, perhaps, is to offer pleasure that liberates rather than confines, that enables more, instead of fewer, ways of "being."

*"I don't want to suffer those conditions no more"*

#### Chapter VII Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I do not know whether teenage girls are still hampered from surfing the waves in Australia, but I do know that when I was in San Francisco in September 1991, I did not see one woman surfing. Granted the weather was poor, it is still significant that among 30 odd surfers (on separate occasions) there were no women present.



## APPENDIX A

## Chronological Listing of Films Viewed

1953	The Wild One	1983	Class High School U.S.A. The Outsiders Risky Business Rumblefish Spring Break	1988	For Keeps Fresh Horses A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon Mystic Pizza Satisfaction She's Having a Baby The Year My Voice Broke
1955	The Blackboard Jungle East of Eden Rebel Without a Cause				
1959	Gidget	1984	Hardbodies Old Enough No Small Affair Reckless Revenge of the Nerds Secret Places Sixteen Candles Where the Boys Are '84 The Wild Life	1989	Back to the Future II Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure The Dead Poet's Society Dream a Little Dream Heathers Say Anything Shag
1960	Splendor in the Grass				
1961	Gidget Goes Hawaiian West Side Story				
1963	Beach Party				
1965	Beach Blanket Bingo Billie Girl Happy	1985	Back to the Future The Breakfast Club Desperately Seeking Susan Just One of the Guys Saint Elmo's Fire The Sure Thing Tomboy Weird Science	1990	Pump Up the Volume
1966	Women of the Prehistoric Planet			1991	Career Opportunities
1973	American Graffiti				
1974	The Lords of Flatbush				
1978	Grease National Lampoon's Animal House	1986	About Last Night Ferris Bueller's Day Off Lucas My American Cousin Playing for Keeps Pretty in Pink Seven Minutes in Heaven Soul Man Top Gun Twist and Shout		
1979	Breaking Away Meatballs Rock'n'Roll High School The Warriors				
1980	Foxes Little Darlings				
1981	Endless Love Puberty Blues	1987	Dirty Dancing Hiding Out Maid to Order Morgan Stewart's Coming Home The Pick-Up Artist The Princess Academy River's Edge Some Kind of Wonderful		
1982	Diner Fast Times at Ridgemont High The Last American Virgin Porky's				

## APPENDIX B

### Films narrated by male characters (between 1973-91)

American Graffiti (1973)	About Last Night (1986)
The Lords of Flatbush (1974)	Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)
Nat. Lampoon's Animal House (1978)	Lucas (1986)
Breaking Away (1979)	Playing for Keeps (1986)
Meatballs (1979)	Soul Man (1986)
The Warriors (1979)	Top Gun (1986)
Endless Love (1981)	Twist and Shout (1986)
Diner (1982)	Hiding Out (1987)
The Last American Virgin (1982)	Morgan Stewart's Coming Home (1987)
Porky's (1982)	The Pick-Up Artist (1987)
High School U.S.A. (1983)	River's Edge (1987)
The Outsiders (1983)	Some Kind of Wonderful (1987)
Risky Business (1983)	(Partially from girl's)
Rumblefish (1983)	Fresh Horses (1988)
Spring Break (1983)	A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon (1988)
Hardbodies (1984)	She's Having a Baby (1988)
No Small Affair (1984)	The Year my Voice Broke (1988)
Revenge of the Nerds (1984)	Back to the Future II (1989)
Oxford Blues (1984)	Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989)
Back to the Future (1985)	The Dead Poets Society (1989)
The Sure Thing (1985)	Dream a Little Dream (1989)
Weird Science (1985)	The Rachel Papers (1989)
	Say Anything (1989)
	Pump Up the Volume (1990)

### Films narrated by female characters

Grease (1978)	Pretty in Pink (1986)
Rock'n'Roll High School (1979)	Seven Minutes in Heaven (1986)
Foxes (1980)	Dirty Dancing (1987)
Little Darlings (1980)	Maid to Order (1987)
Old Enough (1984)	The Princess Academy (1987)
Secret Places (1984)	For Keeps (1988)
Seventeen (1984)	Mystic Pizza (1988)
Sixteen Candles (1984)	Satisfaction (1988)
Where the Boys Are (1984)	Heathers (1989)
Desperately Seeking Susan (1985)	Shag (1989)
Just One of the Guys (1985)	When He's Not a Stranger (1989)
Tomboy (1985)	
My American Cousin (1986)	

### Films showing both male and female perspectives

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)	Breakfast Club (1985)
Reckless (1984)	Saint Elmo's Fire (1985)
The Wild Life (1984)	

## Types of teen films

## Action/adventure

The Wild One (1953)	Desperately Seeking Susan (1985)
National Lampoon's Animal House (1978)	Tomboy (1985)
Meatballs (1979)	Weird Science (1985)
The Warriors (1979)	Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)
Foxes (1980)	Playing for Keeps (1986)
Little Darlings (1980)	Top Gun (1986)
Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)	Hiding Out (1987)
Porky's (1982)	Morgan Stewart's Coming Home (1987)
High School U.S.A. (1983)	Back to the Future II (1989)
Risky Business (1983)	Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989)
The Outsiders (1983)	Dream a Little Dream (1989)
Rumblefish (1983)	Heathers (1989)
Spring Break (1983)	Pump up the Volume (1990)
Revenge of the Nerds (1984)	Career Opportunities (1991)
Back to the Future (1985)	

## Beach Movie

Gidget (1959)	Beach Party (1963)
Gidget Goes Hawaiian (1961)	Beach Blanket Bingo (1965)

## Class conflict

The Lords of Flatbush (1974)	Pretty in Pink (1986)
Breaking Away (1979)	Dirty Dancing (1987)
Meatballs (1979)	Some Kind of Wonderful (1987)
The Outsiders (1983)	Fresh Horses (1988)
Reckless (1984)	Mystic Pizza (1988)

## Coming of age

East of Eden (1955)	Top Gun (1986)
Gidget (1959)	Twist and Shout
American Graffiti (1973)	Dirty Dancing (1987)
The Lords of Flatbush (1974)	Maid to Order (1987)
Grease (1978)	Satisfaction (1988)
Foxes (1980)	The Year My Voice Broke (1988)
Little Darlings (1980)	Shag (1989)
Puberty Blues (1981)	When He's Not a Stranger (1989)
No Small Affair (1984)	Pump up the Volume (1990)
Desperately Seeking Susan (1985)	
Saint Elmo's Fire (1985)	
The Sure Thing (1985)	
Lucas (1986)	
Seven Minutes in Heaven (1986)	

## APPENDIX C

## Conflict between two groups

The Wild One (1953)  
 The Blackboard Jungle (1955)  
 Rebel Without a Cause (1955)  
 West Side Story (1961)  
 Animal House (1978)  
 Meatballs (1979)  
 Rock'n'Roll High School (1979)  
 The Warriors (1979)  
 Little Darlings (1980)  
 Porky's (1982)  
 High School U.S.A. (1983)  
 The Outsiders (1983)

Rumblefish (1983)  
 Spring Break (1983)  
 Reckless (1984)  
 Just One of the Guys (1985)  
 Playing for Keeps (1986)  
 Pretty in Pink (1986)  
 Dirty Dancing (1987)  
 Morgan Stewart's Coming Home (1987)  
 Some Kind of Wonderful (1987)  
 Say Anything (1989)  
 Pump up the Volume (1990)

## Friendship

American Graffiti (1973)  
 The Lords of Flatbush (1974)  
 Breaking Away (1979)  
 Foxes (1980)  
 Puberty Blues (1981)  
 Diner (1982)  
 Class (1983)  
 The Outsiders (1983)  
 Old Enough (1984)

Secret Places (1984)  
 The Breakfast Club (1985)  
 Saint Elmo's Fire (1985)  
 Lucas (1986)  
 Seven Minutes in Heaven (1986)  
 Twist and Shout (1986)  
 Mystic Pizza (1988)  
 The Year My Voice Broke (1988)

## Juvenile delinquency

The Wild One (1953)  
 The Blackboard Jungle (1955)  
 Rebel Without a Cause (1955)  
 Rock'n'Roll High School (1979)

The Warriors (1979)  
 The Outsiders (1983)  
 Rumblefish (1983)  
 River's Edge (1987)

## Musical

West Side Story (1961)  
 Beach Party (1963)  
 Beach Blanket Bingo (1965)  
 Girl Happy (1965)

Grease (1978)  
 Rock'n'Roll High School (1979)  
 Satisfaction (1988)

## Nostalgia

American Graffiti (1973)  
 The Lords of Flatbush (1974)  
 Diner (1982)  
 Porky's (1982)  
 The Outsiders (1983)  
 Rumblefish (1983)

Secret Places (1984)  
 Dirty Dancing (1987)  
 A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon (1988)  
 The Year My Voice Broke (1988)  
 Shag (1989)

## APPENDIX C

## Romance/sexuality

Splendor in the Grass (1960)	Seven Minutes in Heaven (1986)
West Side Story (1961)	Soul Man (1986)
all the beach movies	Top Gun (1986)
Grease (1978)	Twist and Shout (1986)
Little Darlings (1980)	Dirty Dancing (1987)
Endless Love (1981)	Hiding Out (1987)
Puberty Blues (1981)	Maid to Order (1987)
Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)	Morgan Stewart's Coming Home (1987)
High School U.S.A. (1983)	The Pick-Up Artist (1987)
No Small Affair (1984)	Some Kind of Wonderful (1987)
Reckless (1984) Secret Places (1984)	For Keeps (1988)
Sixteen Candles (1984)	Fresh Horses (1988)
Desperately Seeking Susan (1985)	Mystic Pizza (1988)
Just One of the Guys (1985)	Satisfaction (1988)
The Sure Thing (1985)	She's Having a Baby (1988)
Tomboy (1985)	The Year My Voice Broke (1988)
Weird Science (1985)	Dream a Little Dream (1989)
About Last Night (1986)	Say Anything (1989)
Lucas (1986)	Shag (1989)
Playing for Keeps (1986)	Pump up the Volume (1990)
Pretty in Pink (1986)	

## Science-Fiction or fantasy

Women of the Prehistoric Planet (1966)	Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989)
Back to the Future (1985)	Dream a Little Dream (1989)
Back to the Future II (1989)	

## Sex comedy

National Lampoon's Animal House (1978)	Hardbodies (1984)
Porky's (1982)	Revenge of the Nerds (1984)
The Last American Virgin (1982)	Where the Boys Are '84 (sex comedy for girls) (1984)
Class (1983)	The Princess Academy (1987) (for girls)
Risky Business (1983)	A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon (1988)
Spring Break (1983)	

## With Women Directors

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)	Seven Minutes in Heaven (1986)
Old Enough (1984)	Maid to Order (1987)
Secret Places (1984)	Satisfaction (1988)
Desperately Seeking Susan (1985)	Shag (1989)
Just One of the Guys (1985)	
My American Cousin (1986)	

## Films Produced, Directed and/or Written By John Hughes

- 1984    Sixteen Candles
- 1985    The Breakfast Club  
          Weird Science
- 1986    Ferris Bueller's Day Off  
          Pretty in Pink (directed by Howard Deutch)
- 1987    Some Kind of Wonderful (directed by Howard Deutch)
- 1988    She's Having a Baby
- 1991    Career Opportunities

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