“Getting Messy: Exploring Intimate Pedagogical Moments in Film and Television”

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abstract

A pedagogical moment is a moment in a text that disrupts expectations or creates discomfort, encouraging the viewer to respond in some way. In this thesis I explore representations of intimate interactions from film and television that provoke an understanding of the messiness of young people’s relationships. Messiness is traditionally excluded from conceptualisations of sex education. While comprehensive sex education has been critiqued for its focus on risk and the prevention of STIs and pregnancy, at the same time, the more liberal alternative—a focus on prioritising pleasure and particularly the pleasure of young women—has been questioned by authors such as Mary Lou Rasmussen, and Louisa Allen and Moira Carmody, who note that a focus on pleasure may itself reinforce heteronormative forms of gender and sexuality. In this thesis I am interested in the moments of incoherence represented in young people’s intimacies that question expectations of appropriate behaviour and current discourses of sex education. I argue for attending to the present (rather than the implied futures indexed by both sex education or pleasure discourses) in these intimate pedagogical moments of confusion and conflict.

In part one I critique the heteronormative discourses of sex education that produce youth in particularly gendered ways. I centre my analysis around two key themes, “Pregnancy” (chapter one) and “Virginity” (chapter two). In “Pregnancy”, I analyse the 2007 film Juno. Rather than considering teen pregnancy as a problem and judging Juno’s behaviour, I argue that Juno’s representation of teen pregnancy enables recognition of the complications and contradictions in our understanding and contemplation of young people and sex, noting that “rationality” is often expected to govern experiences that are embodied and arguably inherently incoherent. In “Virginity” I consider scenes in which young women refuse to have sex with young men in Looking for Alibrandi (1999) and The Rage in Placid Lake (2003). I analyse the production of the young women as virgins, with discourses of virginity loss drawn upon to define their experiences. By juxtaposing the
decisions of a young Catholic woman and a young secular woman to abstain from sex, the multiple influences in decision making are revealed.

In part two I explore public intimacy. As cultural forms, the films and television episodes I consider depict intimacy in public within the texts, but also publicly to an audience, engaging and potentially touching viewers. In “Touching” (chapter three) I analyse the interaction of three couples in the first four seasons of the television show *Glee* (2009- ). Touch intimately links these characters throughout the show and enables contemplation of intricate friendships. In “Flirting” (chapter four), I then move to consider the Australian film *The Black Balloon* (2007), exploring the relationship between protagonist Thomas, his autistic brother Charlie and his love interest Jackie. Recognising the uncertainty implicit within flirtation, in this chapter I demonstrate the ways in which Charlie’s presence within the film draws attention to alternative forms of communication and to the ways in which the intimacies between characters highlight the futile divisions between public and private which attempt to instate normative behaviour. Finally, in “Endings” (chapter five) I take this blurring of public and private a step further, as I analyse the film *Easy A* (2010). Narrated by protagonist Olive, *Easy A* may be perceived as a public diary in which matters of an intimate nature are politicised. Emphatically self aware, the ending of *Easy A* is performative; although appearing to conform with a teleology of sex, ending happily and with forward momentum, in its self-conscious repetition of genre conventions and other texts, the film undermines any sense of a heteronormative ending. In reading this ending as repetitive, I highlight the way in which it positions viewers in the present moment.

I conclude with “Surrendering”, by considering the recent Australian film *Sleeping Beauty* (2011). This controversial film represents a young woman with whom audiences are not intended to relate, and who fails to live up to expectations of an agentive femininity. Because it refuses to provide justifications for its characters’ actions, *Sleeping Beauty* creates discomfort and highlights the importance of accepting confusion and ambiguity in representations. In doing so, this film concentrates viewers on the present moment. Similarly, rather than prescribing an ambitious future, this thesis—in its orientation to the present and intimate pedagogical moments in film and television—is hopeful but without certainty, and I argue for reflection on the messiness of the unexplainable and irrational moments with which our lives are filled.
This thesis contains only sole-authored work, some of which has been published and/or prepared for publication under sole authorship. The bibliographical details of the work and where it appears in the thesis are outlined below.


The content from this article is primarily contained within the introduction.
acknowledgements

As *Love and Other Catastrophes* (1996) draws to a conclusion, medical student Michael (Matt Day) finishes reading Alice’s (Alice Garner) thesis about Doris Day and tells her ‘I think it’s perfect, I wouldn’t change a word’. While Alice has finished writing her PhD, she has spent the film hiding from her supervisor, afraid of her thesis’s inadequacies. I empathise with that feeling of both wanting your work to be read, and fearing it will not be good enough, or be misunderstood. For doing their best to quell that feeling, thank you to my partner Zak and my sister Bree for listening, supporting, reading, and for telling me that things are perfect even when I know they’re not.

Just as *Catastrophes* represents feelings of inadequacy and gratitude, *Grand Designs* (1999 - ) represents both the chaos and feelings of magnitude this thesis has evoked; the process of writing and rewriting, the demolition, construction, renovation, and sheer emotional investment involved. Indeed, *Grand Designs* has been a useful analogy for explaining the feelings and process of writing to family and friends, who probably became more bewildered when I would come out with lines such as ‘so you know in that episode where they have to get the structure built before they can measure the windows and then the window manufacturer is delayed and so they can’t get the house watertight for two months, I feel like that’. This thesis has been the instigator for multiple moves, financial woes, and countless tears, and at the same time it has been the greatest privilege to spend four years researching and writing about topics which continue to engage and excite me. I appreciate the scholarships and financial support I have received and the many research, teaching, and baking jobs that have assisted me to spend this time writing.

Four years ago I moved to Sydney to start this PhD and live as a boarding mistress at a girls’ school in Sydney’s eastern suburbs. If nothing else, I want to thank those girls for reminding me why I never want to be fourteen again. I particularly thank the student whose enthusiastic obsession with *Glee* made me *have* to watch it. Thanks also to Kerry and Merv for their care and support and for opening their home to me when I couldn’t
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Sydney brought with it so many wonderful people and experiences. Thank you to my first supervisor, Anna Hickey-Moody. I have really enjoyed working with you and appreciate your generous and ongoing support. The experience of living in Sydney was made particularly special by the friendship of an amazing group of women with whom I began this PhD. To Becky, Kate, Rosie, Jess, Nancy, and Kerryn, thank you for sharing your knowledge, thoughts, stories, inspiration and support – I was lucky to find such a group of intelligent young women, all writing such amazing things, and I look forward to reading everything you produce. I also found a great deal of inspiration in the University of Sydney’s seminar series and greatly appreciated the opportunity to hear and meet academics, and be introduced to new ideas and theories.

One and a half years after I moved to Sydney I returned to Perth and began a new stage of this PhD. I have to thank my supervisors at UWA, Alison Bartlett and Chantal Bourgault du Coudray for encouraging me to take the thesis in new directions and challenging me to get to the bottom of what I was writing, to have less thought to form and convention and find my own way to join the dots of this messy thesis. I also want to thank Van Ikin for his amazing efforts as Graduate Research Coordinator and for making everything to do with administration so much more pleasant. At UWA I have particularly enjoyed the GMCS Series and thank Jessica Taylor, Chantal, and Rob Cover for their support in this program. I have also been lucky to attend some amazing conferences and appreciate those who have commented on my work and provided discussion and inspiration in their own work at CSAA at Southern Cross University and the University of Sydney, Console-ing Passions in Adelaide, AWGSA at UNSW and Rev-Con in Perth. Thanks also go to the anonymous reviewers of the articles I’ve written for challenging me to be a better writer and to the friends who have generously read the thesis and offered valuable feedback.

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Finally, this is a thesis inspired by the affect and intimacy experienced in the enjoyment of film, music, television, and books, and so many texts have been wonderful comforts (and distractions) as I’ve been writing. But perhaps the most influential text has a story that links it back to my own sex education. I watched the television show *Daria* (1997-2002) on the ABC every day after school as a late primary and middle school student and the show taught me lot about the political nature of ambivalence and produced family and relationships as grey areas, challenging my perceptions of morality and friendship. Because of this, perhaps *Daria* is the best starting point for this thesis. The most vivid memory I have of my sex education classes at high school was in year eight. In second semester of that year, my English teacher taught Health, and I remember completing a crossword of relevant sex ed terms. My memory of the day is hazy, I can’t remember what the clue was, but I recall that my teacher was unsure of the answer to a particular question; her known answer, wet dreams, wouldn’t fit into the boxes. My friend and I, however, easily told her the answer: “nocturnal emissions” fit perfectly in the space, our knowledge gained from *Daria’s* first episode in which Daria and Jane discuss what the boys learnt when girls and boys were separated in their self esteem class. I grew up in a family of teachers, and my whole life, whether at school or not, has included teachers and learning. While this thesis has strayed from its initially intended deliberations over sex education, film, and the classroom, I want to thank all my teachers—not just in sex education, but English, History, official and informal—for teaching me to recognise the learning that is done in the moments between explicit lessons.
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Here comes the rush before we touch, come a little closer

Tegan and Sara “Closer”
introduction

MOMENTS

Figure 1: My ticket to Never Been Kissed.

Figure 2: Anita (Molly Shannon) takes a sex education class. Still from Never Been Kissed (1999) Fox 2000 Pictures.
“Sex Talk”: Films and Sex Education

The scene opens with a close-up of an anatomical torso flanked by the signs of “comprehensive” sex education; a model of a woman, a man, and a pile of bananas. The shot pans out to show English teacher Sam Coulsen (Michael Varton) pacing in front of a blackboard. Noticing Anita (Molly Shannon) trying to discretely signal to Josie (Drew Barrymore) from the doorway of the human biology classroom, Sam walks to the door and asks ‘you’re here for the sex talk?’1 Anita, a promiscuous journalist and friend of Josie, looks him up and down; ‘well, I like a man who gets right to the point’. Sam questions ‘are you Pam?’ and Anita whispers seductively, ‘if you say so’. Mistaken, Sam introduces her to the class as Pam Kitterman, stating that she will ‘be leading us in our sex discussion’. Confused, Anita walks to the centre of the room. A point of view shot shows the class seated at tables with a row down the middle. Composing herself, Anita states ‘sex’. She laughs nervously. ‘Well, yes, sex, um, www-hat do you say really, you know? Um, ah, you like a guy, you do it with him, sometimes he calls, sometimes he doesn’t.’ Anita laughs and as Sam leaves the classroom, Josie drops her books off the table. Anita rushes to help and they have a whispered conversation, with Anita telling Josie that she was coming to say hi, and noting that her teacher ‘is such a fox’. As Sam returns to the classroom, Anita covers her conversation by loudly telling Josie, ‘why don’t we talk about that later, and I just want to say that the burning sensation is totally normal.’ The class mutters ‘ew’ and Josie pulls a face of disgust. Once again taking her place at the front of the class, Anita starts,

Um, sex is really fun. When you’re old enough, which none of you are. Trust me, I should know. Because when you lose it to some guy named Junior with bad breath in the back of a van at a Guns ‘n’ Roses concert you’re gonna wish you listened to your mother when she said, ‘you know, nobody’s gonna want to buy the whole friggin’ icecream truck when you’re handing out the popsicles for free!’

She laughs and the students smile nervously and look at each other questioningly. Anita sighs. ‘Any questions?’ As one, the class raise their hands.

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1 All quotations from the films and television episodes used throughout this thesis have been transcribed by myself from available DVDs of the texts.
In the next shot each student sits with a banana on a stand and places a condom on it with varying levels of competence. Anita walks through the class monitoring their progress and reassuringly comments ‘I know it’s hard’, the class giggles and she recovers her unintended pun quickly, ‘I mean difficult, difficult but safe sex is really important.’ Returning to the front of the class she picks the longest, straightest, widest banana from the pile, smiling as she tells the class ‘so just imagine that the bananas are the real thing in a land called, every man’s fantasy’. Tracy (Katie Lansdale), the girl Josie is sitting with, comments ‘God, I can’t do this’ and Josie, struggling herself, comments ‘maybe that’s because we’re not supposed to be having sex with bananas’.

This moment of sex education represented in *Never Been Kissed* (1999), directed by Raja Gosnell, resonates with my own experience of sex education at a school in regional Western Australia: a discussion dominated by penetrative heterosex, risk, pregnancy, HIV, STIs and accompanied by a stoic teacher, a range of phallic shaped objects, and a generous supply of condoms. In my experience there was nothing less erotic than learning about sex. Arguably too, there is no “messier” topic than sex education; a subject dominated by fluids and feelings, eros and embarrassment. At home, however, I watched movies and read books that made me think and feel about relationships in new ways. I saw *Never Been Kissed* at the Queens Park Theatre, at the time Geraldton’s only cinema, with my Mum after my best friend was forbidden from attending given a rumour that we were meeting boys. I vividly remember my mum raving about Michael Varton as we left through the lobby of the theatre and I balked at liking the same guy as my mum; the fact that he was double my age and playing a teacher never crossed my mind. I remembered *Never Been Kissed*’s moment of sex education, embarrassment and messy boundaries between child and adult as I stumbled across the movie on television while formulating this PhD project, and wondered whether such a moment could be pedagogical. Throughout this thesis I explore such intimate pedagogical moments in a range of popular texts. In doing so I endeavour to develop new sexual literacies by contemplating how pedagogical moments might enrich the available discourses of sexuality and gender. To this end, I engage in an extended analysis of three mainstream Australian films—*Looking for Alibrandi* (1999), *The Rage in Placid Lake* (2003), and *The Black Balloon* (2007)—alongside two popular US films, *Juno* (2007) and *Easy A* (2010), and one US television series, *Glee* (2009-present), considering these texts in new ways.
In linking these Australian and US texts, I draw on Jane Mills’ assertion that Australian cinema has been ‘constantly defined … in relation to Hollywood.’ Not only may Australian cinema be read in relation to Hollywood, Mills highlights ‘cinema’s permeable borders’ which she notes enable ‘the multidirectional, multileveled and multilayered flow of ideas, cast, crew, images, sounds and other cultural phenomena between nations, films and other cultural texts.’ That is, rather than perceiving Hollywood as simply homogenous, Mills argues,

the relationships between the globally dominant cinema and other cinemas, national and local, are more complex, fluid and dynamic than is generally imagined. … When cinemas are conceptualised as homogenous with rigid and strictly policed borders, the complexity and multiplicity of both Hollywood and non-Hollywood cinemas is obscured.

Given the messy boundaries between such forms, in this thesis I consider US “Hollywood” films and television alongside Australian films, recognising their complexities without recourse to questions of national cinema.

.Never Been Kissed is a film about Josie, a 25-year-old journalist and never-been-kissed virgin, whose first assignment to a high school provides her with an opportunity to rewrite her horrible teenage years. Instead of the silent bodies, pleasures and desires of sex education, in Never Been Kissed the young women are shown to desire other young men and Josie, posing undercover as a high school student, desires her teacher Sam, with moments of touch and flirtation between Josie and Sam recorded and watched covertly by Josie’s newspaper office. When Josie reveals her identity as a journalist at the prom, Sam feels betrayed, sure that Josie was writing a story about their potentially illicit interaction. Busy packing to move to New York, Sam is not privy to Josie’s confession in the Chicago Sun Times where she explains that she fell in love with him. However, he finds out at the last minute and the film ends as they kiss in front of a cheering crowd.

In spite of the dominance of conservative and heteronormative endings in popular texts such as Never Been Kissed, film can present moments of nuance and provide an environment to discuss important aspects of our lives that are absent from sex education: pleasure,

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3 Ibid.
relationships, and sexuality. Indeed, the moment of sex education with which I began the introduction continues with a conversation between Josie and her friend Tracy about sex. While Josie describes the mating patterns of Adelphi penguins and ostensibly reinstates an expectation that mating for life is both achievable and desirable, Tracy rejects this, stating ‘but I’m not a penguin’. Sam comments over Josie’s shoulder ‘it’s an analogy’ and startled at being overheard Josie lets go of the condom she was manhandling onto a banana, hitting Sam in the eye, an action that may be analogised to ejaculation. Represented in this way, romance narratives are simultaneously acknowledged and contested, with this moment presenting a performance of awkward pleasure, embarrassment, and desire.

While portraying the messy relationships and discourses that surround sex education, the space in which this sex education class is located—a human biology classroom filled with anatomical models and posters, including one which states “AIDS it doesn’t discriminate”, as well as condoms and bananas—highlights that the focus of this sex education class is on risk, prevention, and penetration. Such sex education in Australia has been critiqued as simplistic given its limited focus on penetrative heterosex and preventing pregnancy and STIs. Indeed, as Lynne Hillier, Lyn Harrison, and Deborah Warr suggest, ‘[t]he “safe sex” message which is promoted in Australian school sexual health programmes has been simplified and sanitised to the extent that often the only remaining message appears to be “safe sex equals condom use.”’ By reducing intimate behaviour to penetrative heterosex, experiences of pleasure are restricted to acts associated with risks and danger, and pleasure itself, Deborah Tolman suggests, can seem ‘hedonistic and irresponsible’. Such an approach should be questioned, and young people’s behaviour must be acknowledged and

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5 This story about the monogamy of penguins may itself be placed in question. Considering the representation of penguins in documentaries, Judith Halberstam emphasises the difficulty of telling the sex of penguins, suggesting that scientists sometimes reinscribe heteronormative discourses by presuming the penguins are of the opposite sex, further noting that ‘the penguins are monogamous for only one year’: The Queer Art of Failure (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 39.


respected: as Peter Gourlay questions ‘[h]ow convincingly and effectively can we educate about safe sex practices if we cannot comprehend and accept young people’s sexual feelings, identity, interests, motivation and behaviours?’

In this thesis I use the terminology sex education as a ‘catch-all’ encompassing variations of sex education, including sexuality education and relationships education. In the Australian context, Deana Leahy, Mary Lou Rasmussen, and Maree DinanThomson note that sex education has traditionally ‘focused on the biological and physical dimensions of sex’ while ‘sexuality education … includes the physical, social, emotional and psychological dimensions.’ Under a broad definition, Rasmussen suggests that ‘sex education, in the school context, is not understood as a specifically scientific or biological endeavour but as a field of knowledge that necessarily engages issues of values, cultural and religious diversity, and sexual difference.’ It is this broad definition of sex education from which I will draw throughout this thesis.

In the United States, however, where alternative terminology is used, the sex education scene depicted in *Never Been Kissed* would likely be termed comprehensive sexuality education. Tension can be found in US sex education debates between those in favour of comprehensive sexuality education programmes, which are similar to those taught in Australia, and those in favour of and abstinence only education, that is, ‘abstinence-only-until-marriage educational approaches, which teach that abstaining from sexuality before marriage is the only 100% safe and healthy approach for young people’. Much has been written about the serious antagonism between these approaches, particularly critiquing governmental support in the United States for abstinence only approaches, which are

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deemed to lack scientific validity, and these discussions, to a lesser extent, can also be found in the Australian context. In academic readings, Nancy Lesko notes ‘abstinence approaches are generally associated with tradition, backwardness, and conservative religion infused public policy, while comprehensive sex education is linked with modernity, scientific accuracy, and a freedom to talk about and enact sexuality.’ Despite this division, Lesko notes that both approaches have ‘nostalgic longings’, writing, [w]hile they reference distinct imaginaries of gender, sexuality, and relationships, they both long for knowledge that leads directly and unambiguously to happiness, and they long for harmonious, simpler sexual relations that are obtainable through active implementation of stable knowledge and rationality.

Tension between “scientific” and “religious” perspectives can also be found in Australian sex education debates. As Rasmussen notes, Australian religious schools may develop alternative curriculums as ‘different groups feel that certain types of sex education are hegemonic and prejudiced toward or against certain religious perspectives.’ In chapter two, “Virginity”, I consider this interaction between religious and secular experience, recognising that the boundaries constructed between such terms may be difficult to maintain.

Tension may also be found in the differences between what students are taught in school sex education and what they want to learn. As Louisa Allen and Moira Carmody note, ‘[w]hat is often forgotten in the struggles around competing discourses of education is to listen to the voices, the desires and the pleasures that young people want to explore.’ In a study of New Zealand youth aged 16-19 years, Allen found that the primary topic young people wanted advice on was ‘[h]ow to make sexual activity more enjoyable for both partners’. Young people also requested information regarding ‘[a]bortion and teenage

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18 Ibid, 282.


21 Louisa Allen, “They Think You Shouldn’t Be Having Sex Anyway’: Young People’s Suggestions for Improving Sexuality Education Content”, Sexualities 11, no. 5 (2008): 578.
parenthood” and “[e]motions in relationships and breaking up”. Moreover, Allen and Carmody note that “[d]iscussions of sexuality are also criticised for being limited to sexual intercourse and avoiding same sex desire”. Analysing young people’s responses, Allen suggests that they ‘imply content is currently too clinical and de-eroticized’, that information ‘does not satisfy students’ interests in these aspects of intimacy’, and that young people are ‘critical of partial and didactic information’. That is, young people are aware of the issues at play and sex education’s absences. To recognise young people as ‘sexual subjects’ by acknowledging ‘requests for information about pleasure in sexuality education’ is not to assume or ‘automatically provide them with agency’ but rather to view their sexuality ‘positively (rather than negatively as a problem to be managed or denied at school)’. Similarly, drawing from studies in Australia and New Zealand, Alan McKee argues that teenagers want information regarding ‘the emotional side of physical intimacy – how to start, manage and, if necessary, end relationships, and understand the place of love and physical intimacy in them’ and ‘an attention to pleasure – learning how to make physical intimacy more pleasurable for themselves and for their partners’. McKee also advocates acknowledging young people’s relationships and the fact that young people may be ‘finding such experimentation pleasurable’. These gaps identified by Allen and McKee demonstrate that it is important to move beyond the ordinary dimensions of penetrative heterosex simply for the sheer breadth of sex, intimacy, pleasure and people it excludes. That is not to say that penetrative heterosex is not enjoyable or significant to the lives of many young people, however, focussing almost exclusively upon it is unnecessary and ‘devalues other forms of sexual expression and intimacy’. As I will consider further throughout this introduction, alternative dimensions of sexuality must thus be considered and one element that has become a significant topic for consideration in sex education debates has been pleasure.

22 Ibid, 581.
23 Ibid, 584.
28 Ibid, 503.
“Sex is Really Fun”: Sex Education and Pleasure

Re-watching *Never Been Kissed* in 2009, Anita’s comment ‘sex is really fun’ struck me as potentially addressing pleasure’s absence in sex education. Earlier that year, I had been intrigued by an article published on ABC’s news online by Sarah Collerton: “Teach Teens about Pleasure in Sex” and I wondered what being taught sex education by Anita would be like. The inclusion of pleasure in sex education is itself complex. In Australia, while the biological and risk aspects of sex are generally explained, pleasure is often absent from sexual discussions, with the ‘association of sex with pleasure’ in education described by Rasmussen as ‘somewhat tenuous’. However, over the last twenty-five years, pleasure has been of significant discussion in sex education research, following Michelle Fine’s suggestion in 1988 that

> the absence of a discourse of desire, combined with the lack of analysis of the language of victimization, may actually retard the development of sexual subjectivity and responsibility in students. … Public schools constitute a sphere in which young women could be offered access to a language and experience of empowerment.

As Allen notes, ‘when a discourse of desire is missing, young women are positioned in ways which conform to traditional notions of female sexual passivity’. Fine’s argument has instigated significant research in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, and is particularly linked with feminist sex education research, highlighting the importance of recognising pleasure and desire in sex education rather than merely focussing on risk or abstinence. In more recent research, however, Rasmussen, and Allen and Carmody have come to a ‘critical pause’, which Allen and Carmody suggest ‘is about critically reflecting on what has been achieved through the call for inclusion of a

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33 Allen, “Pleasure’s Perils”, 458.


36 Roger Ingham, “‘We Didn’t Cover That at School’: Education against Pleasure or Education for Pleasure?”, *Sex Education* 5, no. 4 (2005): 375-88.

37 Tolman, *Dilemmas of Desire*.

38 See, for example, Vanessa Cameron-Lewis and Louisa Allen, “Teaching Pleasure and Danger in Sexuality Education”, *Sex Education* 13, no. 2 (2013): 122; Allen and Carmody, “No Passport”, 455.
missing discourse of desire and pleasure’. Rasmussen suggests a need for ‘reflexivity about our own thick desires’, suggesting ‘[r]ecognition that pleasure and desire are highly contested goods might provoke further interrogation of the role of these “goods” within sexuality education.’ Indeed, it has been suggested that such an emphasis on pleasure can have ‘its own normalising effects’, a critique I will come to in the next section of this introduction.

Exploring the intersection of sex, pleasure, and risk has been a significant element of feminist research and debate. In the edited volume of papers from the Scholar and the Feminist IX Conference, “Towards a Politics of Sexuality” at Barnard College in 1982, Carole Vance states,

[The conference attempted to explore the ambiguous and complex relationship between sexual pleasure and danger in women’s lives and in feminist theory. The intent of the conference planners was not to weaken the critique of danger. Rather, we wished to expand the analysis of pleasure, and draw on women’s energy to create a movement that speaks as powerfully in favor of sexual pleasure as it does against sexual danger.]

This conference faced significant restrictions and in the epilogue of the volume Vance details the protests the conference faced from ‘members of anti-pornography groups’. Vance writes,

[s]exuality poses a challenge to feminist inquiry, since it is an intersection of the political, social, economic, historical, personal, and experiential, linking behavior and thought, fantasy and action. … Feminists need sophisticated methodologies and analyses that permit the recognition of each discrete domain as well as their multiple intersections.

Ten years later, in her book Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure, Lynne Segal outlines a history of sexual pleasure within the feminist movement, questioning how ‘did a movement which came out of and drew its initial strength from the assertive sex radicalism and utopian

40 Rasmussen, “Pleasure/Desire”, 472.
41 Ibid, 479.
42 Ibid. See also Allen, “Pleasure’s Perils”, 463.
45 Vance, “Pleasure and Danger”, 16.
thinking of the 1960s counter-culture manage to produce so many who would end up so silent on questions of sex and love?" In contemporary discussions considering the intersection of pleasure and danger, Carmody argues for considering the negotiation of pleasure and danger as dynamic. Carmody suggests the development of an 'ethical erotics' which 'would shift our thinking away from a fixed notion of some desires and acts determined by gendered expectations as being universally seen as either pleasurable or dangerous or “good”/“bad”, “natural”/”unnatural”, with a need to recognise that “positive and negative experiences may occur simultaneously.” Carmody’s suggestion reflects the conflicts surrounding debates about sex and danger and, more importantly, acknowledges that the boundary between pleasure and danger may be messy and difficult to maintain. But it is also important to recognise the presence of pleasure outside the formal curriculum. As Rasmussen notes, ‘discussions and explorations of sex and pleasure are by no means absent in schools’ and Allen suggests ‘that girls’ desire is a site of possibility for the exercise of agency, but perhaps not as some (of us) feminists have imagined or hoped for.’ In this way, Allen and Carmody ‘argue for the continued importance of wedging open spaces for the possibility of ethical pleasures, in forms that are not pre-conceived, heteronormative or mandatory.’

“Totally Normal”: Pleasure, Queer Theory, and After-Queer

Never Been Kissed’s sex education scene offers an opportunity to question heteronormative assumptions. Anita’s unsolicited comment that ‘the burning sensation is totally normal’ draws what is “normal” in sex and sex education into question, recognising ideas of pleasure and pain in relation to sex and desire. Moreover, Josie’s conversation with Tracy as the sex education class proceeds may represent one such example of pleasure’s existence in school, indicated both in Tracy’s assertion that she is ready to have sex, and Josie’s projectile condom. Queer theory has been a significant force in instigating the critical pause in discussions of sex education and pleasure. Discussing the origins of queer theory, Annamarie Jagose notes that while ‘[o]nce the term “queer” was, at best, slang for

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48 Cameron-Lewis and Allen, “Teaching Pleasure and Danger”, 126.
51 Allen and Carmody, “No Passport”, 457
homosexual, at worst, a term of homophobic abuse', now 'queer is very much a category in the process of formation', proposing 'that its definitional indeterminancy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics.'\(^{52}\) Jagose suggests that queer theory resists 'the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire' and 'locates and exploits the incoherencies in those three terms which stabilise heterosexuality.'\(^{53}\) The ambiguity surrounding queer, and the emphasis placed on ensuring it remains undefined, creates theoretical issues in aligning queer theory with sex education. In contrast to queer theory's undefined origins, Susan Talburt and Mary Lou Rasmussen note that LGBT studies and queer studies have similar objectives, including 'ending homophobia and extending educational equity', suggesting that a 'strategic essentialism' has been privileged.\(^{54}\) In this way, Talburt notes that while in schools “queer” ‘has offered interventions that appear to be oppositional’ they tend to ‘function as tactical elements operating within, and thus upholding, dominant logic.’\(^{55}\) Similarly, Kathleen Quinlivan notes that while queer is unstable, in queer research, ‘queer students’ may be “hail[ed]” … into a unitary identity that takes little account of other discourses of social stratification such as class, race, ethnicity and dis/ability.’ In this way, Quinlivan notes that “queer” schooling research runs the risk of becoming a new shorthand for liberal and, in some cases, homonormative notions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) inclusion that privilege white middle-class queer subjectivities.\(^{56}\) That is, in relation to schooling, queer itself becomes a term of categorisation, in contrast to its destabilising potential.

This association demonstrates the way in which pleasure in the classroom is potentially normalising.\(^{57}\) As Talburt suggests, ‘however liberatory our intentions’,\(^{58}\) linking pleasure with purposes is problematic and potentially regulatory, as ‘attaching political change and subject formation to pleasure works against pleasure’s very transformative potential.’\(^{59}\)

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53 Ibid, 3.
58 Talburt, “Toys, Pleasures”, 89.
59 Ibid, 93.
Instead, it is the unknown aspect of pleasure which is significant. Allen and Carmody note that ‘[t]he fact that we cannot know what a discourse of pleasure might do in advance opens it as a site of perpetual creation and recreation and therefore (sexual) possibility’, and suggest that it is ‘the “presence” of this site of possibility rather than its up-take or denial which is transformatively important.’ Allen and Carmody argue that it is crucial that we resist attempts to reduce discourses of erotics into ‘a pleasure imperative’ where students learn the recipe for how to gain it, and maybe, even, how to give it. This would see pleasure co-opted as part of the regime of sexual normalisation.

But this does not mean that queer research and politically “left” research may not exist beside one another. As Deborah Youdell writes, in allowing these forms of ‘politics to co-exist and speak to each other’ it is possible to remember ‘that individuals are always constituted in and through relations of power and practice in discursive fields that are inflected by and constitutive of the cultural and the material.’

Recognising the problematic conceptualisations of queer, particularly in education, Talburt and Rasmussen propose considering the ‘after-queer’, noting that this does not suggest movement beyond queer theory ‘as “queer” itself is neither uncontested nor complete.’ Rather, Daniel Marshall suggests this after-queer moment is ‘concerned with the emergence of mainstream representations of gay and lesbian experience, agentic reading practices and the activity of public queer youth cultures.’ As queer becomes regarded as an identity, Youdell notes that ‘[q]ueer as practices of unsettling and scattering continues to be deployed, but … its meaning as tactical practice risks being lost.’ In contrast, ‘after-queer’ highlights the ‘repetitions and linearity’ present in ‘queer research’, encouraging recognition of the way in which research utilising queer theory often seems to possess ‘a relentless search for “agency”, a belief in pedagogical improvements to encourage diverse gendered and sexual subjectivities, and ideas of a future made better by new imaginings.’

Following Talburt’s cue, I hope to ‘locate… queer desires and queer relations to desire

63 Talburt and Rasmussen, “After-Queer”, 5.
64 Marshall, “Popular Culture”, 79.
everywhere with characters who ‘emerge as both complex and problematic’. Talburt and Rasmussen suggest that in education, ‘little research takes up the intersections of neoliberalism, as rationality, technology, or affect, with sexuality’ and considering these intersections offers a possibility to consider ‘multiplicities and productivities rather than the identification and repetition of narratives to be understood, appreciated, and adjudicated.’

In situating this thesis between feminism, queer theory, youth culture, and cultural studies I provide a space to explore the multiple possibilities of texts.

“Just Imagine”: Pedagogical Moments, Affect, and Feminism

While I began this thesis with the intention of rethinking sex education to incorporate pleasure, I have become increasingly intrigued by the messy nature of intimate moments, the complex feelings and contradictions that cannot be easily explained or understood. The pedagogical moments I explore within these texts disrupt otherwise normative understandings of normative texts with normative endings. The term “moment” recognises the simultaneously significant and trivial aspects of these texts. In The History of Sexuality Vol. 1 Michel Foucault suggested that as sex is tied up with disciplining forms of power, ‘[t]he rallying point for the counter attack against the employment of sexuality ought not to be sex - desire, but bodies and pleasures’. Jagose notes the way in which this ‘call to “bodies and pleasures”’ has been described as a ‘moment’. She plays with the term, suggesting ‘[a]s a thing of a moment’ this ‘seems at once momentous and momentary, not only of great consequence but also fleeting, a temporal placeholder, the rhetorical structure of invocation gesturing towards without securing a future possibility.’ The pedagogical moments I consider in this thesis may be thought of in such terms, fleeting, flirtatious moments that at once suggest progress and yet do not move forward: momentary and

70 Talburt and Rasmussen, “After-Queer Tendencies”, 11-12.
71 For a discussion of the possible uses of “scenes” and “scenarios” based on personal experiences and reflection, as an entry point to dialogue see Vera Paiva, “Analysing Sexual Experiences through ‘Scenes’: A Framework for the Evaluation of Sexuality Education”, Sex Education 5, no. 4 (2005): 345-58.
74 Ibid.
present. Perhaps more significantly, they are moments in which affective sexual literacies are potentially engaged.

In considering film and television, I present examples of the multiple meanings and knowledges that can be found within such texts. The concept of the film moment has been described as significant. In their edited collection *Film Moments: Criticism, History, Theory* Tom Brown and James Walters suggest that for film, the moment has special resonance. In its earliest form, the cinema was a moment: the projection of a few seconds recorded and exhibited for audiences. Film endures as a medium made of moments: the brief, temporary and transitory combining to create the whole.  

What counts as a moment in this thesis is broad. Brown and Walters suggest ‘the term “moment” is not a fixed measurement’; rather moments ‘feel like moments to those writing about them, and are judged to have significance in understanding a film, or film, in a wider sense.’ The moments I consider are often scenes which have broad significance for the film as a whole, or may be intertextual, linking to songs, movements, or other texts. Importantly, in recognising the potential of moments I step outside the conventional emphasis on the endings of films, sharing with Steven Shaviro (drawing from Gilles Deleuze) a recognition that ‘[e]ven those all-too-common movies that—on the level of character and narrative—purvey the most reactionary stereotypes of gender and sexuality have their own potentialities for change and reversal, their “lines of flight.”’ Similarly, discussing animation, Judith Halberstam suggests along the way to these “happy” endings, bad things happen to good animals, monsters, and children, and failure nestles in every dusty corner, reminding the child viewer that this too is what it means to live in a world created by mean, petty, greedy, and violent adults. To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and ultimately to die.

Regardless of their final outcomes, moments have the potential to bring something else to the reading of a text, recognising the significance of failures and confusion.

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75 Brown and Walters, “Preface”, in *Film Moments: Criticism, History, Theory*, ed. Tom Brown, and James Walters (London: British Film Institute, 2010), xi (italics in the original).
76 Ibid, xi (italics in the original).
77 Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 64.
78 Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 186-87.
Although this thesis has potential relevance for classroom teaching, it is not my intention to offer such pedagogical advice. Instead, I make a theoretical argument about how film can be used to work through ideas of affect, sexuality, and gender. In this way, I reflect upon Allen and Carmody’s emphasis on the theoretical: ‘to implement pleasure as a site of possibility within sexuality education at school, space must be opened for it to be thought as such.’

Pedagogy is the process of teaching and learning, although as Henry Giroux emphasises, pedagogy is more than just teaching strategies and technique. As Carmen Luke notes ‘[l]earning and teaching, … are the very intersubjective core relations of everyday life. They exist beyond the classroom, are always gendered and intercultural’, with Luke noting ‘I have learned from and been taught by popular culture, peers, parents, and teachers, as a girl and a woman’. Contextually then, as Michelle Fine and Sara McClelland note, ‘[a]dolescent desires develop within the context of global and national politics, ideologies, community life, religious practices, and popular culture; in family living rooms, on the Internet and on MTV; in bedrooms, cars and alleys.’ This learning takes many forms and may be broad ranging. In their study of the responses of young people to sex and the media in the United Kingdom, David Buckingham and Sara Bragg found that ‘[c]hildren are not the naïve or incompetent consumers they are frequently assumed to be. They use a range of critical skills and perspectives when interpreting sexual content; and this develops both with age and with their experience of media.’ That is, not only are young people subject to pedagogical material, it may be critically received. Given young people’s media consumption, it has been suggested that film could be incorporated into sex education.

Considering the inadequacies of sex education in the United States, Catherine Ashcraft writes ‘I propose that we need to critically incorporate popular culture into formal education efforts to develop programs that resonate with teens’ experiences.’ Similarly,
noting the importance of popular culture and youth’s investment in it, Sharyn Pearce argues ‘films could prove a more effective conduit for sex education teaching for American youth (and others)–than the official, pedagogical experience of the classroom.’

One significant reason offered for the association of popular culture with sex education is that the media addresses topics often ignored; for example, the media, as a source of informal learning, has traditionally provided information to queer youth which is rarely present in sex education. However, rather than considering informal learning, a film’s reception, or conducting audience research, in this thesis I use film to think through themes regarding young people and sexuality.

For the purposes of this thesis I consider pedagogical moments as arising from interactions with a text. Elspeth Probyn has suggested that ‘the first point of departure in analyzing the text requires an embodied acknowledgement’ considering ‘that moment when a text sets off a frisson of feelings, remembrances, thoughts, and the bodily actions that accompany them’.

Such feeling is integral to the experience of film and recognising bodily reactions. My consideration of pedagogy thus takes into account the embodied aspects of learning. Indeed, in writing about happiness, Sara Ahmed doesn’t start with ‘affect’; instead, she suggests ‘I would begin with the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near’, a process that acknowledges the complexity of feelings. The term affect is connected to feeling and the body. Anna Hickey-Moody and Peta Malins describe affect as ‘that which is felt before it is thought; it is that which has a visceral impact on the body before it is given subjective or emotive meaning.’ In this way, affect is pre-cognitive, existing before emotions and thoughts. Similarly, in The Affect Theory Reader, Greg Seigworth and Melissa Gregg explain ‘[a]ffect, … is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath,
alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension. Affect is innately connected to the body, indeed for Probyn, ‘affect tends to refer to a privileging of the bodily and is different to both knowledge and emotion, but is always present in our interactions. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that ‘affects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects. However, what constitutes affect is not uniform, as Seigworth and Gregg write, ‘there is no single, generalizable theory of affect and Probyn notes that ‘it matters less that one be pure in the use of emotion or affect than that one remain alive to the very different ideas that circulate about what is, in the end, intimately connected’. Affect and pedagogy can themselves be ‘intimately connected’ and the intersection of affect and pedagogy can be seen in the work of Elizabeth Ellsworth who considers the pedagogical value of experiences. As Ellsworth writes, ‘thinking and feeling our selves as they make sense is more than merely the sensation of knowledge in the making. It is a sensing of our selves in the making, and is that not the root of what we call learning?’

Theories of affect and feeling hold an important place in this thesis, as I draw from my personal experiences of the texts. While Alison Jaggar has commented that emotions, ‘like all data, are always subject to reinterpretation and revision’, she argues they should be valued as ‘critical reflection on emotion … is itself a kind of political theory and political practice.’ As such, I attempt to model how film and television moments could perform similar work for others. The importance of feeling to the interpretation of texts can be found in the work of Susan Feagin who argues, discussing literature in her book Reading with Feeling, that

[t]o appreciate a work is not merely to recognize that a work has certain properties, aesthetic qualities, or artistic virtues, nor merely to be able to recognize what it is

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92 Seigworth and Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers”, in Gregg and Seigworth, Affect Theory Reader, 1 (italics in the original).
93 Probyn, “Teaching Bodies”, 28.
95 Seigworth and Gregg, “Inventory of Shimmers”, 3.
96 Probyn, “Teaching Bodies”, 28.
99 Ibid, 171.
about a work that gives it these qualities or its value. To appreciate a work is, in part, to get the value out of it, and ‘getting the value out of it’ involves being affectively or emotionally moved.\textsuperscript{100}

These aesthetic dimensions, Feagin argues, are significant in appreciating a text, and ‘a sensitivity to these sorts of features is often precisely what enables us to experience empathy or sympathy.’\textsuperscript{101} Such an aesthetic approach is also recognised by Juan Antonio Tarançon, who suggests ‘the narrative and aesthetic dimension that precludes the mapping of straightforward connections between films and social or political events may well be the device that transforms a fictional account into effective social knowledge.’\textsuperscript{102} And yet, these feelings are not necessarily discussed. Films are intended to ‘evoke emotions, feelings, moods, and desires’,\textsuperscript{103} and as Kerry Mallan and Sharyn Pearce note, the pleasure of film is communicated ‘through the senses and emotions’,\textsuperscript{104} however these feelings are not necessarily the first thing that comes to mind when analysing a text.

Similarly, although recent research has paid particular attention to affect and feeling in sex education,\textsuperscript{105} traditionally such themes have been absent. Lyn Harrison and Lynne Hillier note that within sex education, student bodies ‘become strangely devoid of feelings, emotions and sensuality’.\textsuperscript{106} Feelings are particularly intangible and given my interest in the messy, in this thesis I am drawn to moments of confusion or uncertainty. As Claudia Schippert writes, ‘[c]onfusion or provocation can result in important pedagogical moments if used strategically’.\textsuperscript{107} This provocation can arise from a disjuncture of expectations with our own affective responses, a disjuncture which can create ‘alienation’ from those around us.\textsuperscript{108} Acknowledging such agreement or disagreement with a text encourages assumptions to be questioned, but it also recognises that some feelings will be uncertain. Lisa Trimble,

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid, 243.
\textsuperscript{102} Tarançon, “\textit{Juno} (Jason Reitman, 2007): A Practical Case Study of Teens, Film and Cultural Studies”, \textit{Cultural Studies} 26, no. 4 (2012): 455.
\textsuperscript{106} Harrison and Hillier, “Subject of Sex Education”, 282.
\textsuperscript{108} Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects”, 37. For further discussion of emotions and the disjuncture between bodily feeling and reflection see Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge”.

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for example, has advocated the importance of recognising that ‘sexualities is a body of knowledge’ not one fixed truth, acknowledging pleasure, affect, embodiment, ambiguity and ‘unknowing’.109 Similarly, as Jen Gilbert notes ‘not knowing or feeling confused (for both youth and adults) are not problems to be solved by sex education, but rather the basis of learning about sexuality and, in fact, the very grounds of learning itself’.110 There thus is a need to respect what is unknown or uncertain.

This messy combination of affect, emotion, and bodily feeling may be viewed in line with the liminal space of adolescence with which each of these texts deals. By using the term “adolescence” I recognise the production of a time of transition and liminality, between child and adult. As sociologist Jonathon Epstein suggests, “[a]dolescents are seen as no longer being children, but not yet being completely adult”.111 Moreover, adolescence is a period in which identities are said to be formed. Catherine Driscoll notes the conventional dimensions of this process for young women, suggesting

Feminine adolescence is not a transitional period but an assemblage of transitions, many of which are repeatable or reversible and all of which are culturally specific, subject to interpretation and regimes of power. These transitions include menarche and other instances of puberty, school and birthday milestones, first romance and first sex, engagement, marriage and childbirth, along with accompanying changes to employment, to legal status, or to family relations.112

The nature of this assemblage offers significant potential for considering contradiction and ambiguity, particularly around sexuality. In ethnographic research, girls’ experiences are shown to be complicated. For example, in the United Kingdom, Jessica Ringrose and Emma Renold note the contradiction, surveillance, and regulation experienced by girls: expected ‘to be, “knowing”, “sexy” and “up for it” as well as “innocent”’.113 They suggest that ‘while “sexualisation” as a policy discourse has usefully pointed to the problems of the hypersexualisation of girls bodies, the solutions it proffers are typically moralistic and call

for a return to a middle class fantasy of girl innocence and virginity’. 114 Indeed, as Danielle Egan notes, ‘popular sexualisation discourse [is distanced] from the complicated project of growing up girl’. 115 While I do not consider girls’ reactions in this thesis, as Egan notes, ‘how young women make meaning of media is rarely straightforward; more often than not, it involves a complex brew of pleasure, resistance, complicity, pressure, banality, confusion, disgust, curiosity and refusal’. 116

The texts I draw from are primarily teen films, a genre with a significant tradition of considering the contradictory sexuality experienced by young people, and particularly girls, a term I use interchangeably with young women. Indeed, in The Breakfast Club (1985) Allison (Ally Sheedy) clearly states this contradiction: ‘it’s kind of a double-edged sword isn’t it? … If you say you haven’t you’re a prude, if you say you have, you’re a slut. It’s a trap.’ As Driscoll notes, the presence of girls’ sexuality and the constraints upon it are made ‘visible’ in the teen film. 117 Driscoll argues that teen film is not specifically American but is defined by themes surrounding adolescence, liminality, and sexuality 118 where ‘[t]he modern adolescent … is categorically in process and unfinished’ and defined by ‘institutions’ such as ‘high school’ and the ‘nuclear family’. 119 Given its emphasis on such themes I believe the television show Glee may be included within this mix. Indeed, Driscoll suggests ‘that any film reference to youth brings with it the capacity to “become” or “perform” teen film’ 120 with narrative conventions such as ‘the youthfulness of central characters; content usually centred on young heterosexuality, frequently with a romance plot; … the institutional management of adolescence by families, schools, and other institutions; and coming-of-age plots focused on motifs like virginity’ 121 contributing to create a teen film. Driscoll highlights the role of film’s classification and censorship in the production of teen films...

116 Ibid, 268.
117 Catherine Driscoll, “‘She’s All That’: Girl Sexuality and Teen Film”, in Girls’ Sexualities and the Media, ed. Kate Harper et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 104.
119 Driscoll, Teen Film, 116.
120 Ibid, 139.
121 Ibid, 1-2.
and adolescence, writing ‘[n]egotiating maturity in relation to norms and laws, film classification depends on an idea of adolescence, helps construct and monitor that idea, and repeatedly reinstalls it as the process of coming to citizenship’. Indeed, considering the rating PG-13 in the United States, which ‘strongly caution[s]’ parents that ‘some material may be inappropriate for children under 13’, Driscoll suggests such a rating was ‘designed to be a specific nomination of “teen” films’, an ‘unenforceable’ category which ‘is completely unsure of where guidance ends and maturity begins’. Driscoll notes that ‘sexual content could be packaged into a PG narrative but that the successful containment of adolescent risk within institutions for its management is required to secure it’. In the main body of this thesis I have chosen texts with limited “sexual” content for analysis, rated in Australia as “M”, that is, ‘recommended for mature audiences’, an ‘advisory category’ which fails to designate what constitutes maturity, although they ‘are not recommended for children under 15 years’. These “teen” texts enable valuable consideration of the contradictions regarding sexuality experienced by young people and portray subtle intimacies which exist outside explicit representations of sex and sexuality.

In analysing representations of intimate moments between young people in film and television I draw on feminist cultural studies. Consideration of film and television is a recognised technique of feminist cultural studies, which particularly draws attention to ‘the production of women in and as culture through a focus on representations of and for women’. Feminists’ attitudes towards sexuality are not uniform and while I apply feminist ideas in this thesis, I recognise that girls are often not specifically considered in feminist discourses. Instead, as Driscoll suggests, young women are often constructed ‘as opposed to, or otherwise defining, the mature, independent woman as feminist subject.’

In addition to feminist theory, I draw upon queer theory, which as I noted earlier has

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124 Driscoll, Teen Film, 130-31.
125 Ibid, 131.
127 For example, see Probyn, “Teaching Bodies”, 29; Angela McRobbie, The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change (London: Sage Publications, 2009).
128 Driscoll, Girls, 186.
informed my understanding of sex education and pleasure. Indeed, as Jagose notes, ‘feminist’ and ‘queer’ are interlinked, and she highlights

the difficulty, even the impossibility, of distinguishing decisively between feminist and queer critical traditions. … Feminist theory, no less than queer theory, is a broad and heterogeneous project of social critique that works itself out across provisional, contingent and non-unitary grounds, unconstrained by any predefined field of inquiry and unanchored to the perspective of any specifiable demographic population.  

Jagose concludes by arguing that ‘feminist theory and queer theory together have a stake in both desiring and articulating the complexities of the traffic between gender and sexuality.’ Feminist media and cultural studies also has significant links with queer theory. Indeed Angela McRobbie has noted the importance of queer theory for feminist cultural studies, suggesting that Judith Butler’s writing is valuable for feminist media studies as it ‘allows us to navigate better the complex ways in which popular culture, in a post-feminist environment, where some degree of gender equality is nominally invoked and upheld, nonetheless works to reconsolidate gender norms.’ Similarly, Rob Cover reminds us that there is a need to recognise that popular films ‘construct and maintain the very binaries and identities that queer theory seeks, as praxis, to deconstruct and denaturalise.’ As Anne Schlichter argues, however, it may be possible to consider the way in which films ‘queer heterosexuality’, or ‘explore the possibilities of a disruption of the master narratives of heterosexual formations of gender, race, and sexuality’, potentially offering a space ‘for a critique of heteronormativity.’ That is, I recognise the multiple and complex readings that may be made of these texts, drawing on feminism and queer theory to acknowledge both their normativity and potential.

Feminist cultural studies has recently placed significant emphasis on critiquing the normatively perceived postfeminist media culture. Postfeminism has been defined in a

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131 Ibid.
132 Jagose, Queer Theory, 119.
134 Cover, “First Contact”, 74.
136 See particularly Rosalind Gill, Gender and the Media (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007): 254. This is not the only conceptualisation of contemporary feminist experience. While Hilary Radner expresses sympathy with postfeminist discourses, she suggests the current debate may be seen to have been produced from a movement that emerged beside second wave feminism, which she calls ‘neo-feminism’: Neo-feminist Cinema:
variety of ways, including a ‘break with second-wave feminism’, or ‘a backlash against feminist achievements or goals’. Alternatively, Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley argue that postfeminism represents the need for ‘new ways of understanding the relationship between feminism in the popular, in a period that is historically post-second-wave feminism’, with postfeminism merely indicating change. More recently, however, the form of postfeminism articulated by Rosalind Gill has gained significant attention. Like Hollows and Moseley, Gill refutes the idea of postfeminism as an identity, rather characterising it ‘as a sensibility’ with ‘postfeminist media culture … our critical object; the phenomenon which analysts must inquire into and interrogate’. As Morgan Blue suggests, ‘it is useful to think of post-feminist discourse circulating alongside feminist discourses, … as a product of patriarchy and consumer culture, continually reproduced in commercial media representations.’ In Gill’s writing, postfeminism is linked to neoliberalism and in this space choice becomes illusory, that is, while people feel like they are making their own choices, there is no acknowledgement of the ways in which individuals are ‘subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves’.

At the same time, Ringrose writes, ‘feminist commentators writing about postfeminism tend to position this phenomena as a set of politics and discourses grounded in assumptions that gender equity has now been achieved for girls and women in education, the workplace and the home’, noting that in emphasising equality, postfeminist media culture representations may lead to a tendency ‘to gloss over on-going issues of sexism, sexual objectification and sexual violence facing girls’. However, in contrast to this representation of a presumption of equality in the media, young women face explicit

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137 Gill, Gender and the Media, 250.
140 Ibid, 13.
141 Gill, Gender and the Media, 254 (italics in the original).
142 Blue, “Best of Both Worlds”, 664.
regulation in each of the texts I consider. As Driscoll writes, ‘girl culture both admits contradictions and assigns to girls the authority to negotiate them.’ It is this link between the expression of young women’s sexuality and its governance which I wish to reflect upon in the rest of this introduction.

Indeed, recognition of the sexual regulation of women has become increasingly widespread. While Gill notes a lack of discussion of ‘contemporary sexism’ in ‘media representations of gender’, sexism has been a significant topic of debate in Australia over the last four years. In particular, the difficulty faced by Australia’s first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, has been documented in news stories and public discussion and became the topic of parliamentary debate when Ms Gillard accused the then Opposition Leader Tony Abbott of sexism during question time. Debates around sexism can also be found in the SlutWalks, a global protest that occurred in 2011 following the now infamous statement by Canadian Police Officer Michael Sanguinetti at a safety seminar at a Canadian university: ‘women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimised’. The SlutWalks were firmly based upon women’s right to dress as they wish without fear of assault, reworking an otherwise ‘injurious term’ and challenging victim blaming. Indeed as Kath Albury noted ten years before, ‘it’s hard to imagine what the “assault-proof” outfit might be’, noting the wide range of women and children who are assaulted regardless of attire. It should be noted that the SlutWalks may be perceived as reinscribing white privilege, with Micha Cárdenas suggesting that the SlutWalks demonstrate ‘[t]he complexity of performances of sexual agency in relation to transnational networks of multiple racial and ethnic groups’. Cárdenas notes that among women of colour, both opposition and support for the SlutWalks may be found: while ‘Black Women’s Blueprint’ noted ‘that women of color have worked for years to end the use of derogative terms such as slut,

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150 Ibid, 334.
partly in response to histories of slavery and forced sexualization that white women do not share’, ‘other women of color activists have taken part in organizing SlutWalks’. What the SlutWalks demonstrate most strongly, however, as Ringrose notes, is ‘that despite the beliefs that women “have it all”, that ground gender equality mythologies, women are still subject to deeply sexist, widespread cultural mores that their bodies are the bearers of sexual (and other forms of) morality’.

Postfeminist media culture has been particularly critiqued for its “sexualisation”, which Gill argues ‘refer[s] to both the extraordinary proliferation of discourses about sex and sexuality across all media forms, as well as to the increasingly frequent erotic presentation of girls’, women’s and (to a lesser extent) men’s bodies in public spaces.” Over the last decade, many reports and books have been published which discuss the dangers posed to girls by sexualised media culture and commodification, literature which has been perceived by some researchers as problematic. For example, Feona Attwood and Clarissa Smith suggest that such literature lacks ‘convincing evidence’ for assertions that ‘young people were being “sexualized” by culture.” Indeed, Smith and Attwood note that this literature may ‘make a complex and difficult set of issues appear “obvious” and easy to understand through their positioning of young people and adults as victims or villains, rescuers or

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153 Ibid, 187.
154 Ringrose, Postfeminist Education, 6.
155 Gill, Gender and the Media, 256.
Similarly, in their article “Too Much, Too Soon?”, Sara Bragg, David Buckingham, Rachel Russell, and Rebekah Willett note the complexity of the issue of sexualisation and the failure of previous reports to define the term. They suggest that discussions of sexuality and sexualisation ‘are frequently evoked in allocating responsibility, and indeed blame, for things that we perceive are going wrong in children’s lives or in family relationships’. Class is a significant factor in this, with Bragg and her colleagues identifying a desire to ‘distance or differentiate ourselves’ from those deemed sexualised. In emphasising these class dimensions, Egan notes that the focus in discourses of sexualisation is ‘on middle-class white heterosexual girls – girls of colour, queer girls and poor girls are irrelevant, absented or viewed as examples of feminine failure’, with fears that middle-class girls will also fail in this manner. Importantly, however, these debates regarding sexualisation are not new and Danielle Egan and Gail Hawkes link such debates to the Social Purity Movement of the nineteenth century in the United States. Egan and Hawkes write ‘if sexualisation is as ubiquitous as “the air we breathe” and seemingly uniform in nature, one has to wonder if sexual innocence is ever truly possible in the lives of girls.’ Moreover, they argue that ‘in its current form, anti-sexualisation narratives move feminist thinking away from a deconstruction of dominant patriarchal culture by vilifying sexuality and reproducing a proscriptive and painfully narrow window of sexual acceptability’.

This ‘narrow window’ may itself be found, whether intentionally or not, in some feminist research. Considering postfeminist media culture and its sexualisation, Gill suggests that while in the past women’s objectification was passive, it is now performed as a choice with a ‘shift from the portrayal of women as sex objects to the portrayal of women as active and desiring sexual subjects’ who are ‘simply “pleasing themselves”’. What I find most

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160 Ibid, 290.
163 Egan and Hawkes, “Past the Panic”, 271.
164 Ibid, 277.
165 Ibid, 280.
167 Gill, Gender and the Media, 89 (italics in the original).
difficult in Gill’s analysis is her suggestion of ‘compulsory (sexual) agency’ as a required feature of contemporary post-feminist, neoliberal subjectivity.\textsuperscript{169} Considering Gill’s analysis, Ringrose notes, ‘[c]ombining the ideas of “compulsory” with “sexual” and “agency” is a conceptual or heuristic device Gill undertakes to further destabilise taken-for-granted notions of free will and choice’ and suggests that this focus ‘places girls’ capacity for sexual decision making in doubt’, with the term ‘compulsory’ excluding ‘nuance and negotiation’.\textsuperscript{170} Similarly, Feona Attwood argues that ‘we need not collapse analyses of these phenomena into statements about women’s absolute freedom, or insist that they have none whatsoever.’\textsuperscript{171} Indeed, noting the way in which girls are positioned as subject to such discourses, Driscoll suggests ‘we diminish opportunities for both a feminism not at war with female experience and feminist girlhood.’\textsuperscript{172} As such, I am particularly wary of applying Gill’s theory of postfeminist media culture to the representation of young women.\textsuperscript{173} Instead, I focus on moments of intimacy represented in the texts I consider, and the constraints and contradictions present within them.

In considering pedagogical moments, I particularly draw attention to the present moment. In discussing feminism and masculinity studies, Judith Kegan Gardiner highlights the opposing directions in which these disciplines face, writing

> masculinity is a nostalgic formation, always missing, lost, or about to be lost, its ideal form located in a past that advances with each generation in order to recede just beyond its grasp. … Feminism, in contrast, is a utopian discourse of an ideal future, never yet attained.\textsuperscript{174}

That is, Kegan Gardiner writes feminism and masculinity ‘both simultaneously appear as ideals that are not realized here and now’.\textsuperscript{175} Similarly, discussing the disappointment and anger in some feminists’ reactions to sexualisation, Egan suggests that this may represent the loss of ‘a particular middle-class liberal feminist fantasy of dutiful daughters who would take the movement forward in the manner its foremothers envisioned.’\textsuperscript{176} In this thesis I

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{168} Ibid, 91.
\bibitem{169} Gill, “Empowerment/Sexism”, 40 (italics in the original).
\bibitem{170} Ringrose, Postfeminist Education, 67.
\bibitem{171} Attwood, “Through the Looking Glass? Sexual Agency and Subjectification Online”, in Gill and Scharff, New Femininities, 206.
\bibitem{172} Driscoll, “Mystique”, 291.
\bibitem{173} Similarly, for a critique of McRobbie’s Aftermath, see Egan, “Lost Objects”, 266.
\bibitem{175} Ibid.
\bibitem{176} Egan, “Lost Objects”, 270.
\end{thebibliography}
am not searching for ideals. The characters I consider are privileged, predominantly white and middle class, repeating the perception of feminism as a particularly ‘white, middle-class movement’, and yet, at the same time, these texts present a failure to move forward, often repeating conventions. Rather than focussing on a linear movement towards an ideal future, I am interested in respecting present moments of intimacy in these texts, perhaps recognising moments of ‘queer temporality’ and ‘the recursive eddies and back-to-the-future loops that often pass undetected or uncherished beneath the official narrations of the linear sequence that is taken to structure normative life’. Indeed, like some forms of feminism, sex education, in its focus on pleasure, risk, or abstinence appears to be focused upon attaining desired futures. As such, I argue for attending to present pedagogical moments of incoherence which perhaps exist outside conceptualisations of appropriate behaviour and current discourses of sex education. Regardless of whether feminism is a stated object of the texts I discuss, like Hollows and Moseley I believe that ‘thinking about feminism in popular culture can produce a more nuanced and complex engagement as well as enable new positions to emerge’. The texts I study have a feminist sensibility, that is, while feminism is not necessarily argued or mentioned, it nevertheless has a presence.

In this thesis, then, I consider the presence of ruptures of convention in a range of texts. In part one “Critiquing Sex Education”, I centre my analysis around two key themes, “Pregnancy” (chapter one) and “Virginity” (chapter two), contemplating the ways in which discourses of sex education may be critiqued. I am particularly invested in forms of feminism which do not judge the behaviour of others, and I agree with Halberstam that there is a need to ‘not disown another version of womanhood, femininity, and feminism’ that is, ‘a feminism that fails to save others or replicate itself, a feminism that finds purpose in its own failure.’ Rather than judging the young female characters I discuss, I am interested in the way they are represented. As I have noted in this introduction, current forms of sex education are centred around expectations of coherence, namely responsibility and sexual activity. In “Pregnancy”, I analyse the film Juno, which portrays the teen pregnancy of protagonist Juno and her decision not to terminate the pregnancy; to, in her

178 Jagose, “Feminism’s Queer Theory”, 158.
180 In contrast, Blue suggests postfeminist discourse divests young women ‘of any such philosophizing and feminist awareness, replacing those influences with the influences of fashion and beauty industries’: “Best of Both Worlds”, 664.
181 Halberstam, Queer Art of Failure, 128.
words, ‘selflessly’ have the child adopted. Rather than considering the “problem” of teen pregnancy, I contemplate the ways in which pregnancy acts as a presence throughout the film, disrupting heteronormative expectations. In this film, Juno becomes pregnant, that is, she experiences the cultural expectations that surround the pregnant teen, with the film recognising the scripts of behaviour that are used to define her. I explore the incoherence of her positioning, both as a pregnant teen—disrupting expectations of the girl body—and in her choices. I argue that Juno’s representation of teen pregnancy enables recognition of the complications and contradictions in our understanding of and contemplation of young people and sex, that is, it is problematic to expect “rationality” from experiences that are embodied and arguably inherently incoherent or ‘messy’.

In “Virginity” I consider pedagogical moments in which young women refuse to have sex with young men in Looking for Alibrandi and The Rage in Placid Lake. Discussion of abstinence in the popular media often connects the decision not to have sex with religion. By considering the Catholic Josie Alibrandi alongside the secular Gemma in The Rage in Placid Lake, I explore the multiplicity of reasons for these young women’s decisions to abstain from sex. I contemplate the way in which discourses of virginity loss come to define Josie’s and Gemma’s experiences as they are produced as virgins through the young men’s propositions, noting that the focus on the young women’s virginity has the potential to distract from the problematic behaviour of the young men. Finally, I consider the ambition Josie and Gemma portray, and the endings of these films which leave the future of their relationships marked as uncertain. Recognising the constructed nature of virginity, I argue that these films demonstrate the uncertainty and incoherence inherent within sexual decision making, negotiating contradictions, differing contexts, and expectations.

In part two I consider “Public Intimacy”, by engaging with the public representation of intimate moments in Glee, The Black Balloon, and Easy A. As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner suggest, ‘intimacy is itself publicly mediated’ and in arguing for ‘sex in public’ Berlant and Warner ‘support forms of affective, erotic and personal living that are public in the sense of accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity.’ Critiquing the ‘public-sex model’ outlined by Berlant and Warner, Lee Wallace notes the potential in ‘private spaces, institutional or domestic, traditionally associated with

183 Ibid, 562.
femininity suggesting that ‘when the intimate inhabitants of domestic space are no longer assumed to be straight, things can seem very different from the sanctioned ideals of straight culture.’ Both public (school) and private (home) spaces are depicted in these mediated texts, and drawing from Kellie Burns it can be seen that ‘mediated texts allow us to expand understandings of gender, sex and sexuality beyond the personal (represented by bodies, experience and personal narratives) to consider how they circulate within and across global mediated spaces.’ Burns argues that watching a show like Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (2003-2007) ‘allows homosexual living to shift continuously between the public and private spheres’ with the programme demonstrating ‘the ways in which the public and private spheres have long been used to construct and police gender, sex and (homo)sexuality’. Burns notes that while such a show is ‘publicly consumable’ on television, it is also viewed in ‘the privacy of their homes’, and thus questions the extent to which the line between public and private is blurred. In the chapters considering public intimacy, I contemplate the confusion demonstrated in these intersections, suggesting that these texts offer possibilities for rethinking the purposes of boundaries between public and private, and recognising the multiple forms of intimacy that can be found in the moments I discuss.

In “Touching” (chapter three) I consider the interactions of three couples in the television show Glee. As a text which has not yet reached its conclusion, Glee is not constrained by finite possibilities and may be considered subjunctive, that is, it ‘renders gender, identity, and sexuality as subjunctive, or open’. Susan Talburt, outlining her theory of the subjunctive in relation to the film The History Boys (2006), notes that in the subjunctive ‘things might or might not happen, versus the indicative world … where things will happen.’ A text such as Glee contains ‘a fluidity in the roles typically ascribed to youth and adults, particularly in terms of circulations of knowledge and power’, as seen in “The First Time” (3.5) where Artie (Kevin McHale), a teenager in a wheelchair, is the only character who has had sex, in a room of two female teachers who are over thirty years old, one of

185 Ibid, 131.
188 Ibid.
190 Ibid, 52.
191 Ibid, 51.
192 This reference to an episode of Glee identifies the season and episode.
whom is divorced, and two high school students—Rachel (Lea Michele), a straight senior, and Blaine (Darren Criss), a queer Junior—who are both in long-term relationships. In this chapter I consider the interactions between three couples whose relationships break up in “The Break Up” (4.4), analysing the flashbacks which are depicted in the performance of Coldplay’s song “The Scientist”, a pedagogical moment which illustrates the ways in which touch intimately links these characters throughout the show. One of the joys of writing about a television show as it is being written is never knowing what will happen next, and due to the ongoing nature of the television show I have chosen to stop my analysis at the end of season four. Since the final episode of season four, one of the main characters, Finn Hudson, played by Cory Monteith has died (5.3), following Monteith’s death in July 2013. Just as other characters have become engaged and formed new relationships, the evolving form of this show destabilises my theories and assertions, but also makes writing about Glee exciting. In depicting the joy and restrictions placed upon intimate behaviours, I argue that Glee represents possibility; hope, without certainty.

In “Flirting” (chapter four) I consider the Australian film The Black Balloon and explore the relationship between the protagonist Thomas, his autistic brother Charlie, and his love interest Jackie. Recognising the uncertainty implicit within flirtation, in this chapter I examine the intersection between Thomas’s suburban family life and the cautious flirtation he shares with Jackie. Charlie’s presence within The Black Balloon draws attention to alternative forms of communication; indeed, analogy may be made to sign language, encouraging viewers to listen visually as well as aurally. In this way, in “Flirting” I place focus on looking and glances between characters. I argue that the uncertainty of flirtation portrayed in The Black Balloon highlights and undermines the normality that is ineffectually maintained by the division between public and private.

Finally, in “Endings” (chapter five) I analyse the conclusion of the film Easy A as a pedagogical moment, and argue that in its self-conscious repetition of genre conventions and other texts, the film undermines an otherwise conventional happy ending. While Easy A ends with forward momentum as Olive and love interest Todd drive off into the future, I draw from Jagose’s theory of fake orgasm193 to suggest that Easy A performs a fake ending, remaining in stasis. Easy A takes the blurring of public and private discussed in “Flirting” a step further, as, narrated by protagonist Olive, Easy A may be perceived as a

public diary in which matters of an intimate nature are politicised, producing a public, albeit potentially inauthentic, intimacy. In reading the ending of *Easy A* as repetitive, I argue that the film repeats past problems and identifies them as current, requiring present consideration.

I am dissatisfied with simply ‘reading film’. Films have value because they make me react—laugh and cry—against my better judgment. As bell hooks suggests, ‘[i]f we were always and only “resisting spectators,” … films would lose their magic. Watching movies would feel more like work than pleasure’. It is important to acknowledge that pleasure and critique can coexist, and in this way I move beyond the perception that ‘reading’ a film ‘is a cool, intellectual experience’. Like *Never Been Kissed*, the texts I have selected to discuss in this thesis reflect my viewing over the past fourteen years. I watched *Looking for Alibrandi* at the end of year nine, after having loved Melina Marchetta’s book of the same name. I began watching *Glee* because of the obsession of a year ten girl at the Sydney school where I worked as a boarding mistress at the beginning of 2010, a job which gave me a bedroom window that looked up to the school where *Looking for Alibrandi* was filmed. To me, these texts are intimate and familiar, and arguably my writing is inflected with my complex emotional and affective connections to them. I am interested in the moments of nuance and subtlety within these texts, moments which can be described as intimate, confusing, irrational, undefinable, and which therefore place conventional expectations in question. In its orientation towards present and intimate pedagogical moments in film and television, in this thesis I argue for reflection on the messiness of the uncertainty and irrationality with which our lives are filled.

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195 Ibid.
part one

CRITIQUEING SEX EDUCATION
Figure 3: Juno (Ellen Page) confronts Bleeker (Michael Cera) at the lockers. Still from *Juno* (2007) Fox Searchlight Pictures.
A heavily pregnant Juno (Ellen Page) confronts Bleeker (Michael Cera) in a school corridor as he stands at his locker. The mid-shot cuts off Bleeker’s head, but shows both Juno’s pregnant stomach and her face as she asks ‘are you honestly and truly going to prom with Katrina de Voort?’ For this moment, Juno is fragmented; the focus is on her pregnant stomach and face. She slips her bag to the ground, and the shot cuts to Bleeker’s face as he sighs ‘ah, hi’ and smiles. Juno comments ‘Leah just, just said that you were gonna go with her’ and Bleeker replies ‘yeah, I did ask her if she wanted to go’. A shot is taken from behind Juno, watching Bleeker’s face as he explains their plans. Juno smiles, ‘I bet your Mum’s stoked that you’re not taking me’. Bleeker looks at her, ‘you’re mad, why are you mad?’ Juno shakes her head,

I’m not mad, I’m in a great mood, I mean despite the fact that I’m in a fat suit that I can’t take off, and despite the fact that pretty much everyone’s making fun of me behind my back and despite the fact that your little girlfriend gave me the stink eye in art class yesterday.

Bleeker jumps to Katrina’s defence, explaining ‘Katrina’s not my girlfriend, all right? And I doubt she gave you the stink eye, that’s just the way her face looks, you know, that’s just her face’. Juno nods and looks behind him. In the next shot, a blonde girl in a pink sweater (Ashley Whillans) is shown pulling a face at Juno. The shot cuts back to Juno, who replies,

yeah, whatever, you just take Soupy Sales to prom, I can think of so many cooler things to do that night. Like, you know I might pumice my feet, um, I might go to Bren’s dumb Unitarian church, maybe get hit by a truck full of hot garbage juice, you know ‘cause all those things would be exponentially cooler than going to prom with you.

Bleeker looks down at the ground ashamed and he shakes his head, replying, ‘you’re being really immature’. He looks at her and she raises her eyebrows, as he tells her ‘you have no reason to be mad at me, I mean, you know, you broke my heart, I, I should be royally ticked off at you, you know, I should be really cheesed off, I shouldn’t want to talk to you any more’. The shot cuts to a close-up of Juno’s face ‘well, what, because I got bored and had sex with you? And I didn’t want to like marry you?’ Bleeker’s face is also in close-up as he comments, ‘like I’d marry you, you’d be the meanest wife ever. OK. And I know you weren’t bored that day because there was a lot of stuff on TV and,
and then the Blair Witch Project was coming on Stars and you were like, I haven’t seen this since it came out and so we should watch it and then but oh no, we should just make out instead, la la la’. Bleeker’s voice fades off. Juno looks uncomfortable as he speaks, the interchange of close-ups of their faces conveys the intimacy between them. Then the shot is taken from further back, the characters distanced once again. Juno closes her eyes then looks away. ‘You just take Katrina the douchepacket to prom, I’m sure you two will have like a real bitchin’ time’. Bleeker scratches his head, avoiding her gaze as he says ‘well, I still have your underwear’. Juno scoffs, looking up at the ceiling, ‘I still have your virginity’. In close-up, Bleeker states ‘God, would you shut up?’ and Juno quickly replies, ‘What? What are you ashamed that we did it?’ Bleeker intercuts, telling her no, and she continues, ‘because at least you don’t have to have the evidence under your sweater. I’m a planet’. She looks at Bleeker, who stands silent and then looks at the ground.

In this scene from the 2007 film Juno, directed by Jason Reitman, Juno MacGuff confronts her best friend Paulie Bleeker about his plans for prom. Juno and Bleeker had sex for the first time in the preceding summer school holidays and Juno follows Juno’s pregnancy, her decision to have the baby adopted, and its birth as she attempts to determine her feelings for Bleeker. In this chapter, I consider teen pregnancy as a presence, rather than a problem. Pregnancy in Juno offers one site for thinking through current discourses of sex education, which focus on preventing teen pregnancy and creating rational neo-liberal subjects. Education scholar Nancy Lesko notes the emphasis placed on rationality in both abstinence only and comprehensive sex education, an emphasis which is disrupted by acknowledging the confusion and irrationality that may surround sexual decision making. Later in this chapter, I consider the emphasis in sex education on risk and responsibility, the discussions surrounding teen pregnancy and abortion, as well as the pleasure and confusion portrayed in Juno’s pregnant embodiment, but first, I analyse the ways in which Juno disrupts ideas of shame through her visibility and humour.

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Juno has a great deal of privilege in this text, and it is from this position of privilege, with the support of friends and family, that expectations of teen pregnancy can be questioned and contested. In the scene described above, at eight months pregnant, Juno struggles with her visible presence within her school community, and Juno and Bleeker’s conversation constitutes a significant pedagogical moment in which the pregnant body is linked with girlhood. As Juan Antonio Tarancón suggests, *Juno* constitutes a representation of girlhood which both ‘addresses the contradictions contemporary society poses for adolescents as they come of age’ and ‘attempts to make sense of the uncertainty teenagers feel in face of conflicting discourses about relationships and gender roles’. Juno’s body represents a juncture between girl/woman, innocent/sexual, teenage/maternal and encourages viewers to question their understandings of youth, gender, and sexuality. While Juno may be read in relation to these binaries, they should not be reinforced; *Juno* is a film about becoming, in which a static subject position is continually refused and displaced.

*Juno* disrupts the linear ideas of becoming: becoming woman, becoming mother, becoming feminist. Juno persists in a state of in betweenness, of liminality. Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose draw from Gilles Deleuze’s concept of becoming, noting that ‘[i]t tries to capture the movement and doing of subjectivity … as always in process’ and suggest that this movement ‘ruptur[es] any linear transition or trajectory (e.g. of the innocent girl child to the sexual woman).’ Similarly, Catherine Driscoll notes that within Deleuze’s writing ‘[f]eminine adolescence is not a transition from one state to another but a contingent and in some senses reversible movement.’ Juno’s depiction demonstrates the instability of binaries of femininity. Jessica Ringrose notes the ‘feminine binaries’ in which young women are placed—’the academically successful vs failing girl, the nice vs the mean and/or aggressive girl, and the virginal innocent vs the over-sexualised slutty girl’—and suggests

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“[t]hese are contradictory discourses that specific girls have to manage in particular ways.”

The film opens with Juno standing on a suburban lawn wearing baggie jeans and a red hoodie, swigging from a large orange juice bottle. Her clothing and body language are arguably masculine as she wipes her mouth on her sleeve and yet viewers are told in the next scene that she is pregnant, an explicit sign of femininity and womanhood. Similarly, juxtaposition is made between Juno’s bedroom and the bedroom of her friend Leah (Olivia Thirlby). While both rooms feature walls covered with collage, Juno’s room features drawings and paintings of women. In contrast, Leah’s room seems brighter and more heteronormative: her walls feature images of men cut from magazines. This contradictory characterisation continues when, sitting in an armchair with a pipe, Juno tells Bleeker that she is pregnant. Tarancón suggests that the film presents Juno as having ‘symbolically appropriated the place of traditional patriarchy’,

but this scene may also refer to the pipe smoking of early-twentieth-century writer Gertrude Stein, who is representative of lesbian sexuality and whose ‘experimental’

writing in some cases ‘cannot be reduced to any sensible, coherent, unitary meaning’.

Intertextual references such as this connect Juno to feminist identities and movements that contest traditional notions of femininity, and demonstrate ‘that young people’s sexual subjectivities are nuanced and do not always neatly conform to traditional notions of passive female and active male (hetero)sexuality’.

Indeed, it is such moments that can have a significant impact in rethinking gender. Visibly pregnant, Juno does not conform to gender scripts.

Potentially ‘sexualised’ by her pregnancy, Juno may be perceived to simultaneously contest the concept of the innocent “good” girl and ‘fissure bourgeois conceptions of the child’.

Indeed, Juno is described as a ‘cautionary whale’, her pregnancy demonstrating the risks associated with sex, and ‘confirm[ing] her heterosexual status’.

Juno’s embodiment in this film is dominated by pregnancy, an experience that may itself be viewed as a process of becoming. Sociologist Imogen Tyler suggests ‘that it is time to …

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7 Tarancón, “Juno”, 460.
9 Ibid, 476.
reclaim pregnancy as a transient subjectivity by reframing pregnant women as the active subjects of their own gestation. Similarly feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young argues that pregnancy has a temporality of movement, growth, and change. … The pregnant woman experiences herself as a source and participant in a creative process. Though she does not plan and direct it, neither does it merely wash over her; rather, she is this process, this change.

Juno’s experience throughout the film reflects this concept of being in process. Despite her pregnancy, at the end of the film Juno is not woman or mother but rather a teen girl with a boyfriend and a band. For Juno, becoming is reversible.

In this ability to reverse, Juno may be contrasted with Melissa (Emily Barclay) in the Australian film Prime Mover (2009), directed by David Caesar. As a high school drop out who works at a petrol station, Melissa’s pregnancy leads to a quick marriage to ambitious truck driver Tom (Michael Dorman) and a move from rural Dubbo in New South Wales to the remote outback, where her life is depicted as difficult and lonely. In this representation of a hidden pregnancy, the film may act as a counterpoint to Juno’s pregnancy which ‘brings compassion, maturity, and romantic love’. Kelly Oliver notes that while ‘middle-class white pregnant teens are represented as cute, funny, and end up warmly embraced by friends and family’ lower class and ‘black mothers … are presented as “bad choice makers”’. While Juno and Melissa are both white, Juno’s pregnancy is represented in a manner that belies her working-class status. As Wendy Luttrell argues, should motherhood become part of Juno’s future, it will undoubtedly follow a prescribed middle-class version, one that assumes achieving maturity before raising a child, compared to … a working-class model of motherhood whereby maturity is said to be achieved through raising a child.

Juno is expected to go to college, despite her parents’ working-class status, an expectation that remains unchanged throughout the film. In contrast, in the ending of Prime Mover,

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15 Young, Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 167 (italics in the original).
18 Ibid, 100.
Melissa decides to finish high school, making childcare arrangements with her husband. While Melissa must decide whether to rekindle her relationship with Tom, Juno returns to being a teenager; cycling to sing and play guitar with Bleeker, as if nothing ever happened.  

Prime Mover considers pregnancy as an experience in which growth is achieved—Melissa becomes a responsible mother—while Juno explicitly disrupts a linear format, destabilising the presumed inherent link between the pregnant body and the maternal body.

This personal growth is a significant element of films featuring pregnancy. In her book Knock Me Up, Knock Me Down: Images of Pregnancy in Hollywood Films, Oliver explores the increasing representation of the pregnant body in popular culture. She notes that, while in the mid-twentieth-century pregnancy was not permitted on screen, pregnant bodies have gone from shameful and hidden to sexy and spectacular. Considering popular culture, Tyler similarly states that ‘maternity has never been so visible, so talked about, so public and so deeply incoherent.’ Regarding romantic comedies which feature pregnancy, Oliver suggests that ‘pregnancy becomes a new form of romance that brings heterosexual couples together’ and ‘is the means through which both the male and female characters grow and mature as individuals, and thereby become suitable partners and parents. By turning what is usually an unwanted pregnancy into a wanted baby, these characters learn to want each other’ thus privileging ‘conservative family values that insist on women becoming mothers in order to live valuable or happy lives.’ Indeed, Oliver notes that ‘[e]ven the tough smart-mouthed Juno is softened up by her pregnancy and through it becomes a fitting partner for easygoing, laid-back, sensitive Pollie [sic].’ However, Juno does complicate some understandings of normativity; just as Juno may be seen to become pregnant at the “wrong” time, by allowing Vanessa (Jennifer Garner) to adopt the child in spite of her impending divorce, a linear timeline of behaviour is disrupted.

21 Oliver, Knock Me Up, 28.
23 Tyler, “Pregnant Beauty”, 22.
24 Oliver, Knock Me Up, 9-10.
25 Ibid, 11.
26 Ibid, 72.
While Oliver predominately focuses on the generalised pregnant woman, there is a significant difference between the representation of the white middle-class woman becoming pregnant at the ‘right’ time and the pregnant teen. As Anita Harris notes,

[m]otherhood in the teen years, especially if the woman is single or partnered but unmarried, is marked as inherently fraught, the cause of life long social problems and the end of opportunity. Even if planned (and sometimes especially if it is planned), it is always read as a mistake.\(^\text{27}\)

Harris notes that while ‘[s]uccess and failure are constructed as though they were dependent on strategic effort and good personal choices. … [T]hese designations have much more to do with economic and cultural resources than personal competencies.’\(^\text{28}\)

Indeed, ‘particular kinds of young women have been constructed as a problem for society, namely young mothers, the sexually active, and Black and Indigenous girls.’\(^\text{29}\)

The pregnant teenage body holds a transgressive place in current understandings of maternity. As Luttrell notes, ‘[t]here are a host of assumptions about what is wrong about teenage pregnancy; generally speaking, it is not considered a good thing—for teenagers, their children, or society’.\(^\text{30}\)

Indeed, in an article on the bodies of illegitimately pregnant women Gail Reekie notes that the troublesome aspect of the pregnant teen lies in her ‘contradictions’:\(^\text{31}\)

‘[b]earing the blatant testimony of its capacity to transgress sexual and parental norms, the body of the pregnant teenager exposes the limits of what is culturally thinkable about proper sex and motherhood.’\(^\text{32}\)

Similarly, Luttrell notes that in the past ‘[k]eeping the white pregnant body out of public light was integral to the restoration of social respectability and self regard’.\(^\text{33}\)

By visibly representing the presence of the pregnant teen body, there is the possibility that ‘happiness participates in making things good’:\(^\text{34}\) that is, teen pregnancy is rendered acceptable, rather than “bad” or “wrong”.\(^\text{35}\)

In this way, Juno’s pregnant presence disrupts teen pregnancy’s shameful associations.


\(^{28}\) Ibid, 31.

\(^{29}\) Ibid, 15.


\(^{32}\) Ibid.

\(^{33}\) Luttrell, “Where Inequality Lives”, 299. Luttrell comments that while the white pregnant teen was hidden, ‘black teenage pregnancy was not viewed as an aberration, but as an extension of either a promiscuous or a damaged black female sexuality’.


\(^{35}\) Luttrell, “Where Inequality Lives”, 301.

\(^{36}\) Heather Latimer critiques *Juno* for this reason, suggesting that sarcasm is used in *Juno* ‘to play with traditional morals about teenage pregnancy and abortion’: “Reproductive Politics”, 218.
Indeed, shame’s absence throughout much of the film encourages consideration of other feelings. For Elspeth Probyn, shame ‘is productive in how it makes us think again about bodies, societies, and human interaction.’ 37 Juno is described as not ‘ashamed’ of her pregnancy and sexual activity and Jessica Willis contrasts shame’s absence in the film with the expectation that unwed pregnant teenagers will ordinarily feel shame. 38 In contrast, Lesko argues that in sex education it is important to ‘offer interpretations that invoke good and bad feelings, familiar and unfamiliar longings, and attend to vulnerabilities, anxieties, regrets, mistrust and other backward feelings’. 39 Juno’s experience conveys and produces such a range of feelings and encourages respect for people ‘who express and/or embody confusion, uncertainty, disbelief, or who make mistakes’. 40 While I draw from Juno to illustrate this confusion and irrationality, Lesko suggests Juno is an example of a text which represents ‘empowered individuals managing risks and creating caring relationships … Juno is only ever momentarily confused, overcomes her mistakes, and redeems herself through self-determination’ with Juno ‘protected from real chaos or impropriety’. 41 Nevertheless, I believe Juno offers a valuable space for contemplating confusion. As Sara Ahmed suggests, a cultural studies approach may enable consideration of ‘how ordinary attachments to the very idea of the good life are also sites of ambivalence, involving the confusion rather than separation of good and bad feelings.’ 42 Juno’s experience is not entirely happy but neither is it distraught. Juno’s visibility contests shame, her pregnancy flaunting her sexuality.

In contrast to Juno’s visibility, gendered scripts of behaviour restrict Melissa in Prime Mover: the only option to avoid shame is to marry. Ahmed writes, ‘[w]e can think of gendered scripts as “happiness scripts” providing a set of instructions for what women and men must do in order to be happy, whereby happiness is what follows being natural or good’. 43 For Melissa, pregnancy is a problem because ‘we made mum right’ by fulfilling her prediction that Tom ‘won’t be so special when he gets you up the duff’, and this problem may be “solved” with the ‘happy object choice’ of marriage. 44 Melissa reveals her pregnancy

37 Probyn, Blush: Faces of Shame (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xviii.
41 Ibid, 291.
42 Ahmed, Promise of Happiness, 6.
43 Ibid, 59.
to Tom as they celebrate the purchase of his truck. Shown to be the only customers in the Chinese restaurant, Tom tells Melissa about his plans to move away, asking Melissa to come. They smile at each other. Melissa leans across the table and asks ‘do you know what?’ She leans closer and whispers in his ear, ‘I’m pregnant’. Despite the long pause that follows this revelation, Tom knows his part to play, just as Melissa has expectations about how this conversation ought to proceed: Melissa is pregnant, therefore he must love her and they must marry. The atmosphere at dinner seems bleak, exposed rather than intimate, and both Tom’s declaration of love and marriage proposal are based on Melissa’s pregnancy, following a heteronormative script that legitimates pregnancy through marriage.

Despite this legitimising act of marriage, Melissa spends her pregnancy alone, hidden in a caravan park in the middle of nowhere. Married, Melissa’s sexual activity may no longer be ‘secret’ or guilt ridden, and yet the relationship as a whole is not depicted in positive terms. Melissa and Tom’s relationship is neither romanticised nor constitutes a ‘happy ending’, as the film depicts the period following the marriage rather than leaving it for a future outside the film. This period is depicted as difficult for both parties, Tom working to pay off his truck and Melissa alone; sitting in the doorway of her caravan, Melissa sings of Tom traveling while she is ‘stuck here and … stuck on you’, trapped by her pregnancy and relationship with Tom. Later, as Tom drives off after an afternoon of impromptu sex with Melissa in the back of his truck, a heavily pregnant Melissa stands alone outside her caravan, surrounded by a caravan park in which the presence of rusty metal suggests abandonment.

Conversely, the association of Juno’s pregnancy with happiness, family, and friends, can be seen to disrupt heteronormative linear transitions of behaviour. In The Promise of Happiness, Ahmed considers the ways in which ‘happiness is used to redescribe social norms as social goods’ and reinforce heteronormative behaviours. Juno is depicted as happy despite acting ‘irrationally’: failing to use contraception or to get an abortion goes against the grain of expected behaviour for a young intelligent high schooler. While I will discuss teen pregnancy and abortion later in this chapter, for now I am interested in the way Juno

45 Allen, Sexual Subjects, 64.
48 Ahmed, Promise of Happiness, 2.
refuses to ‘[m]aintain… public comfort’: Juno is pregnant and visible, yet shameless and not distraught (she doesn’t behave with ‘despair, helplessness’ or ‘angst’). In explaining this concept of public comfort, Ahmed relates a prose poem called Our Sister Killjoy by Ama Ata Aidoo in which Sissie, a black woman, ‘sustain[s] the comfort of others’ by agreeing when ‘[o]n a plane, a white hostess invites her to sit at the back with “her friends,”’ two black people she does not know’ noting that Sissie does not want to ‘create awkwardness’ by explaining she does not know them. In contrast, with the support of family and friends, Juno appears to ‘create awkwardness’ in that she goes against what mainstream heteronormative expectations require. That is, ‘[t]o refuse to go along with it, to refuse the place in which you are placed, is to be seen as trouble, as causing discomfort for others.’

In its refusal of shame, Juno thus challenges traditional understandings of the pregnant teenager.

Instead, pregnancy is simultaneously represented as both humorous and abject in Juno. As Oliver notes, this is not an unfamiliar representation in pregnancy films, suggesting ‘[p]regnancy is funny because the pregnant woman’s body is out of control … . Laughing at the pregnant woman’s bodily emissions, growing proportions, and cravings, including sexual appetite (or lack of it), are staples of the momcom genre’. While the abject potential of the maternal body is discussed in Juno, any depiction of it leaking is thwarted. Instead, Juno’s humour is not so much based on her body and its movements, as it is on her wit. As Regina Barreca writes in a study of women and humour, ‘[h]umor breaks taboos by allowing us to talk about those issues closest to us’ and ‘bring to light subjects that are otherwise shrouded by society.’ As in the horror films Juno is shown to enjoy, Juno can be seen as ‘the monster’ that ‘like the abject, is ambiguous; it both repels and attracts.’ In writing about the horror film and the abject maternal body, Barbara Creed draws on Julia Kristeva’s definition of abjection, being ‘that which does not “respect

49 Ahmed, Promise of Happiness, 68.
52 Ahmed, Promise of Happiness, 68.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid, 69.
55 Oliver, Knock Me Up, 9
57 Ibid, 90.
borders, positions, rules” … that which “disturbs identity, system, order”’. Juno’s body transgresses expectations and it may be viewed in a similar way to the riot grrls’ writing of ‘slut’ on their bodies in the 1990s, using terms of condemnation as a public confrontation, an act which made the body a site of protest. It is the abject nature of the pregnant body and its visible presence that is most objected to by Leah and Juno when Juno does not go through with an abortion. Leah notes the physical implications of maintaining the pregnancy, stating ‘but then you’re going to get like huge. And your chest is going to milktate. And you’re going to have to like’ her voice drops and she whispers ‘tell people that you’re pregnant.’ Leah’s comment is funny, but it also highlights the abject way in which the pregnant body, particularly the pregnant teen body, is regarded.

Humour is also found in Juno’s interactions with her father. Throughout the film, Juno’s father Mac (J.K. Simmons) positions Juno and Bleeker as children, an act which ironically highlights the perpetuation of discourses of innocence in relation to young women’s sexuality. At the same time, however, Juno uses humour to disturb and comfort those around her. Barreca argues that ‘[w]hen a girl uses humour, she makes those around her nervous because her use of humour indicates that she is unwilling to accept her role as passive onlooker’ and ‘[b]y using humour to get attention, the girl shows that she wants—consciously or unconsciously—to break with society’s expectations and that she is demanding a more active role than the one scripted for her’. When revealing her pregnancy to her parents, Juno misinterprets her father’s question about the identity of the ‘kid’ she had sex with, telling him that she doesn’t know much about the baby other than that ‘it has fingernails, allegedly’. When her father rephrases the question to ask ‘who’s the father’ and finds out it is Bleeker, Mac and Leah smile and look incredulous, with Mac remarking ‘I just didn’t think he had it in him’. His incredulity questions Bleeker’s masculinity and Juno defends him, as well as her own decision to have sex with him, stating, ‘Paulie is actually great, in ah’ Mac tries to interrupt, stating ‘ok’ before Juno concludes, ‘in chair’. Humour is created in the discomfort Juno produces with her reply, intentionally providing too much information. This conversation ends soon after, with Mac

59 Ibid, 45.
63 Ibid, 108.
stating ‘well I thought you were the kind of girl who knew when to say when’ a statement that results in a rare moment of shame for Juno who looks down, before looking back at him and stating ‘I don’t really know what kind of girl I am’. Juno’s reply demonstrates her refusal to be labelled as ‘that kind of girl’. As Willis notes, however, ‘the father does not say that Juno should know when to say “no”’, allowing for the possibility of Juno having sex. 

Willis notes further ambiguity in Juno’s response, suggesting that Juno’s words imply that there are multiple ways to embody both sexuality and identity. Her statement is most clearly a comment on the fact that sexuality for girls is complicated by social discourses that pronounce girls as powerful subjects but simultaneously impose constraints on their diverse sexual existence and full expressions of sexuality. … Juno’s words convey the ideological construction of girlhood during the early part of the 21st century as unstable, in transition. Juno thus troubles meanings of “girl” and sexuality. As Luttrell suggests though, Juno’s ability to question in this way is produced by her privilege. Indeed, Juno’s supportive parents elide the need for a marriage as is experienced by Melissa. Nevertheless, this support does not erase the negative implications of abject representations of pregnancy.

The scene with which I began this chapter highlights the sexual double standard that enables Bleeker to invite another girl to the prom, while Juno suffers the stares of her peers; the evidence of her sex with Bleeker explicitly visible ‘under her shirt’. Just prior to Juno’s argument with Bleeker, Juno’s pregnant torso is shown in close-up walking in a crowded school hallway. The camera cuts behind her as she walks: her peers all stare and leave a space for her to walk in. This corridor scene works to ‘disassemble’ Juno’s maternal body. Tyler writes, ‘[t]he maternal can only be produced as a site of horror through representational practices which figure “her” as in excess of a singular body/identity.’ By first showing only her stomach, the camera fragments her body, highlighting that others perceive her as an abject body. While recognising the abjection experienced by pregnant women, Tyler argues for the need to ‘challenge the forms and processes of abjection that are central to the social exclusion and marginalization of women.’ This moment of walking through the school hallway, in which viewers hear whispers and see the stares of Juno’s peers, contrasts sharply with a scene earlier in the film in which Juno pushed her

64 Willis, “Sexual Subjectivity”, 251. This may be contrasted with Thoma, “Buying up Baby”, 415.
65 Willis, “Sexual Subjectivity”, 252.
68 Ibid, 95.
way through crowds of raucous students who barely gave her a second look. When Juno decided to maintain the pregnancy, she worried about this stage of the pregnancy and the need to sew elastic into her jeans; now, at eight months pregnant she tells Leah of her need to wear a bra and ‘rub all this nasty cocoa butter stuff on myself so like, … my skin won’t explode’. Despite her early confidence, such statements produce pregnancy as abject and a negative confronting experience, and thus restrict the agentic nature of her sexuality.

It is following this scene in which Juno’s body is fragmented that Juno confronts Bleeker, an act that recognises her insecurity as her pregnancy progresses: Juno is angry that Bleeker no longer finds her attractive. Earlier, Juno feared that Bleeker wouldn’t like her when she got ‘huge’ but he reassured her stating ‘I always think you’re cute, I think you’re beautiful’. Now, the news that he is attending prom with another girl upsets Juno. Bleeker’s proposed attendance at prom with Katrina removes Juno’s fallback heteronormative relationship. As Ringrose and Renold suggest, ‘[w]hile some girls may “try on” slut as part of the pleasures and pain of participating in their peer sexual cultures, it remains a tricky, slippery site of potential injury and sexual regulation.’

This scene suggests that Juno can only contest these boundaries while in a relationship or while potentially “with” Bleeker.

However, Juno’s decision to maintain the pregnancy can also be seen to rupture heteronormative expectations of young women. In their ethnographic study considering the behaviour of young women in the United Kingdom, Renold and Ringrose found that while ‘girlhood, femininity, sexuality and gender remain heavily regulated’, ‘some tween and teenage girls … were subverting, undermining or overtly resisting and challenging the ubiquitous hegemonic heterosexual matrix.’ They particularly highlight the ‘ruptures … that are often overlooked or missed in the search for grand narratives of resistance.’ Renold and Ringrose note that there is potential for movement ‘in those openings generated through instability where the hierarchical binary system of gender/sexuality is disrupted and challenged’.

This can be seen in Juno’s forthright and humourous critique of young women’s sexual activity and awkward conversations with her parents, in her challenges to the sexual double standard, and her continued sexuality despite her

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71 Ibid.
72 Ibid, 315-16.
73 Ibid, 317.
representation as abject. Similarly, Teresa de Lauretis suggests that there is the possibility of ‘a different construction of gender … in the margins of hegemonic discourses’. De Lauretis suggests ‘these terms’ are ‘inscribed in micropolitical practices’, with ‘effects … at the “local” level of resistances, in subjectivity and self-representation.’ Like the ruptures discussed by Renold and Ringrose, such minor ‘micropolitical practices’ and resistances, while significant, are fleeting and momentary. And yet Renold and Ringrose note that while such ‘movements and ruptures’ are ‘often subject to recuperation, … resonances of the movements remain’. While Juno concludes in a way that reinforces heteronormativity and ‘reasserts the centrality of heterosexual romance’, the pedagogical moments I explore in this chapter create ruptures that resonate beyond the text.

Indeed, Juno can be viewed as positioned ‘elsewhere’: outside convention. De Lauretis suggests ‘elsewhere’ is,

the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. … And it is there that the terms of a different construction of gender can be posed—terms that do have effect and take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation: in the micro-political practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments.

Juno’s representations of heteronormativity combine with ‘daily resistances’—these micropolitical moments of rupture—to allow the recognition of movement between these two spaces. The emphasis on constant movement indicates the liminality in experiences of gender and the constant process of becoming. As de Lauretis argues, these spaces ‘coexist concurrently and in contradiction. The movement between them, … is the tension of contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy.’ In a postmodern world, living with contradiction is part of life and feminism. Juno’s multiplicity refuses any conclusions regarding girls’ sexuality and consistently places it in question.

75 Ibid.
76 Renold and Ringrose, “Regulation and Rupture”, 320.
77 Hoerl and Kelly, “Post-Nuclear Family”, 372.
78 de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender, 25.
Rupturing Pregnancy: Teen Pregnancy and Abortion

Having told Bleeker of her plan, Juno calls the abortion clinic, WomenNow, on her hamburger phone after school, and this phone call connects Juno’s experience of sexuality to her clinical sex education classes. Presumably responding to the question ‘how long have you been sexually active?’ Juno states in voiceover ‘I hate it when adults use the term sexually active. What does it even mean?’ Juno’s question is accompanied by a flashback of a teacher standing in front of a blackboard on which ‘birds and bees’ is written. The teacher is shown slipping a condom over a banana, as Juno asks ‘may I like deactivate some day, or is this some sort of permanent state of being?’ This scene and question imply a critique of sex education and its focus on sexual “activity”. By asking whether she will ‘deactivate’, the term ‘active’ is called into question. It also intimates that rather than destroying innocence, sexual activity is reversible. While this flashback demonstrates that Juno has had comprehensive sex education and has knowledge of contraception, Juno’s question highlights the predominance of metaphor in sex education: bananas, birds, bees, and activation all exclude the teen body from the sex education classroom. Despite sex education implying young people are, or will be, sexual, actual bodies appear to be separate from education and its definitions. Juno’s pregnancy, however, breaks the taboo surrounding young women’s sexual activity. As Juno tells Leah about her trip to the abortion clinic, the camera is angled to look down on Juno, positioning her as more vulnerable than Leah. However, Leah steps down from her lofty position at the top of the stairs when Juno stops Leah’s abject enquiry ‘do you think the baby could all like scratch your vag on the way out and then it would…’ by informing Leah she is ‘staying pregnant’. Standing beside Juno, Leah tells her to keep her voice down as ‘my mum doesn’t know we’re sexually active’, a statement which allows Leah to be aligned with Juno and the possibility of pregnancy. At the news of Juno’s pregnancy, Juno’s stepmother, Bren (Alison Janney), repeats this emphasis on not knowing, responding ‘I didn’t even know you were sexually active’. As Louisa Allen notes, ‘[f]or young women there are particular ramifications when “femininity” and “sexually active” are linked: ‘a discourse of active female desire’ could damage young women’s reputations, positioning them as jeopardising their femininity.’ By parading her pregnancy in public, and performing the role of sexually active girl, Juno explicitly contests this potential.

81 Ibid, 91.
In contrast to Juno’s becoming, comprehensive forms of sex education are dominated by neoliberal discourses of risk and responsibility and reflect a desire for linear transitions: ‘from normal childhood to normal adulthood.’ As Renold and Ringrose note, there is a ‘presumed/wished for linear developmental transition between girl to woman in relation to postfeminist discourses and moral panics over girls, sexuality and sexualization’. As a pregnant teenager, Juno answers these panics with her explicit sexuality perceived as disrupting her otherwise linear path. A risk society, as outlined by Urich Beck, ‘situate[s] youth as being at risk’, places emphasis on the individual, makes people responsible for their behaviour, and diverts attention from social problems. Considering this risk society alongside neoliberalism, social researcher Peter Kelly notes that ‘[y]outh, as it is constructed in at-risk discourses, is at-risk of jeopardising, through present behaviours and dispositions, desired futures.’ Similarly, sociologist Luttrell notes that teen pregnancy is perceived as altering ‘a proper life trajectory’. Of course this disruption assumes that teen pregnancy is a negative experience for all young women. Yet as Catherine Ashcraft notes, ‘pregnancy can function as a vehicle for rather than barrier to learning’, suggesting that while ‘adults often cast teen pregnancy and motherhood as the ultimate threat to academic achievement … teen mothers frequently discuss how having a child made them take school and other responsibilities more seriously, helping them transition from at-risk to at-promise’. Certainly, at the end of Prime Mover, Melissa appears to be once again on the track of linear potential, with the suggestion that she will allow Tom back into her life, but on her terms. Similarly, Juno does not seem to miss a step in her high school education, continuing to attend with plans to go to college. However, this is less important than the fact that her pregnant visibility is disruptive. Indeed, some literature surrounding the popular representation of teen pregnancy in the United States suggests that such ‘idealized images of teenage pregnancies in Hollywood are causing more teenage girls to try to get pregnant’ with Juno’s image linked to real life stories of teen pregnancy.

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85 Kelly, “Youth at Risk”, 25.
86 Ibid, 30.
89 Oliver, Knock Me Up, 13, 104. See also Lutteral, “Where Inequality Lives”, 301.
The contexts for decision making around sex are often ignored in sex education discourses: young men and women are constructed ‘as rational, choice-making citizens (to-be), who are responsible for their future life chances through the choices they make’. In this way, neoliberal discourses, such as those found in sex education, place blame on youth for their sexuality and ignore the social context in which decisions about sex and its possible consequences, such as pregnancy, are made. As Lyn Harrison and Lynne Hillier in their study of sex education content note, ‘decisions are often governed by multiple and contradictory pressures’ and they highlight ‘the messiness of much of our sexual decision making’. Decision making is messy, and this messiness is created by our relationship with the often contradictory others and cultural contexts that surround us. As Nick Mansfield suggests in his definition of subjectivity, ‘the subject is always linked to something outside of it—an idea or principle or the society of other subjects. … One is always subject to or of something.’ Similarly, Moira Carmody considers ‘the way our immediate daily life is already caught up in complex political, social and philosophical, that is, shared concerns’. In the remainder of this chapter I contemplate the impact of such social aspects in the representation of Juno, considering the social dimension of her decisions and the way in which rationality is prioritised in critiques of the film.

**Teen Pregnancy**

As a “problem”, teen pregnancy is the impetus for much sex education. As Grace Spencer, Claire Maxwell, and Peter Aggleton argue, in sex education, empowering youth is about encouraging the ‘right’ choices: ‘delaying sexual intercourse and avoiding pregnancy and

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90 Kelly, “Youth at Risk”, 30.
91 Catherine Donovan and Marianne Hester note ‘that individual decisions about whether or not to use condoms and/or contraception are socially and culturally shaped by beliefs and expectations about gender, sexuality, family, sex, love and risk, rather than individualised decisions based on what might be termed “healthy choices”’; “Because She Was My First Girlfriend, I Didn’t Know Any Different’: Making the Case for Mainstreaming Same-Sex Sex/Relationship Education”, *Sex Education* 8, no. 3 (2008): 279. In this way, as Leahy and Harrison note, in intending to ‘provide[ ] students with the life skills to reduce their “risks”’ an assumption is made that youth ‘are rational, free, health seeking subjects and that their lives are somehow separate from the broader socio-cultural factors that shape their worlds’: “Risky Business”, 19. With regards to context and sexual decision making, see also Grace Spencer, Claire Maxwell, and Peter Aggleton, “What Does ‘Empowerment’ Mean in School-Based Sex and Relationships Education?”, *Sex Education* 8, no. 3 (2008): 350; Mary Louise Rasmussen, “Pleasure/Desire, Sexularism and Sexuality Education”, *Sex Education* 12, no. 4 (2012): 477.
93 Ibid.
95 Carmody, *Sex and Ethics: Young People and Ethical Sex* (South Yarra, VIC: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 84.
sexually transmitted infections’. In an attempt to prevent teen pregnancy, sex education literature advocates responsibility, rationality and agency by appealing to reason. For instance, those writing in favour of sex education in Australia often argue that research has shown that if sex education is provided to young people prior to first intercourse, they are more likely to wait, and/or, use contraception. Language such as ‘responsibility’ and ‘healthy’ is used repeatedly in arguments in favour of comprehensive sex education with little definition. As sociologist John Scott notes, by prioritising “healthy” and “responsible” behaviour the focus turns to ‘the dangerous aspects of sexuality, such as sexually transmitted infections, exploitation, and unwanted pregnancy’, which reinforces these same risk discourses. Indeed, even feminist sex education literature that focuses on the importance of young women’s pleasure and desire has the potential to perpetuate restrictive discourses of responsibility and sexuality. Psychologist Deborah Tolman outlines a definition of sexual subjectivity as

a person’s experience of herself as a sexual being, who feels entitled to sexual pleasure and sexual safety, who makes active sexual choices, and who has an identity as a sexual being. … Sexual subjectivity can and should … be at the heart of responsibility in sexual decision making—whether deciding not to have sexual intercourse or to have protected sexual intercourse, to have sexual experiences that have nothing to do with sexual intercourse or not to act on those feelings at all.

Under such a definition, Juno’s pregnancy removes her from the position of agentive sexual subject and implies that she is “irresponsible”, because her pregnancy presumably

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96 Spencer, Maxwell, and Aggleton, “Empowerment”, 346.
97 Harrison and Hillier, “Subject of Sex Education”, 282. Mary Lou Rasmussen argues that there has been an emphasis on producing ‘agentic subjects; young people who can evaluate information given to them, and, hopefully, act on it in a responsible fashion’: “Secularism, Religion and ‘Progressive’ Sex Education”, Sexualities 13, no. 6 (2010): 702.
results from unprotected penetrative heterosex. As Sue Jackson and Ann Weatherall suggest, the focus on youth’s choice and responsibility may ‘allow young people to be blamed, unsupported and marginalized where they make “bad” choices that see them being abused, pregnant or contracting a sexual infection’.\(^{103}\) For example, considering a range of films containing unplanned pregnancies, Lisa Dresner writes,

> [t]his epidemic of unplanned pregnancies is striking not simply because of the pregnancies’ unplanned nature—what kind of idiot wouldn’t use condoms during the AIDS epidemic?—but also because of the kind of women who become pregnant. All of these accidental pregnancies happen not to aspiring homemakers who long to stay home with large families but to vital career women who have meaningful work (or studies) outside of the home and who are presumably intelligent and informed enough to use birth control.\(^{104}\)

While this comment demonstrates the problematic nature of filmic displays of unplanned pregnancy, it also condemns those whose behaviour does not accord with Dresner’s beliefs about appropriate behaviour. That is, Dresner’s moral ideals assert themselves in assessing such representations of pregnancy. In depicting the pregnant Juno, \textit{Juno} may itself perpetuate this understanding of teen sex as risky.\(^{105}\)

Yet Juno problematises the expectation that she lacks agency, placing sex education discourses in flux. Allen notes that while youth are said to be at risk, ‘incapable of “rational” sexual decision making … out of control’,\(^{106}\) and unable to act ‘responsibly’; they are simultaneously responsible for their actions with the only option available to be ‘a sexual subject who will “choose” to avoid, delay or modify their behaviour through the use of contraceptives and condoms’.\(^{107}\) Juno is critiqued because her behaviour does not accord with reason and rationality: she plans for sex and has knowledge of safe sex practices and yet she gets pregnant. Juno’s assertion that the sex act was ‘premeditated’ leaves Willis questioning ‘Juno has immediate and affordable access to drug-store pregnancy testing supplies; why does she not have similar ease of access to and thus decide to use any variety

\(^{103}\) Jackson and Weatherall, “The (Im)possibilities of Feminist School Based Sexuality Education”, \textit{Feminism and Psychology} 20, no. 2 (2010): 169.


\(^{105}\) Willis, “Sexual Subjectivity”, 249.

\(^{106}\) Allen, \textit{Sexual Subjects}, 64.

\(^{107}\) Ibid.
of birth control methods. There are many reasons why contraception may not be used, despite knowledge of safe sex. As Tolman writes, ‘[h]aving sex “just happen” is one of the few acceptable ways available to adolescent girls for making sense of and describing their sexual experiences’. In contrast, possessing contraception may be viewed as ‘planning for sex’, an act that exhibits ‘intention’ to a sexual partner, and removes the possibility that such sex may be perceived as spontaneous. In the conversation between Juno and Bleeker at the start of this chapter, Juno performs ambivalence and ambiguity surrounding her intention to have sex, repeating her parents’ and peers’ expectation that she was ‘bored’, a performance which is confounded by Bleeker. But we should ask why Bleeker did not provide contraception. Louisa Allen and Moira Carmody note the way in which discourses of pleasure and desire ‘once again burden young women with the responsibility of “understanding their bodies” and “managing their orgasms” and may be unrealistic to achieve.’ As Ringrose and Renold write, in order to ‘trouble the ongoing tendency to make girls responsible for their own and others’ sexual safety, as idealised rational, sexual risk averters and pedagogues’ boys also need to be considered. But Juno’s presence as the confident and desiring pregnant teen also highlights a significant absence in sex education. As Spencer, Maxwell, and Aggleton note, in sex education understandings of empowerment do not account for those youth who are confident ‘and yet also engage in “risky” sexual behaviours, such as unprotected sex’. To save face with her parents and in this scene with Bleeker, Juno resorts to the discourse that sex just happened; yet it is important to be wary of forcing a coherent subject position upon Juno that is refused by the text.

Juno’s incoherence can be seen in her simultaneous performance of irresponsibility, capability, and rejection of motherhood. Juno performs the part of a girl who is unable to look after a child and at the same time she disrupts understandings of the capabilities of girls. As Ashcraft notes, in the past ‘15- and 16-year-olds were … often expected to be

109 Tolman, Dilemmas of Desire, 2.
parents’ with the stigma attached to teen pregnancy a recent social construction.\textsuperscript{115} This stigma is also noted by Angela McRobbie who suggests ‘[y]oung motherhood, across the divisions of class and ethnicity now carries a whole range of vilified meanings associated with failed femininity and with disregard for the well-being of the child.’\textsuperscript{116} In\textit{ Prime Mover}, Melissa suffers from such expectations. While Juno ‘mystif[ies] the social and economic constraints on single motherhood that exist irrespective of alternative family configurations’,\textsuperscript{117} Melissa is shown to experience them: the loneliness of pregnancy continues into parenthood, with Tom returning to work immediately following the birth. Although possessing the legitimacy of marriage, Melissa is effectively a single mother. Her baby, Sarah, is shown crying as Melissa walks her along a highway and past a long empty swimming pool. In another scene the baby cries inside the caravan while Melissa sits outside, taking deep breaths, composing herself before she goes back inside. Melissa is shown to struggle with the belief that she is a bad mother, and this is exacerbated by her mental and physical isolation in this location. After Tom threatens her in a drug-addled state, suspecting Melissa of seeing\textsuperscript{118} his old boss behind his back, Melissa returns to Dubbo and her mother’s house. In this act, Melissa attains the mantle of responsible motherhood from both her mother and Tom, becoming a “good” mother.

In contrast,\textit{ Juno} plays on the negative expectations of teenage motherhood. Juno’s father attends the house of the adoptive parents with Juno, arguing that she is ‘just a kid, I don’t want you to get ripped off by a couple of baby starved wingnuts’. This comment presents Juno as naive and in need of protection from the equally problematic people who will adopt her child. Juno and Mac meet Vanessa Lorry the adoptive mother at her front door. Vanessa smiles introducing herself, ‘hi, I’m Vanessa. You must be Juno and Mr MacGuff, Hi’ she places her hand on her chest signalling to herself ‘Vanessa’. Juno looks at her seriously but teasing, and highlighting that Vanessa has introduced herself twice, replies ‘it’s Vanessa right? Is that…’ Her father cuts her off, stating ‘thanks for having me and my irresponsible child over to your house’. Vanessa quickly replies ‘oh no, thank you. Thank you’. Vanessa is oblivious to Juno’s critique and while Juno highlights Vanessa’s nervousness, her father’s ironic comment both passes judgment on Juno and questions Juno’s responsibility. Vanessa’s reply—thanking them each in turn—however, seems to

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\textsuperscript{115} Ashcraft, “So Much More”, 652-53.
\textsuperscript{116} McRobbie,\textit{ The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change} (London: Sage Publications, 2009), 85.
\textsuperscript{117} Hoerl and Kelly, “Post-Nuclear Family”, 368.
\textsuperscript{118} With the implication being in a sexual way.
\end{flushleft}
implicitly thank Juno for her irresponsibility, the behaviour that is a ‘blessing’ for Vanessa as it will provide her with her desperately wanted baby. Juno is adept at using humour to comfort and confront, and at the adoption meeting her humour continues to both disrupt and contain the situation. In asking Vanessa for a double of Maker’s Mark Juno confronts the expectations of the adopting parents. She is not being self-deprecating, but rather positions herself as smart, with an understanding of how they might regard her: an irresponsible young woman. Needing to be told by Juno’s father that ‘she’s kidding’, their reaction encourages viewers to confront their own expectations of pregnant teenagers. However, it is also a joke that puts Vanessa at ease enough to sit and discuss the adoption. There is irony in Juno’s mature comforting of Vanessa; Juno puts Vanessa at ease while simultaneously professing her own irresponsibility.

At this adoption meeting Juno is linked with riot grrl music and Courtney Love, and thus also with feminism, irresponsibility, and bad mothers. Riot grrl is a feminist movement that emerged in the 1990s and ‘foregrounded visions of punk feminism’. Anna Feigenbaum suggests ‘Riot Grrrls spat critiques of patriarchy and spoke of the contradictions women face.’ Similarly, Renée Coulombe notes that ‘riot grrrls re-envisioned feminism, restoring the power of the word “girl” and placing the empowering of girls center stage.’ In a conversation with the adoptive father Mark Lorring (Jason Bateman), Juno is linked to riot grrl by her favourite bands—the Stooges, Patti Smith and The Runaways—all influential punk artists from the 1970s. As Coulombe points out, in the mainstream media, ‘punk and alternative music by mostly unknown and independent artists’ is ‘strongly associated with the image of Riot Grrrl’, and thus, potentially, with feminism. In an article considering performer Courtney Love and feminism, Kylie Murphy notes that ‘[p]unk has provided a crucial site within rock music for female musicians to challenge both public

119 A brand of Bourbon Whisky.
121 Ibid.
122 Coulombe, “Just a Girl”, 151
123 All bands from the 1970s, The Stooges and Patti Smith were instrumental in the creation of punk music, while the Runaways were an all girl punk band.
125 It has been suggested that the riot grrl movement has been co-opted by neoliberalism with Harris writing, riot grrl’s ‘punk philosophy of DIY (do it yourself) and individual responsibility for social change lent itself easily to its transformation into a discourse of choice and focus on the self’: Future Girl, 16.
perceptions and the music industry’s sexist understandings of the proper female performance of the popular music artist and fan and notes that a band like,

The Runaways demonstrated that women could do more than merely sing, or sing and gently strum within the parameters of the folk genre. Punk allowed women to perform a model of anger on stage that was defiantly aggressive, loud, and confronting in its unfamiliarity.

At this adoption meeting, Juno plays the song “Doll Parts” by Love’s 1990s band Hole with Mark. The song is simple and repetitive with few chords and an imperfect, slightly discordant melody, and as Susan Hopkins writes, “Doll Parts” ‘critiqued the cultural dissection and fragmentation of women’s bodies’, a dissection Juno increasingly experiences as her pregnancy proceeds, with focus placed on her stomach. While Hole’s front woman Courtney Love was not a riot grrl, as Murphy notes, ‘[t]he journalistic narrative of Riot Grrrl continually folds Hole through the mixture’ with Hole ‘an entrance point for fledgling Riot Grrrls’.

Juno’s performance and association with Courtney Love highlights the ways in which women who act in alternative ways are vilified as irresponsible and “bad mothers”, an expectation Juno contests. References to alcohol and Juno’s use of Adderall, a behavioural medication commonly prescribed to those with ADHD, link her with Love, who was critiqued in the media for allegedly using heroin throughout her pregnancy. As Feona Attwood writes ‘Courtney Love has become a regular object of ridicule and abuse in the mainstream press, a position that is attributable to her apparently druggy, bad mother, disrespectful widow and still slutty behaviour’. Juno’s performance of “Doll Parts” with Mark therefore positions her as an inappropriate mother in contrast to the perfectly feminine Vanessa. In the scene immediately preceding “Doll Parts”, Juno accepts the discourse of inappropriate mother as she tells Vanessa ‘I just want the baby to be with people who are going to love it’. She smiles, Vanessa sits closer to Mark, and Juno continues, ‘and be good parents. You know? Um, I mean I’m in high school, dude, I’m ill-

126 Murphy, “‘I’m Sorry—I’m Not Really Sorry’: Courtney Love and Notions of Authenticity”, Hectate 27, no. 1 (2001): 141.
127 Ibid.
130 Murphy, “I’m Sorry”, 142.
131 The story was revealed in Lynn Hirschberg, “Strange Love”, Vanity Fair (September 1992).
equipped’. Vanessa beams at her, calling her ‘selfless’, ironically the only reward Juno desired. Earlier in the film, when revealing the pregnancy to her parents, Juno similarly states confidently, ‘it’s just I’m not ready to be a mum’. Her father quickly agrees, ‘damn skippy you’re not. You don’t even remember to give Liberty Bell her breathing meds’. At this, however, Juno’s tone changes, replying ‘that was once, and she didn’t die if you recall’. While repeating the discourse of irresponsibility as justification for not wanting to be a mother, Juno rejects the idea that her behaviour is irresponsible. Such moments stand in opposition to Pamela Thoma’s statement that ‘contradicting Juno’s mature self-possession, everyone agrees with her own assessment that she is not equipped to be a mother’, and yet Thoma also suggests that Juno is ‘potentially a feminist who refuses to conform to the social scripts that hail and produce women as good mothers.’ Juno performs both sides of the argument: while she does not want, or feel ready, to be a mother she refutes other people’s suggestions she would be incapable. At the ultrasound, Juno, Leah, and Bren refute the ultrasound technician’s (Kaaren de Zilva) assertion that Juno would create ‘a poisonous environment to raise a baby in’. Juno retorts ‘how do you know I’m so poisonous? Do you know, like what if these adopted parents turn out to be like evil molesters’, Leah chimes in ‘or like stage parents’ and Bren concludes ‘they could be utterly negligent. Maybe they’ll do a far shittier job of raising a kid than my dumb arse stepdaughter ever would, have you considered that?’ Juno’s refusal to “become mother” both requires ascension to and refusal of the societal expectation that teenagers make bad mothers. This defence highlights the performativity of responsibility.

Abortion

Discourses of responsibility and rationality can also be found in the representation of Juno forgoing abortion in favour of adoption. As Juno is centred on the presence of an unwanted teen pregnancy, the notion of abortion is given little space in the film. The manner in which abortion is portrayed, however, has troubled some feminists in critiques of the film. For example, Heather Latimer suggests that it is likely such a pregnancy would be aborted in ‘reality’ and suggests that ‘real life’ unwanted pregnancies may be experienced very

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133 Juno’s half sister.
135 Ibid. See also Hoerl and Kelly, “Post-Nuclear Family”, 366, who write ‘the movie codes Juno as socially rebellious and a progenitor of the sexual liberation movements articulated with Second Wave and Third Wave feminism.’
differently to the manner depicted in the film. In responding to such critiques which question Juno’s reality, I am wary of Tarancón’s suggestion that film criticism is still deeply embedded in a model that is intent on bringing to the fore the supposed, intrinsic ideology of its object of analysis, where ideology, regardless of its political colouring, is often seen as a homogenous, consistent and impermeable discourse. Juno may certainly be seen to raise ethical questions concerning such controversial matters as pre-marital sex or abortion. However, … the film’s polysemic nature cannot be reduced [in this way].

Juno is a complex and at times contradictory film and Tarancón is adamant that it cannot ‘be regarded as a transparent window on to society or as a straightforward illustration of concrete, well-defined social conditions’. Noting the way in which ‘the appropriation, the repetition and the manipulation of a series of conventions that audiences associate with a tradition of representation in cinema are the performative markers of cultural conflict’, Tarancón suggests that Juno can ‘provide teenagers and adults alike with resources to understand the contradictions they are faced with in contemporary society’. However, it is important to note that this is only one narrative, as Maya Pindyck notes, ‘pinning the subject of abortion to one, or even a handful, of experiences and emotions distorts the wide range and nuances of women’s abortion realities.’ It is the contradictions inherent within Juno that enable very different interpretations of it, and I am interested in the feeling of confusion and difficulty produced in the abortion scene, as well as the resulting discussions of rationality and choice.

In debates around abortion, the term “choice” has been important in highlighting women’s right to abortion but also recognising the restrictions upon this right. As Elisabeth Porter notes, historically ‘the politically powerful slogan “a woman’s right to choose” expressed

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136 Latimer, “Reproductive Politics”, 217. Latimer also identifies the films inaccuracies in the representation of abortion, stating ‘that abortion clinics are actually staffed with trained personnel who often risk their own safety for their jobs’: 218. See also Karen Weingarten who argues that, Juno’s depiction of teen pregnancy and adoption is implausible, yet in portraying an anti-abortion protest in front of the women’s clinic Juno visits the film approaches reality: “Impossible Decisions: Abortion, Reproductive Technologies, and the Rhetoric of Choice”, Women’s Studies 41, no. 3 (2012): 264. In comparing the film to reality these articles appear to miss the point of the film.
137 Tarancón, “Juno”, 453.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid, 445.
140 Ibid, 462.
real needs for women who had no choice’.142 However, Probyn explains that ‘the choice in prochoice opens up a semiotic space now occupied by antiabortionists’ suggesting that ‘the decision to have an abortion is represented as just one choice among many: that the decision to have an abortion is an easy matter’.143 The concept of choice has been complicated by its association with neoliberalism and postfeminism. In an article analysing the depoliticisation of pregnancy in US films, Kristen Hoerl and Casey Kelly argue that ‘[w]ithin a post-feminist paradigm, the meaning of choice is inverted such that even a woman’s decision to reclaim her traditional gender roles is coded as a feminist expression of agency’; that is, as women are presumed to have ‘achieved the goals of feminism’144 there is the potential for ‘blame for women’s struggles’ to ‘be placed on women themselves on the basis of their poor decisions’ rather than recognising the inequalities in play.145 As Thoma, who, like Hoerl and Kelly, defines Juno as postfeminist notes, ‘postfeminist feminine subjectivity jettisons the political subject and replaces it with an “empowered” consumer whose choices are nonetheless constrained within a ruggedly individualizing neoliberal discourse’.146 In critiquing the neoliberal and postfeminist concept of choice then, emphasis is placed on the inequalities obscured in discussions of choice147 which are not necessarily fixed by a focus on rights; as Porter notes, ‘the enabling conditions … to make rights actually realizable’ are also required.148 Given that Juno has access to abortion, however, her decision to maintain the pregnancy and have the child adopted can be perceived by some viewers as incomprehensible.

For Juno and Leah, abortion is initially the assumed solution to Juno’s pregnancy. Told of the pregnancy, Leah asks ‘[s]o are you going to go to Havenbrook or WomenNow, ‘cause you know you need a note from your parents for Havenbrook?’ Leah’s subsequent offer to call for Juno, like she did for their other friend, signals that abortion is not unfamiliar

143 Elspeth Probyn, “Choosing Choice: Images of Sexuality and ‘Choiceoisie’ in Popular Culture”, in Negotiating at the Margins: The Gendered Discourses of Power and Resistance, ed. Sue Fisher and Kathy Davis (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 279. Considering the ‘pro-choice’ stand point of Juno director Reitman, Latimer provides a searing critique suggesting such a position ‘can be seen as symptomatic of how insidious the terms of anti-abortion politics have become; it is completely routine now to be both pro-choice and to embrace foetal personhood, or to argue for a woman’s reproductive freedom, but be uncomfortable with the ‘A’ word (as abortion is referred to in Knocked Up)’; “Reproductive Politics”, 214.
144 Hoerl and Kelly, “Post-Nuclear Family”, 361.
145 Ibid, 370. See also Thoma, “Buying up Baby”, 417.
146 Thoma, “Buying up Baby”, 411.
147 Hoerl and Kelly, “Post-Nuclear Family”, 363. In depicting a young working-class woman (Thoma, “Buying up Baby”, 415; Hoerl and Kelly, 367) whose baby is adopted by a middle-class woman, Hoerl and Kelly suggest Juno deflects attention from the ways in which Vanessa’s own reproductive options actually depended upon Juno’s own reproductive vulnerability: 376; see also Thoma, 415-16.
within their peer group. Despite this no-nonsense portrayal, it has been argued that in *Juno* abortions are represented as shameful,\(^{149}\) ‘trivialised’,\(^{150}\) and are ‘swiftly’\(^{151}\) and ‘easily dismissed’\(^{152}\) as ‘an undesirable option from the past’.\(^{153}\) Hoerl and Kelly even suggest that ‘carrying a fetus to term is the assumed choice’ and argue that the film ‘stigmatize[s] women who have had abortions as unnatural and unfeminine.’\(^{154}\) I would argue, however, that such readings detract from the nuance of Juno’s experience. The scene in which Juno runs away from the abortion clinic begins with Juno walking through a car park. A young Asian girl, Su-Chin (Valerie Tian), dressed brightly in a pink jacket and blue beanie, holds a sign stating ‘NO BABIES LIKE MURDERING’ and shouts ‘all babies want to get borned’. The two girls, who are school peers, make conversation about schoolwork and behavioural medication. Juno looks at the door of WomenNow, then back to Su-Chin. ‘Well, it’s good seeing you Su-Chin’. Juno walks past Su-Chin and towards the clinic, and her face is foregrounded as Su-Chin nervously calls her anti-abortion message from the background. ‘Y-your baby probably has a beating heart you know’, Juno looks up, rolls her eyes and then briefly closes them, ‘it can feel pain’. Juno keeps walking but turns when Su-Chin states ‘it has fingernails’. The non-diagetic music that has been playing throughout the scene stops. Juno asks ‘fingernails? Really?’ Su-Chin nods a tiny bit, and Juno raises her eyebrows before turning back to the clinic. Inside, a young receptionist (Emily Perkins) with multiple piercings and dark eyeliner sits playing on a game boy. Juno enters, blows out air and stands at the reception desk. The punk receptionist barely looks up at Juno, and in a monotone states ‘welcome to WomenNow, where women are trusted friends, please put your hands where I can see them and surrender any bombs’. Juno is given a form to fill and told ‘don’t skip the hairy details, we need to know about every score and every sore’. Juno nods and is asked ‘would you like a free condom? Boysenberry’. Juno pushes it back towards her. ‘I’m off sex’. The receptionist replies ‘my boyfriend uses them every time we have intercourse. They make his junk smell like pie’. Juno looks petrified. She nods, smiles wanly and turns to sit down and fill out the form. A close-up is shown of Juno’s eyes as she looks up at the sound of someone audibly tapping their fingers on a page, and attempts to identify where the sound comes from. An African American woman sitting with her quiet daughter taps her fingers on the form she holds. Juno looks to the other side of the room

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\(^{149}\) Hoerl and Kelly, “Post-Nuclear Family”, 366.  
\(^{150}\) Latimer, “Reproductive Politics”, 222.  
\(^{151}\) Thoma, “Buying up Baby”, 416.  
\(^{152}\) Latimer, “Reproductive Politics”, 211.  
\(^{153}\) Thoma, “Buying up Baby”, 416.  
\(^{154}\) Hoerl and Kelly, “Post-Nuclear Family”, 375-76.
where the breasts and stomach of a pregnant white woman are shown; her arms rest across her stomach and she picks at her pale-coloured nail polish audibly. On the other side of the room sits the torso of another African American woman who paints her long fake nails red. A close-up is shown of a white man’s arms crossed, resting on a form as he scratches his arm. A white woman, looking down, chews her nails. The torso of a woman files her nails, a hand with multiple rings taps on a desk, and a man scratches his neck. The shots cut fast between these fragmented people, focussing our attention on fingernails. Juno looks down, the camera slowly zooming toward her as the sounds swell and combine, conveying panic. The film cuts to Su-Chin yelling outside the clinic. Juno runs, and Su-Chin yells after her ‘God appreciates your miracle’.

This scene provides little justification to viewers for Juno’s quick exit from the abortion clinic, and it may be read as presenting Juno as irrational, failing to exercise reason. In critiques of the film, much is made of its failure to represent Juno’s decision-making process. Latimer suggests ‘abortion is … easily dismissed as an option’ despite the fact that Juno ‘presents its female protagonist in a situation that would warrant a thoughtful consideration of abortion in real life’ and Thoma suggests ‘[n]o sustained attention is devoted to deciding against abortion’. Similarly critiquing the lack of justification, Lutteral notes that Juno’s decision to have the child adopted is ‘a choice that she makes with little apparent angst’. In justifying her refusal to Leah, Juno describes the events of the abortion scene, highlighting the receptionist’s attitude towards sex and condoms alongside Su-Chin’s comment about fingernails, elements that I will analyse in more detail. However, Juno also comments that it ‘smelt like a dentist’s office’, a sterile and hygienic environment which is nonetheless feared by some, and thus Juno’s statement may be read as encouraging empathy from those who similarly irrationally fear the dentist. Indeed, when Juno tells Leah that she ‘couldn’t do it’ it seems as though she didn’t have a choice, a perception confirmed by her father’s comment as he sits with her following the birth: ‘one day you’ll be back here, on your terms’. As Oliver notes, it is problematic that the focus on choice means ‘that if a woman does not choose abortion, then she has chosen pregnancy’. That is, while Juno’s justifications seem irrational, her words highlight the restrictions upon her choice.

155 Latimer, “Reproductive Politics”, 211. See also Hoefl and Kelly, “Post-Nuclear Family”, 368.
156 Thoma, “Buying up Baby”, 416.
The perception of Juno’s actions as not rationally justified is further complicated by the apathetic characterisation of the anti-abortion protester Su-Chin and the pro-abortion receptionist, both of whom highlight issues of responsibility. As Karen Weingarten notes, in some situations it may be argued that ‘a woman who aborts a healthy fetus for personal reasons is … viewed as irresponsible because she supposedly is not taking responsibility for the conditions that caused her pregnancy in the first place.’\(^{159}\) Depicted as young, both Su-Chin and the receptionist are described by Hoerl and Kelly as ‘caricatures’ who ‘depoliticise … abortion.’\(^{160}\) While the lack of support from the receptionist can be viewed as unrealistic\(^{161}\) she also implicitly critiques Juno’s behaviour: while the receptionist is sexually active and will assist Juno in the procurement of an abortion, she never has ‘unsafe’ sex. In this way, the receptionist positions Juno as irresponsible in contrast to her own “responsible” behaviour. Responsibility is also foregrounded in Juno’s conversation with Su-Chin, who is “off-pills.” Su-Chin quietly comments that it was Juno who ‘ripped off her clothes and dove into the fountain at Richdale Mall’ having taken ‘too many behaviour meds’, in contrast to Juno’s original assertion that it was ‘some girl’. Despite Juno using the story to relay the dangers of self-prescribing medication, in identifying Juno as the person in the fountain at the mall, Su-Chin re-establishes Juno as irresponsible, irresponsibility that I have noted is also perceived in the absence of birth control and Juno’s presence at the abortion clinic.

It is in the midst of this context of critique of Juno’s responsibility that Juno runs from the clinic. However, Latimer focuses on Su-Chin’s arguments against abortion and suggests Juno ‘make[s] commonsense the choice to keep an unwanted pregnancy via a set of assumptions about abortion and foetal personhood.’\(^{162}\) Further, Latimer proposes that the noise made by the patients ‘combines into a deafening roar for Juno that eventually sounds like a heartbeat’,\(^{163}\) writing that the scene ““plays like” antiabortion propaganda.”\(^{164}\) I do not hear this chaotic fingernail scratching and tapping sound as a heartbeat, and a heartbeat is not mentioned at any other point in the film, including during the ultrasound. Latimer’s comment, however, makes particular assumptions about knowledge: only certain types of knowledge are acceptable, and women will be unable to make the ‘correct’, ‘rational’

\(^{159}\) Weingarten, “Impossible Decisions”, 276-77.
\(^{160}\) Hoerl and Kelly, “Post-Nuclear Family”, 369.
\(^{161}\) Latimer, “Reproductive Politics”, 218.
\(^{162}\) Ibid, 214.
\(^{163}\) Ibid, 218 (italics in the original).
decisions if they are provided with the ‘irrational’ alternatives. Juno is perceived to deal with pregnancy in an irrational way: Latimer argues that Juno ‘could have included abortion seriously’ by depicting ‘Juno sitting down with a parent or a counsellor and talking through all of her options, cracking jokes along the way, and still deciding on adoption’.\footnote{Latimer, “Reproductive Politics”, 223.} That is, Latimer appears to want a rationale for Juno’s actions which accords with her understanding of appropriate decision-making behaviour, and thus Juno is critiqued for not spending enough time on her decision.\footnote{Thoma, “Buying up Baby”, 416.}

Moreover, a similar discussion is noted in Weingarten. Noting the impact of ‘social and political pressures’ on decisions she suggests that ‘Juno raises the question of what it means for women to choose or not choose abortion when they’re surrounded by a cacophony of statistics about the negative effects of abortion, … and gruesome images of fetuses when they visit picketed clinics.’\footnote{Weingarten, “Impossible Decisions”, 264.} While the affect shown in the foregrounding of Juno’s face as she walks towards the clinic displays a dismissal of Su-Chin’s words, Juno’s subsequent action appears to ‘create awkwardness’ for some feminists.

As I have noted, however, Juno may herself be perceived as a feminist, and it is for this reason that her inability to abort the foetus perhaps creates discomfort. As Ahmed writes, Feminists must … be willing to cause disturbance. Feminists might even have to be wilful. A subject would be described as wilful at the point that her will does not coincide with that of others, those whose will is reified as the general or social will.\footnote{Ahmed, Promise of Happiness, 64.} The disturbance Juno creates through the visibility of her wilful pregnancy is not necessarily what some feminists may expect. Ahmed notes the ways in which feminists may kill the joy of others—creating awkwardness by not just going along with sexist, racist or homophobic words and behaviour to maintain other people’s happiness. In literally running away from abortion, Juno causes disturbance for some pro-abortion feminists, including those who I have quoted as analysing Juno; Juno appears to ‘kill’ these feminists’ joy with little justification for her actions. In doing so, Juno draws attention to the desire for coherence and consistency around sexual decision making in both neoliberal sex education and feminist discourses. In analysing reviews and commentary on Juno alongside secularism, Mary Lou Rasmussen notes Juno is ‘irksome for some feminists because …

\footnote{Latimer, “Reproductive Politics”, 223.}  
\footnote{Thoma, “Buying up Baby”, 416.}  
\footnote{Weingarten, “Impossible Decisions”, 264.}  
\footnote{Ahmed, Promise of Happiness, 64.}
[Juno is] constructed as liberated and irrational\textsuperscript{169} without ‘a proper treatment of abortion … informed by reason’.\textsuperscript{170} While the commentary on Juno I have considered is arguably feminist and secular, the emphasis on reason reproduces a “right” way of acting. Secular justifications for decisions to abort, Rasmussen notes, require reason, recognition of abortion’s value, and remorse:

Good subjects make the decision to abort or to keep their child based on a well reasoned decision; they don’t take abortion for granted; and they display sufficient remorse and trauma when relinquishing their child. … When unplanned pregnancies are portrayed as ill-conceived, insufficiently painful to the psyche, or, as a luxury, they are construed as problematic because they undermine feminist and secular justifications of choice.\textsuperscript{171}

In this way, placing emphasis on reason is untenable as it excludes the affective components of confusion and incoherence that surround sexual decision making, and reinstates a set of emotional requirements that may exclude some women as bad subjects for behaving differently.

Rather than perceiving Juno as irrational, it is important to acknowledge that, as Alison Jaggar writes, ‘emotions may be helpful and even necessary rather than inimical to the construction of knowledge.’\textsuperscript{172} Jaggar notes the way in which the female has been linked with the emotional and the irrational, in contrast to the reasoned, rational male.\textsuperscript{173} In particular, Jaggar writes that the myth of ‘dispassionate inquiry … promotes a conception of epistemological justification vindicating the silencing of those, especially women, who are defined culturally as the bearers of emotion and so are perceived as more “subjective”, biased and irrational’.\textsuperscript{174} However, this does not suggest emotions will never be misleading; Jaggar writes ‘[a]ccepting the indisputability of appropriate emotions to knowledge means no more (and no less) than that discordant emotions should be attended to seriously and respectfully rather than condemned, ignored, discounted or suppressed.’\textsuperscript{175} Indeed, just as there are “right” and “responsible” ways to behave, there are “correct” ways to be

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, 18.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid, 151.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid, 165.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, 169.
emotional. As Erica McWilliam and Caroline Hatcher explain, today in workplaces ‘[p]art of the work of pedagogy … is to train individuals in the proper way to be emotional. … The call is not to rationality but to the right sort of irrationality’.

In discussions of the right to abortion, both Porter and Jaggar use the term ‘agonizing’, with abortion described by Porter as ‘an agonizing, morally acute dilemma’. Similarly, Probyn writes ‘the primacy of choice blurs the fact that abortion is for most women an extremely painful emotional and physical experience, that it is for many the last choice.’ To critique this emphasis on agony is not to deny the difficulty or confusion surrounding abortion, but to acknowledge the plurality of emotional responses to abortion.

Considering the film, I have noted the critiques of Juno’s lack of justification for her decision, which touch upon emotion. But further to these critiques, Latimer argues that Juno will assist viewers to consider how ‘abortion has become an issue about “hearts and minds” rather than about women’s bodies, or why keeping an unwanted pregnancy has become the newest plot device of the romantic comedy.’ Each critique of Juno, including mine, makes a judgement based on expectations and Juno’s perceived emotional response. While I recognise that to connect emotion with abortion has been problematic, excluding emotion or requiring the “right” kind of emotion homogenises Juno’s experience in accordance with the values of the writer. These are complex matters. As Lutteral writes, unwanted pregnancy requires ‘making decisions and resolving dilemmas for which there … [is] no ideal resolution.’ Indeed, while recognising that choices may be read as ‘collud[ing] with the dominant interpretations’, as Probyn notes, disruptions are possible. Probyn has suggested that the representation of choice ‘potentially has the power to effect changes in the “feeling” of the lived’ with choices altering viewer’s feelings:

Representations of choice can translate into a feeling of possibility. The pull of the possible that may accompany images of choice has the power to rearrange the

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181 For example, Latimer notes the debates that surrounded the discredited ‘post-abortion syndrome – post-traumatic stress disorder stemming from the psychological strain of abortion’: “Reproductive Politics”, 212.
184 Ibid, 283.
affectivity of my material circumstances: it cannot perhaps change them substantively, but it certainly can (for better or worse) make them feel differently. As Probyn notes, a feminist analysis ‘can put the discourses and images of choice to work for us’; I want to take this abortion scene and its repercussions as a provocation, ‘to take the choices on offer and to remake them as feminist images’.  

As a representation of feminism in process, Juno draws attention to the relational and affective dimensions of abortion, considering the ways in which Juno’s comment regarding fingernails—a motif which is repeated throughout the autumnal first trimester of the film—draws attention to her relationship with her stepmother, Bren. Juno’s privilege is at least in part enabled by the support given to Juno by her family throughout this pregnancy and while the discussion Juno has with Bren about abortion is limited to the question ‘have you considered, you know, the alternative’ and the answer ‘no’, there is much more at play here. Indeed, I wish to consider the socially embodied elements of relationality in the rest of this chapter. These socially embodied elements are subsumed in the concepts of ‘culture, religion and morality’, components of life which Rasmussen notes ‘are often constructed as somehow outside reason and, therefore, always something which diffuses rather than reinforces young people’s capacity to act as agentic subjects’. These elements may be seen in line with experiences of the emotional; often derided, but nonetheless significant. As Porter writes, ‘[a]ny inference that a pregnant woman stands in isolation understates the ways in which actual social factors influence moral choice’ suggesting that

> difficult decision making involves multiple negotiations between social structures, ideologies, immediate social contexts, and particular desires; rationales shift according to changing needs. Moral praxis involves deep grappling that draws on all of our resources, religious beliefs, moral frameworks, and personal experiences.  

This situation highlights the relations between people that may implicitly influence their decisions. In voiceover prior to the abortion scene, Juno explains that she lives with her father and stepmother, ‘abandoned’ by her real mother. She explains that her stepmother ‘owns a nail salon and always smells like methyl methacrylate’, a statement that suggests that nails are an ever-present part of Juno’s family life. While Juno and Bren are shown to

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185 Ibid.  
186 Ibid, 292.  
189 Ibid, 85.  
190 With regards to Juno's 'abandonment', see Thoma, “Buying up Baby”, 415.
have an explicitly antagonistic relationship, the presence of fingernails may be viewed as less about foetal personhood and more about Juno’s unspoken affective relationship to her family, particularly Bren. As I have noted, Juno repeats this emphasis on fingernails in her explanation to friends and family that she is staying pregnant; when revealing the pregnancy to her parents, fingernails constitute an aside between Juno and Bren, Bren asking ‘nails, really?’ when Juno comments that the baby has ‘fingernails, allegedly’. In this way, Juno’s experience retains a sense of ambiguity and complexity not viewed by Hoerl and Kelly, who argue that Bren’s comment about prenatal vitamins being good for her nails is ‘trivialization of Juno’s pregnancy as a beauty regimen’. Instead, fingernails and the pregnancy become a point of connection between Juno and her stepmother and perhaps provide the context for not getting an abortion, with the experience arguably drawing Juno and Bren closer. Indeed, recognising that Bren is not Juno’s biological mother, but nevertheless provides care for Juno, reflects Vanessa’s ability to also provide care for the unborn child, acknowledging alternative family structures. In this way, this moment in *Juno* recognises the complexity and confusion inherent in decision making, and the multiple ways in which such moments may be perceived.

**Pregnant Embodiment: Pleasure and Confusion**

Confusion, however, may not only be seen in relation to decision making, but also pleasure. Juno’s pregnant presence is not merely abject; it acts as an embodied position from which to explore the representation of pleasure. By considering Juno’s moments of joy I believe it is possible to open a space to think of ‘pleasure as a site of possibility’. Rasmussen notes that in sex education ‘a focus on pleasure and desire is constructed as a universal good, something that we can all agree on’ and yet she notes researchers’ difficulties in accepting youth’s experimentations that step outside normative expectations. Juno, in her pregnancy, is arguably non-normative, but the film also represents pleasure as existing beyond penetrative heterosex. Such representations have potential for rethinking sex education. Allen and Carmody suggest that ‘[o]pening up theoretical understandings of pleasure to possibilities beyond corporeal sensations, heteronormative configurations and bodily acts not only highlights current conceptual

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194 Ibid.
constraints within sexuality education, but also ways of moving beyond these.\textsuperscript{195} In an article contemplating the agency and sexual subjectivity presented in \textit{Juno}, Willis suggests that the failure to present Juno as orgasming is problematic, missing Juno’s ‘own physical pleasure.’\textsuperscript{196} However, the background to Juno and Bleeker’s relationship is fragmented, presented through flashback and memory. To base pleasure solely on the presence or absence of orgasm excludes the multiple forms in which pleasure may be represented.

Pleasure is personal. \textit{The Macquarie Dictionary} defines pleasure as ‘the state or feeling of being pleased’ or ‘enjoyment or satisfaction derived from what is to one’s liking; gratification; delight’ or ‘worldly or frivolous enjoyment’ among other things.\textsuperscript{197} As Rasmussen notes, “pleasure is rather slippery notion. One person’s pleasure may be another’s pain and visa versa”.\textsuperscript{198} Further, as Annamarie Jagose notes, ‘pleasure itself might be difficult, might be demanding, intricate, perhaps even disagreeable or objectionable.’\textsuperscript{199} Juno’s first flashback of sex with Bleeker occurs in the opening scene of the film. For Juno, this flashback appears difficult, and yet the difficulty of this moment does not exclude pleasure. Juno stands on a suburban lawn contemplating an armchair; then, a low angle shot depicts the calves of a young woman in a lounge room as she removes her cherry covered underpants and walks towards a boy who sits naked in an armchair. She smiles nervously as she straddles him. In a close-up of his mouth near her ear he whispers, ‘I’ve wanted this for a really long time’ and she replies ‘I know’. Another beat and he breathlessly remarks ‘Wizard’. Throughout the scene the song “Once I Loved”, performed by Astrud Gilberto, plays softly in the background. The lyrics of this song foreshadow the events of the film and particularly Juno’s confusion:

\begin{quote}
Once I loved,  
And I gave so much love to this love. You were the world to me.  
Once I cried  
At the thought, I was foolish and proud and let you say goodbye.  
Then one day  
From my infinite sadness you came and brought me love again.\textsuperscript{200}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{195} Allen and Carmody, “No Passport”, 465.  
\textsuperscript{196} Willis, “Sexual Subjectivity”, 247.  
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Macquarie Dictionary (Concise)}, 3rd ed., s.v. “pleasure.”  
These lyrics contribute to a feeling of nostalgia and loss. Juno does not smile before or after this flashback, but shouts at a barking dog for distracting her as she swigs orange juice from an enormous bottle. Later, as Juno and Leah move furniture, Leah asks ‘[s]o you were bored, that’s how this blessed miracle came to be?’ and Juno explains that this is not the case, replying ‘no, the act was premeditated, I mean the sex not the whole like let’s get pregnant thing’. Juno tells Leah that she decided to have sex with Bleecker ‘a year ago in Spanish class’. The film cuts to another flashback, presented in bright colours that contrast with the dark night in which Juno and Leah speak. Juno is passed a letter and she almost glows as she smiles at its sender, Bleecker. Back in the present, Leah asserts that Juno loves Bleecker, and Juno replies uncertainly that ‘ah, no, it’s ah, it’s actually really complicated, OK, and I don’t feel like talking about it in my fragile state.’ However, when Leah asks what the sex was like, Juno replies unreservedly ‘magnificent’ as she looks up to the sky, smiling, before the film cuts to Bleecker preparing for the day ahead. While Juno may be unsure about her relationship with Bleecker and her pregnancy, she is shown to find pleasure in this flashback and moment of remembrance.

Juno’s smile displays the presence of joy in such scenes. Within Silvan Tomkins’ theory of affect, enjoyment/joy is conveyed through the display of a ‘smile’. Tomkins notes the wide range of spaces from which enjoyment-joy can be found: relief from pain, excitement, reduction of anger and suggests ‘[s]ocial enjoyments are and can be so diverse partly for the same reason that the objects of man’s excitement can be so diverse. Anything which can capture the interest of a human being can also produce the smile of joy.’ As I argued above, Juno creates discomfort by not acting with shame, but by using humour and experiencing happiness despite her pregnancy—joy that is similarly conveyed in her smiles. While Willis argues that ‘the pregnant body is characterized as off-limits in terms of sexual interaction’, Juno is shown to desire throughout the pregnancy. Tarancón has noted Juno’s desire depicted within the film, suggesting the film subverts ‘the conventions of the teenpic’. For instance, Juno objectifies young male runners (commenting on their genitals bouncing in their shorts), rather than being objectified herself. Further, when visiting Bleecker following her first ultrasound, Juno explains in voiceover that ‘orange tictacs are

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202 Ibid, 81.
203 Ibid, 85.
204 Willis, “Sexual Subjectivity”, 248.
206 Ibid, 19.
Bleeker’s one and only vice’. She watches, smiling, as he picks up the container. The film cuts to Bleeker sitting topless in an armchair reaching for tictacs as Juno continues, ‘the day I got pregnant his mouth tasted all tangy and delicious’. As Bleeker puts the tictacs to his mouth, the shot cuts to a close-up of his mouth. These scenes demonstrate that Juno’s desire is not restrained by her pregnancy, and this desire is something she finds enjoyable. While Juno may not be objectified, she desires and is desired.

Although at times Juno’s pregnancy is marked by abject revulsion at her body, she also demonstrates a desire for those close to her to touch it and feel the body inside, an experience she is depicted joyfully sharing with Bleeker. Juno explicitly draws on reflections of her experience with her body when reestablishing her intimate relationship with Bleeker at eight months pregnant. Juno and Bleeker meet on the school running track in view of their peers and she tells Bleeker ‘you’re not like everyone else. You don’t stare at my stomach all the time, you look at my face. And every time I see you the baby starts kicking super hard.’ Bleeker asks ‘it does?’ and Juno reaches out and places his hand on her stomach. He sighs, ‘Wizard.’ Juno explains ‘I think it’s ‘cause my heart starts pounding every time I see you’ and Bleeker says ‘mine too.’ This embodied reflection enables Juno’s body to take a significant place within her relationship and is followed by Bleeker and Juno kissing in public view of their peers. Juno’s statement that he looks at her face rather than her stomach suggests the importance of respect for her regardless of her pregnancy. Further, it is Juno’s pregnant embodiment that enables her to recognise and acknowledge her feelings for Bleeker, and to find pleasure in her relationship with him. In this way, embodied pleasure is present in her pregnancy, challenging the idea that her pregnancy is shameful and abject.

Thus the pleasure represented in *Juno* exists beyond sex and orgasm, but comes to embody touch and memory. Willis has critiqued *Juno*’s flashback sex scene, stating although Juno is positioned as ‘active’ and ‘on top’, she only speaks ‘in response to the sexual fulfilment of her male partner’s pleasure’.207 Discussing Bleeker’s statement ‘I’ve wanted this for a really long time’, Willis suggests ‘[t]hough it would be simple to shift this dynamic, Juno’s reply is not “me too,” which would make visible her own sexual desire’.208 Despite this absence, this scene constitutes a pedagogical moment in which viewers can contemplate and

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208 Ibid.
question what constitutes pleasure. In considering the representation of female desire at school, Allen suggests ‘treating female desire as “normal” might open desire as a site of possibility in ways that are currently unacknowledged and unavailable.’²⁰⁹ She continues ‘[f]or some readers, this portrayal of female desire will be disappointing as it refuses to exemplify a celebratory form of desire that is unambiguous and indisputable.’²¹⁰ So too, here Juno’s desire is not explicit. Returning to Allen and Carmody’s argument about the ‘transformative potential’²¹¹ of pleasure, described in the introduction: not explicitly portraying ‘orgasm’ or ‘pleasure’ does not mean the experience is joyless.

These pedagogical moments in Juno allow for literacies of teen pregnancy that recognise its complications and contradictions. The juncture of girl and pregnancy represented in Juno’s pregnant girl body, as well as her simultaneous acceptance and rejection of maternity, encourages us to reconsider our presumptions; Juno fails to become a mother, fails to be stigmatised and ashamed, and even fails to become responsible and minimize risk, still cycling helmetless to visit Bleeker as the film concludes. At the same time, Juno hardly meets the requirements of “girl.” That is, Juno contests a simple or cohesive reading, placing the possibility of a static subject position in question, unable to be fixed. Indeed, while Juno appears to ‘become feminist’, this too is complicated by her pregnancy which highlights her failure to use contraception or proceed with the abortion that some feminists would prescribe. The messiness created in Juno’s pregnant presence, and subsequent return to teenage girlhood in the ending of the film, highlights the reversibility and absence of linearity inherent in ideas of “becoming.” But the representation of teen pregnancy and the failure to abort also highlight the way in which desires for rationality and responsibility converge around the image of the young woman. Nevertheless, rather than seeing Juno as inherently irresponsible and irrational, a focus on the affect and emotion portrayed in these moments allows affect to be seen as having a place in rational thought and sex education. An awareness of the affect and emotion as implicated in our experience and knowledge, and consequently according respect to that experience and knowledge, allows more nuanced consideration of Juno’s behaviour. However, this does not mean the possibility that she is in fact irrational should be dismissed; instead it enables respect for that which is not understood. Focussing on rationality can lead to ignoring elements such as relationality,

affect, and the subtle presence of pleasure. Indeed, pleasure may exist beyond orgasm in places we do not expect, such as memory, desire, and touch.

Considering teen pregnancy as a presence enables recognition of the messiness of girlhood and allows these affective ruptures—moments of happiness, discomfort, confusion, humour and difficulty—to potentially resonate with viewers. *Juno* is valuable for the range of affect it depicts, which enables viewers to view and rethink Juno’s pregnancy. In the next chapter I consider two Australian films, *Looking for Alibrandi* and *The Rage in Placid Lake*, considering two pedagogical moments in which young women refuse to have sex with young men. Chapter two further develops the critique of discourses of risk-based sex education, via an analysis of the constructed and gendered nature of virginity and the contradictions such heteronormative discourses produce for young women and men.
chapter two

VIRGINITY

Figure 4: Josie (Pia Miranda) and Jacob (Kick Gurry) contemplate sex in Jacob’s bed. Still from *Looking for Alibrandi* (1999) Australian Film Finance Corporation.

Figure 5: Gemma (Rose Byrne) splutters into her martini as Placid (Ben Lee) tells her ‘I think we should have sex’. Still from *The Rage in Placid Lake* (2003) Australian Film Finance Corporation.
A nervous Josie Alibrandi (Pia Miranda) visits her boyfriend Jacob Coote’s (Kick Gurry) house for the first time prior to the HSC exams towards the end of Looking for Alibrandi (1999). Jacob closes the bedroom door and sits down while Josie surveys the room and then walks towards him. Silverchair’s song “Miss You Love” plays diagnostically. Josie puts her hand on his face. She stands a little above him and he looks up at her. They kiss gently and Jacob tells her ‘I like you making the first move.’ They smile and kiss again more passionately. Jacob’s dad (Ned Manning) interrupts the kiss, yelling from outside ‘you kids want a cup of tea?’ They break apart quickly and Josie laughs. Jacob calls out ‘ah yeah, whatever Dad’ and rolls his eyes. Josie looks at a picture of Jacob and his mum who passed away when he was young, commenting ‘she’s beautiful’ and Jacob replies, ‘so are you’. They kiss again and Jacob leads her to the single bed, where they sit, looking at each other, touching each other’s faces. Jacob unbuttons Josie’s top to feel her breast. Filmed in close-up, the cross she wears on a chain around her neck is clearly visible. He lies her down and repositions himself to lie over her, with Josie adjusting her legs to pull him closer. As Josie lifts his shirt to feel his chest, Jacob undoes his pants and redirects her hand down. Josie pulls her hand away and lies back, telling Jacob ‘I think we should stop.’ Jacob lifts himself up and smiles, replying ‘it’s ok, I’ve got something’, answering Josie’s worried ‘what?’ with ‘a condom’. Resisting, Josie comments ‘it just doesn’t feel right. Your dad’s in the next room making us tea.’ Jacob, however, smiles, telling her ‘you’re making excuses. We’ll be quiet.’ Josie smiles in response and puts her hand to his face, kissing him and lying back down. Jacob quickly tries to pull down her underwear and Josie stops him, stating ‘don’t!’ A close-up of her body is shown, his hand on her hip trying to kiss her. Slamming his face into the pillow he asks ‘don’t what?’ Josie sighs and tries to get up, with Jacob questioning whether ‘it’ is a ‘prize’. Josie responds ‘just not now, not here.’ Jacob asks ‘what do you mean not here? Not ever?’ Angry, Josie retorts ‘no, just not now, is that so hard for you to understand?’ They sit, side by side on the bed. Jacob comments ‘I just always get the feeling that you’re looking for something better’ and Josie replies ‘well then you’re reading

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1 HSC stands for Higher School Certificate and is the term used to connote university entrance exams in New South Wales.
it wrong.’ She sits closer to Jacob and hugs him. ‘You’re so, I don’t know, you’re so lucky. You live without culture or religion, you just have to abide by the law.’ Jacob interrupts, ‘that’s bullshit’ and stands up, ‘I hate the way you simplify my life like that. I thought we got over all that bullshit, you’re a snob … and that’s why you liked that Barton guy.’ Josie replies ‘don’t be sacrilegious Jacob, God, he hasn’t even been dead for three months. Haven’t you heard of mourning periods?’ Jacob retorts ‘I know more about mourning than you’ll ever know and believe me there’s no such thing as periods.’ Josie looks stricken and she stands, ‘God, I’m sorry.’ However, Jacob refuses to accept this, stating ‘no you’re not, you’re not. You’re just good at saying what you think people wanna hear.’ They turn away from each other and Josie leaves. Jacob leans against the bookcase for a moment and then follows her into the street, putting his hand on her tear-stricken face: ‘you should be perfect, you get into punch ups with aspiring models and you, you wipe your nose with your sleeve. You’re my type of chick. Why are we such a disaster together?’ They look at each other, and then Josie turns and walks away.

In *Looking for Alibrandi* (*Alibrandi*), directed by Kate Woods, Josie is described by her friend Sera (Leanne Carlow) as a virgin, a state which is alluded to in this scene in Jacob’s question ‘what is it, a prize or something?’ As a constructed concept, virginity loss has been described ‘as the first time a man or woman engages in vaginal-penile intercourse’ a heteronormative understanding which, as Laura Carpenter notes, excludes those who engage in other forms of sex. This moment between Josie and Jacob can be contrasted with a similar scene of sexual rejection in *The Rage in Placid Lake* (2003) (*Placid Lake*) in which Gemma’s (Rose Byrne) virginity is explicitly raised. Gemma brings two martinis into the lounge of her best friend Placid’s (Ben Lee) parents’ house, where she is staying while his parents are away. Placid looks as though he has something to say, rubbing his hands together. He starts, ‘I think we should have sex.’ Gemma seems to choke a little on her drink, ‘what?’ Moving forward in his chair Placid states ‘hear me out. There’s something in it for you too.’ Gemma asks ‘oh really?’ and Placid explains ‘see Gemma, this virginity thing

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4 Laura M. Carpenter, “The Ambiguity of ‘Having Sex’: The Subjective Experience of Virginity Loss in the United States”, *Journal of Sex Research* 38, no. 2 (2001): 136. In contemplating a wider, more inclusive definition of sex, Carpenter notes that a third of her participants ‘believed that anal sex, oral sex, and coitus were equally capable of resulting in virginity loss, regardless of the sex of the partners involved’: 132.
can become an albatross around a young woman’s neck. As the years go by it builds and builds into a big blockage on the road to partnership and love, leading to spinsterhood and bitterness.’ Sarcastically, Gemma replies ‘it’s like a monkey on my back you say. And you’d like to take the monkey’s place?’ She adjusts her glasses, open-mouthed, as Placid obliviously continues ‘we can talk positions later … you have to do it sometime, and a trusted friend would be the perfect person to do it with first. I am good at it, I promise.’ Gemma replies ‘oh. OK then’ and opening her legs states ‘stick it in.’ Placid smiles ‘well you could woo me a little.’ Gemma stands, and picking up the martini glasses starts to walk away, ‘why don’t I pretend this conversation never happened.’ Placid tells her ‘some of the chaps at work were talking.’ Gemma turns, ‘the chaps?’ Placid replies ‘it’s not normal, us being the way we are together, as close as we are and not fucking.’ Gemma stares at Placid, silent. ‘What, what! You have to surrender yourself to a plan for it to succeed Gemma.’ Gemma looks at him for a moment more, and then turns and leaves.

In raising the issue of virginity in these pedagogical moments, the young men stabilise the young women’s identities—they “become” virgins—rather than situating the girls’ rejection of the young men as prompted by time, place, context, or their own problematic behaviour. Thematically connected by a contemplation of young women’s virginity, with characters in the liminal space between high school and university, these Australian films depict young men and women coming of age. While virginity is not “lost” in either of these films, its presence provides a point of discussion with “virginal” young women positioned alongside explicitly sexually experienced young men. In the first pedagogical moment with which I began this chapter, seventeen-year-old Catholic Australian Italian student Josie refuses the sexual advances of her “Anglo” boyfriend Jacob, whose anger demonstrates a failure to recognise her choice to have sex on her own terms, where and when it is right for her (and arguably not in the five minutes it takes Jacob’s dad to make them a cup of tea). Brought up by her single mother Christina (Greta Scacchi), who was kicked out of home when she became pregnant with Josie at seventeen, the film depicts a year in which Josie meets her father Michael Andretti (Anthony LaPaglia) for the first time, completes high school, dates Jacob and discovers her nonna Katia’s (Elena Cotta) secret: that Christina was born of an adulterous affair with an Australian man and not the now dead family patriarch Francesco. In this way, Alibrandi engages with the secrets and consequences of Josie’s mother and nonna acting upon sexual desire within a disciplining patriarchal frame. In contrast, Placid Lake considers best friends Placid and Gemma and the implications of Placid’s plan to become “normal”, rebelling against his hippy parents, Doug (Garry McDonald) and Sylvia (Miranda Richardson), by getting a job working for an insurance
company. The Gemma/Placid scene, which explores the consequences of Placid’s proposition on his friendship with Gemma, is positioned early in the film. While Alibrandi is narrated by Josie, Placid Lake is narrated by Placid, which restricts the representation of Gemma’s perspective. Nevertheless, gender is highlighted in these films in contrast to traditional romantic comedies which Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey suggest ‘are centred on heterosexual relationships in which the male and female partners enact very delineated roles’ and ‘continue to naturalise and essentialise such conventions and thus make invisible the gendering of those roles and the power dynamics involved’. In this chapter, I compare Josie’s and Gemma’s positioning as “religious” and “secular”, terms which inform understandings of virginity and the closely associated term abstinence. Recognising the inadequacies of this either/or frame, I develop my argument from chapter one, highlighting the intersecting elements of culture, relationality, and societal expectations of sexual decision making. I analyse the representation of masculinity, questioning why these young men require justification for Josie’s and Gemma’s refusal and consider the young women’s sexual reluctance in relation to their ambition. In contemplating the construction of virginity in these films, I identify the multiple intimacies that exist side-by-side in these representations, which may be missed in a sex education which prioritises reason, rationality, or pleasure.

Virginity is a distinctly gendered concept. Discussing the history of the term, Laura Carpenter notes that ‘the expectation that “good” women would remain virgins (by avoiding vaginal intercourse) until marriage persisted until the late 1960s’. That is, traditionally young women are preferentially expected to maintain their virginity until marriage, with different cultural and symbolic meanings attached to men and women’s virginity loss. In an analysis of data collected in interviews with young people based in Manchester and London in the early 1990s, Janet Holland, Caroline Ramazanoglu, Sue Sharpe, and Rachel Thomson suggest that ‘a man gains manhood through a woman’s loss of virginity. A woman has no direct access to the masculine agency which is effected by his entry into her body’. Instead, ‘the onset of menstruation’ is what ‘constitute[s] [her] as a “woman”’. In contrast, Catherine Driscoll notes that ‘virginity minimizes the significance

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of feminine adolescence and designates girls’ maturity as something gifted by men’ adding, however, that this discourse may be problematised.9 As I will explore throughout this chapter, Josie and Gemma become mature without this assumed “loss”.

Josie and Gemma are interpellated into this position of virgin by the discourses that surround sexuality, and by the physical and symbolic marker of the hymen. But the hymen is ‘not the taut web visualized by images of defloration as puncture’.10 Instead, Kathleen Rowe suggests the hymen produces liminality as it ‘serves as a barrier that preserves a kind of independence in the romantic heroine. … She is no longer a child, and not yet either a wife or a mother, or that other form of virgin, the old spinster’, allowing the young woman an element of power.11 While Carpenter suggests that virginity may be viewed as a ‘moment of transition’, and ‘a rite of passage constituting part of the irreversible journey from childhood to adult life’,12 Driscoll argues that virginity is a location of becoming, writing,

Virginity seems to be a static position, a truth claim, but the virgin acts across a space between child and woman that is actively open and closed (fluids pass from her, yet she is sealed). … The virgin functions less as a liminal point between innocence and knowledge than between girl and woman. The girl comes to be virgin.13

Indeed, Driscoll suggests that in teen film, virginity ‘trac[es] the sexualized form of a supposedly linear trajectory even while operating as an in no way inevitable point of adolescent transformation.’14 Similarly, Luce Irigaray suggests that ‘female forms are always incomplete’ and multiple,15 writing, ‘[f]emale sexuality … is more related to becoming, more attuned to the time of the universe’.16 Irigaray lists the ‘irreversible events that define the stages of her life’ including ‘puberty (which boys also experience), losing her virginity, becoming pregnant, being pregnant, childbirth, breastfeeding—events that can be repeated without repetition: each time, they happen differently: body and spirit have changed,

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10 Ibid, 140.
11 Rowe, The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 133.
13 Driscoll, Girls, 140 (italics in the original).
14 Catherine Driscoll, “‘She’s All That’: Girl Sexuality and Teen Film”, in Girls’ Sexualities and the Media, ed. Kate Harper, Yasmina Katsulis, Vera Lopez, and Georganne Scheiner Gillis (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 95.
16 Ibid, 108.
physical and spiritual development is taking place.

Acknowledging the connection of virginity with the traditional patriarchal possession of women, Irigaray writes ‘[v]irginity must be rediscovered by all women as their own bodily and spiritual possession, which can give them back an individual and collective identity status’. Irigaray suggests that ‘virginity, no more than female identity, isn’t simply given at birth. There’s no doubt we are born virgins. But we also have to become virgins, to relieve our bodies and souls of cultural and familial fetters.’ Irigaray reclaims the metaphor of virginity for a feminist form of becoming. In this way, virginity becomes not only a construction, but a process of learning achieved throughout life and disconnected from any event.

While virginity may thus be seen as changeable, it has been constrained and defined by patriarchal discourses, and Driscoll notes that ‘[t]he valorisation of girls’ virginity long associated with patriarchy implies that process and change should not be relevant to girls, who should always enter womanhood in original condition.’ This ‘original condition’ and lack of ‘sexual history’, Driscoll writes, requires that ‘[i]n one sense she is free from sexual taint (knowledge), in another she is proof against tampering with paternity’, expectations which recognise the element of penetration but also restrict knowledge of sexuality to the act of penetration. Yet, as Tamar Jeffers McDonald suggests, it makes sense that ‘the true discovery of sexual knowledge is more properly understood as a process than as a state reflecting a stark either/or.’ In the edited collection *Virgin Territory: Representing Sexual Inexperience in Film*, a collection which predominantly considers representations of the young white female virgin in American, British, and European film, Jeffers McDonald argues that virginity is connected to longer traditions of beliefs about purity, innocence and goodness. The ‘double standard’ and the ‘technical virgin’ may seem to be uniquely 1950s concepts, yet … both are still pertinent to current films and the societies they reflect and serve.

Also considering virginity in film, Driscoll notes that virginity in teen film represents more than ‘the famous “double standard”’, but rather may be perceived as ‘a platform for statements about sexual identity and values attached to it.’ Indeed, Driscoll suggests the

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid, 110.
19 Ibid.
20 Driscoll, *Girls*, 140.
21 Ibid.
23 Ibid, 3.
representation of virginity in teen film offers ‘opportunities for negotiating what sex is wanted, available, and means.’

In the context of sex education literature, however, virginity and particularly the abstinence from sexual activity it entails can have connotations of religion or conservatism. Despite this presumption, Carpenter suggests that there is ‘a diminishing association between religiously and sexual beliefs and behaviour, except among conservative-religious and/or very devout youth.’ In analysing a ‘religious’ and a ‘secular’ character, who each abstain from sex, the similarities between these positions may be viewed. As Mary Lou Rasmussen suggests, ‘secularism, like religion, is steeped in particular value judgements about what constitutes a quality sex education’ and Jen Gilbert notes that while abstinence ‘seems to offer a tidy solution to the emotional conflicts of sexuality’ so too does comprehensive sexuality education; ‘the confidence in science, rationality, and the promise of a “positive, healthy sexuality” all have the potential to push the ambivalent questions about sexuality to the side.’ Instead, to make sex education meaningful, Gilbert suggests ‘we must risk an analysis of uncertainty and ambivalence.’ The divisions between the religious and secular are not clear, and young people may delay sexual activity for a variety of reasons. In a study of secondary virginity, that is, ‘a sexually-initiated person’s deliberate decision to refrain from intimate encounters for a set period of time’, Carpenter notes that her participants, both religious and secular, provided a range of reasons for the choice to abstain from sex, including that ‘their virginity-loss experiences had been extremely unpleasant in physical and/or emotional terms.’ In this way, Carpenter suggests ‘the concept of secondary virginity—initially a religious framing of celibacy—is taking on a new, secular interpretation as it becomes popularized beyond its conservative Christian beginnings’ a situation which demonstrates a need for ‘a sex positive way to say, “If you want to take time off, you should feel free to”’, placing abstinence outside ideas of religion. Indeed, Gilbert notes that,

the ambiguity of the term ‘abstinence’ points to the expansive reach of sexuality and, ultimately, to the pedagogical impotence of prohibitions and prescriptions.

25 Ibid, 71. See also Driscoll, “She’s All That”, 95.
29 Ibid.
31 Ibid, 131.
32 Ibid, 134.
33 Ibid, 137.
Abstinence, … is an empty concept. It can be filled with anything or nothing. It is ephemeral and fleeting.\textsuperscript{34} Separating the concept of abstinence from religion enables the secular feelings that surround these experiences to be considered. Indeed, to draw from Ann Pellegrini, the texts and pedagogical moments I consider offer a potential space in which ‘religious and secular feelings “touch”’.\textsuperscript{35} As Moira Carmody notes, ‘[s]exual intimacy is not a simple matter, it is imbued with a multiplicity of expectations about gender, varying desires and motivations and overlayed by heteronormative discourses that place a moral value on specific acts and choice of erotic partners.’\textsuperscript{36} For example, Josie’s refusal to have sex with Jacob is not necessarily just about her Catholicism or Italian culture. As Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli notes, ‘it is impossible to make universal statements that will summarise the experiences of all members of a particular group such as an ethnic group or sexuality group’\textsuperscript{37} and \textit{Alibrandi} offers a position to question the assumptions that surround those people who identify as religious and secular, taking account of multicultural issues and perspectives and noting that morals and values underpin both identifications.\textsuperscript{38}

While Jacob’s behaviour in this moment may be linked to discourses of masculinity, a matter I will consider later, Josie’s problematic simplification of his life, suggesting that as an “Anglo” Australian he lives without culture or religion, highlights her recognition of the multiple intersecting influences upon her own life. As I noted in chapter one, a range of ‘aspects of young people’s lives … may influence their sexual decisions’ including ‘kinship networks, culture and religion, spirituality and ethics’.\textsuperscript{39} Considering the myth of the “good” Italian girl, a representation within which Josie may be perceived, Pallotta-Chiarolli notes in an ethnographic study that individual Australian Italian women ‘zig-zag’ through cultural constructs, needing to be ‘good’ to please loving parents and uphold a rich heritage; needing to be ‘good’ according to Australian criteria of freedom and independence to feel accepted and succeed in education and employment; wanting to

\textsuperscript{34} Gilbert, “Ambivalence Only”, 234.
\textsuperscript{38} For example, Lesley Speed has considered the different moral positions and ‘prejudiced assumptions’ of Josie and Jacob on the issue of mourning, writing ‘the ethnic diversity of Australian urban life prompts an exchange of stereotypical assumptions that, like the moral code of the good, can never do more than approximate a cultural signified’: “‘No Matter How Far You Run’: \textit{Looking for Alibrandi} and Coming of Age in Italo-Australian Cinema and Girlhood,” \textit{Screening the Past} 19 (2006), under “Looking for the ethnic other”.
\textsuperscript{39} Mary Louise Rasmussen, “Pleasure/Desire, Sexualism and Sexuality Education”, \textit{Sex Education} 12, no. 4 (2012): 477.
be ‘good’ according to personal criteria of social, sexual and interpersonal fulfilment.\textsuperscript{40}

These are expectations that Josie navigates throughout the film and while there may be some internalisation of these ‘cultural constructs’, Pallotta-Chiarolli suggests it is a myth that “[t]he “good Italian girl” will follow a highly moral, conservative and chaste code of sexual behaviour and attitudes”.\textsuperscript{41} Recognising these multiple contradictory elements, Lesley Speed suggests \textit{Alibrandi} represents more than ‘a conflict between two cultures’, noting that Josie is ‘multi-layered’.\textsuperscript{42} Indeed, while Josie is shown to feel restricted by traditional gender norms, travelling to her Nonna’s house after school—narrating a surreal scene in which she imagines she is followed and photographed, ‘dawdling’ to spend as little time at her Nonna’s as possible and commenting that her ‘Nonna’s spy ring’ is ‘the biggest and most thorough in the southern hemisphere’—on the home front, Speed suggests Josie is not as restricted as she may feel. Indeed, Speed points out that the film ‘contradicts’ her feelings of restriction through the variety of locations around Sydney that she ‘independently’ visits.\textsuperscript{43} At the same time, Josie’s perception of surveillance also invokes a panopticon, with the feeling of being watched holding the potential to alter her behaviour.

In this way, Josie is positioned within a complex web of identities and relationships, with multiple influences upon her decision-making process. Josie has ambitions to become a lawyer or politician and is determined not to get pregnant and become ‘trapped’ like her mother, acknowledging the sacrifices her mother made to support them both. As Anita Harris notes, ‘[c]an-do girls are encouraged to delay childbearing until their careers are established but not to renounce motherhood altogether’.\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, a neoliberal environment ensures that Josie’s success or failure lies squarely with Josie; as Harris writes, “those who choose poorly have no one to blame but themselves”.\textsuperscript{45} This situation can be seen to contextualise Josie’s attitudes to sex, firmly situated as a rational decision. Josie clearly possesses a biological understanding of sexuality, indeed, it is Josie who discovers that due to her mother’s birthdate, the man she knew as her grandfather Francesco could not have conceived Josie’s mother. It is suggested in the film, however, that there is a difference between sexual knowledge and embodied experience. While critical of the patriarchal presumption of girls as “good” and virginal, early in the film Josie herself

\textsuperscript{40} Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, “Beyond the Myth of the ‘Good Italian Girl’”, \textit{Multicultural Australia Papers} 64 (1989): 2.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 12.
\textsuperscript{42} Speed, “Coming of Age”, under “Italo-Australian girlhood and coming of age”.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Harris, \textit{Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century} (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2003), 21.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 29.
reproaches young women’s sexual behaviour. As they travel home from school at the beginning of year 12, Sera states that she had sex all holidays. When told to be ‘careful’, Sera sarcastically replies ‘great, now I’m getting advice from a professional virgin, what do you suggest I use?’ and Josie quickly retorts ‘how ‘bout your underpants’. Josie argues for abstinence, dismissing Sera’s sexuality. In contrast, the pedagogical moment between Josie and Jacob with which I began this chapter suggests that when Josie herself experiences a more embodied sexuality the rational arguments she advocates become more difficult to sustain, gaining some understanding of the complex and potentially irrational dimensions of sexuality. In this way, social, cultural and religious elements contribute to Josie’s attempt to understand and come to terms with her sexuality: she does not say they will ‘never’ have sex, just ‘not now’.

While Josie is represented as religious, Placid constructs Gemma as ‘Doris Day the Scientist’, a rational and scientific “good” girl. Exploring secular feeling, Pellegrini notes the ways in which ‘secular modernity’ is associated ‘with reason, progress, freedom, universalism over and against religion, which is framed as particularistic, violent, dogmatic, atavistic and emotionally “off”’.46 Pellegrini suggests that ‘the identification of feelings with religion; or of religion as feelings, nothing more than feelings; or … of religion as irrational belief blocks us from identifying what feelings the secular mobilizes and draws upon. For starters: hope, fear, anxiety, terror’.47 In the liminal space between school and university, Gemma demonstrates fear, unsure of how to proceed. In the penultimate scene between Gemma and Placid, Gemma rationalises the irrational when she attempts to scientifically evoke a near death experience in order to see her mother, who died when Gemma was eight, and ask her ‘advice’. Supported by pages of calculation, Gemma’s informed decision to experiment upon herself is clearly regarded by Placid as the wrong decision. And yet Placid has been shown to experiment on himself often, placing himself in dangerous situations. Indeed, *Placid Lake* begins with Placid’s description of a high school life of serious bullying by classmates, using a video shown at the graduation assembly to expose the vice, abuse and ambivalence that pervades his school. After the screening, Placid is chased to the roof and, believing he can fly, he jumps, breaking every bone in his body; Placid’s proposition to Gemma follows his recovery. Just as Placid jumped off the roof, Gemma views her experiment as a calculated risk worth taking. Both characters are shown to attempt embodied experimentation, demonstrating that while scientific and rational

47 Ibid, 212 (italics in the original).
thought are often perceived to be cerebral and of the mind, they are nevertheless inflected by bodily experiences. Indeed, the term experiment is related to experience: ‘a particular instance of personally encountering or undergoing something’. 48 Just as in chapter one I noted Alison Jaggar’s argument that ‘dispassionate inquiry’ is a myth, 49 it must be recognised that scientific thought will likely incorporate embodied experience. Placid is incredulous that Gemma requires advice from her mother, commenting ‘someone who can work this out, someone who can do all this, not just do it, but someone who gets off on all this, and you don’t know what you should do?’ However, although Gemma’s uncertainty appears to be brought to a head by Placid’s proposition, it also exists beyond it: Gemma’s rationality and secular outlook does not exclude the possibility of uncertainty and irrationality and highlights the multiple intersecting influences on her decisions.

**Propositioning Virgins: Justifications and Normativity**

In propositioning Gemma, Placid justifies his claim with the need to be ‘normal’, influenced by ‘the chaps’ and perpetuating conventional discourses of virginity. With his parents away, Placid invites Gemma to cohabit with him, as he starts his life as a “normal” part of society, telling Gemma ‘[y]ou know to cohabit with a woman is the dream of every normal red-blooded man?’ Gemma replies, ‘you can’t dig me or anything’ and Placid nods, ‘understood. It’ll be like one of those Rock Hudson-Doris Day movies where she’s a virgin.’ When Gemma exclaims at this, Placid replies ‘it wasn’t literal.’ By drawing an analogy to romantic comedies and particularly the films of Doris Day and Rock Hudson, viewers know that Gemma and Placid do ‘dig’ each other and will end up together. Although it is said ‘that Doris Day “always plays a virgin,”’ Jeffers McDonald suggests that Doris Day’s identification as ‘virgin’ was blatantly a construction: ‘neither offscreen facts nor film roles support this reading of the star’. 50 Instead, Jeffers McDonald notes that Doris Day ‘became a virgin’ through media discussion outside the films in which she performed. 51 Similarly, Kathryn Schwarz notes the performativity inherent within virginity, suggesting ‘virginity is finally legible only as an act’. 52 Although Schwartz suggests the

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50 Tamar Jeffers McDonald, “Performances of Desire and Inexperience: Doris Day’s Fluctuating Filmic Virginity”, in Jeffers McDonald, *Virgin Territory*, 103.
performance of virginity is not optional, acknowledging ‘the repetitious insistence on the ways in which female sexuality can be defined, possessed, and made to appear’, Placid Lake demonstrates the performative nature of virginity and femininity by drawing attention to their construction. In stating that Gemma is a virgin, Placid makes a presumption that positions her as less knowledgeable and experienced in matters of sexuality. In contrast, Gemma’s reaction refuses this passive positioning and may be seen in line with the representation of Day. Jeffers McDonald suggests Day puts into question ‘polarities such as active/passive, desirous/fearful, and even before/after’; she cannot be read as one or the other, noting that ‘Day tangles with Rock Hudson, negotiating the boundaries of their relationships without ruling out premarital sex but insisting that it must be on her terms’. In an analysis of Lover Come Back (1961), for example, Jeffers McDonald places focus on Day’s character Jan’s motivation, noting that the character leaves prior to having sex after finding out that her date is not who she thought he was. Jeffers McDonald suggests that ‘the narrative clearly indicat[es] that her reason for leaving is wounded pride rather than neurotic sex aversion.

In positioning Gemma alongside Day throughout the film, Placid’s masculinity is emphasised and may be considered alongside that of Rock Hudson. Jeffers McDonald notes that ‘Hudson’s performances … reveal a nebulous heterodoxy’ and suggests that Hudson’s characters fail to perform ‘orthodox heterosexual masculinity as contemporaneously imagined, desired, and projected’. In this way, Hudson appears to ‘unsettle assumptions’ of heteronormativity. Placid is described as having ‘tricked’ a young woman into having sex with him in the opening of the film, by talking to and connecting with her, and while Placid suggests that his transformation to a “normative” character is for Gemma, Gemma is uninterested in the normative ‘character’ he plays. Indeed, in the films of Rock Hudson, Dennis Bingham suggests the performance of other types of masculinity assists the ‘wolf’, Hudson’s character, to ‘discover… a better man, the one he’s been pretending to be. Through him, he finds he likes being loved, and by a woman who is at least his equal. While Placid may reject the trickster and the businessman by the end of the film, these performances lead to his realisation of his love for Gemma. But an analogy

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53 Ibid, 25.
54 Jeffers McDonald, “Performances of Desire”, 119.
55 Ibid, 105.
56 Ibid, 120.
57 Jeffers McDonald, “Very Little Wrist Movement”, 844 (italics in the original).
58 Ibid, 856.
may also be made to what Jeffers McDonald calls Hudson’s ‘doubled performances, showing his diegetic adoption of a false persona in order to seduce the central female character’.60 Jeffers McDonald suggests this can be analogised to ‘the actor’s own doubling as publicly straight and privately gay’61 and suggests the performance calls into question which of these is the disguise. Such a doubling also surrounds Placid Lake; Ben Lee was dating actress Claire Danes at the time of filming, a public relationship which excludes the possibility of homosexuality. However, Lee is both a popular musician and has, at times, been the object of rebuke from peers, once described by Australian band Powderfinger’s Bernard Fanning as ‘a precocious little cunt’,62 with this unpopularity arguably incited by his optimism and self-righteousness, aspects of personality which appear to be reflected within the film. This doubled association, highlighting the ways in which masculinity may be performed in multiple ways within the one text, complicates Placid’s alternative performances of masculinity.

In contrast to eccentric Placid’s multiplicity, in the Gemma/Placid proposition scene Placid draws on normalising discourses in an attempt to persuade Gemma to have sex with him, Gemma, however, condemns the suggestion that she should just have sex for sex’s sake and rejects the positioning of their friendship within normative expectations of heterosexual relationships. This is not so much a rejection of the possibility of sex, but a rejection of the idea that someone else, particularly Placid, will dictate the terms. Placid constructs sex as a business transaction, and yet as Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott argue, considering sex as ‘mundane’ is generally frowned on, suggesting it is subversive to represent sex as ‘an everyday activity or just a pleasant pastime’ rather than ‘exciting’ and ‘dangerous’.63 However, it seems Gemma’s reaction is not about the mundanity of sex, but the normativity of Placid’s desire to have sex. Later, Gemma asks Placid ‘did you want to have sex with me because you love and lust after me, or because it’s part of your plan?’ In this statement, Gemma both highlights Placid’s business-like plan and appears to demand a certain level of reciprocity: commitment, desire, and love, the culturally sanctioned characteristics of feminine sexuality. In contrast, Placid’s attempts at ‘normality’ position Gemma in a traditionally masculine way: drawing on a stigma discourse while

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60 Jeffers McDonald, “Very Little Wrist Movement”, 847.
61 Ibid.
simultaneously suggesting that Gemma needs to ‘woo’ him. Placid suggests that without losing her virginity Gemma will be unable to find intimacy in life, and as Holland and her colleagues comment, for some people virginity can be ‘a constraint on their own life and freedom to love. In this case the choice of partner is less important, as the point is to get first intercourse over and done with’. Indeed, while theoretically broaching the topic of sex may enable participants to ‘co-operate in negotiating safe and pleasurable practices’, in failing to acknowledge Gemma’s discomfort, Placid excludes Gemma’s pleasure from the conversation. Placid’s emphasis on a plan, normality, and his work colleagues, undermines their already intimate relationship and prioritises heterosexuality and penetrative heterosex as integral to Gemma’s coming of age. That is, while Gemma is shown to be particularly anxious about her future and the impending start of university, Placid ignores the fact that Gemma may attribute significance to other values.

Placid’s emphasis on normality is particularly undermined by his longstanding and complex friendship with Gemma. Having a beer with his boss (Christopher Stollery) in the scene prior to “Gemma/Placid”, Placid states that he cohabits with a woman and describes Gemma as ‘a genius and just like the only person I ever relied on’. His sexually frustrated boss asks ‘how’s the fucking?’ and Placid initially hesitates, but proceeds to perform the script, lying ‘we don’t actually ah, do much else’, laughing when his boss states ‘you know for a minute there I thought you were going to say you don’t do it’, a notion he and Placid recognise would be ‘weird’. In this way, Placid may be seen to negotiate his role as ‘one of the chaps’. Following this conversation Placid questions his platonic friendship with Gemma and, while Placid describes himself as a ‘trusted friend’, he breaks his earlier agreement that he won’t ‘dig’ her. Although Placid Lake may be seen to ‘envisage… the possibility of heterosexual friendship in romantic comedy’, considering friendship films, Celestino Deleyto suggests that friendship between men and women, is a social anomaly that has always been obscured by, on the one hand, same-sex friendships and, on the other, heterosexual love. For this reason, a relationship between men and women that excludes heterosexual desire is a subversive activity that threatens the structure of patriarchy. … [T]his type of relationship has

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64 Carpenter, “Gender and Meaning”, 359.
commonly been seen as a logical prelude to the establishment of a more intimate, sexual attachment.\textsuperscript{68}

As I have noted, this is the presumed ending, foreshadowed in the Day-Hudson analogy, an ending which potentially undermines their otherwise non-normative friendship.

From the opening of the film Gemma is shown to transgress traditional expectations of femininity, both as a child and an adult defending Placid from the school bullies. Indeed, the first example of Gemma’s protection is shown in the opening scene of \textit{Placid Lake}. A long angle shot shows children playing in a schoolyard. The walls of the school are covered in fields, clouds and a rainbow. The camera cuts to a close-up of a young boy’s face (Jordan Brooking). Unhappy, he states ‘Mum, I can’t’. In close-up a blonde woman replies ‘darling, just remember, you’re challenging their preconceived notions of sexuality’. The boys in the schoolyard stop and stare off screen and the film cuts to a close-up of young Placid’s face as he frowns and raises his eyebrows. In a long shot the young Placid is shown to walk into the schoolyard wearing a white dress with puffed sleeves. The film then cuts to the young Placid telling his parents of the beating he received that day at school and they tell him to ‘take a deep breath and find a positive response to this’. In voiceover Placid explains ‘so when I remember that day’, a mid-shot of young Placid being beaten by three small boys who call him ‘pooftah’\textsuperscript{69} is shown, ‘I remember it as the day I met Gemma’. The camera pans to a young girl wearing a school dress and glasses sitting on a bench, writing. She puts down her paper and walks purposefully to the boys, now off screen, and the sound of a boy being hit is heard. In the next shot the young Placid and Gemma are shown sitting companionably side by side. Placid’s ‘abnormal’ behaviour is disciplined by the students, who beat Placid for disrupting gendered expectations, and Gemma protects him from this disciplining behaviour, which she appears to be immune to. This flashback critiques Placid’s parents for both encouraging Placid to disrupt others’ expectations and failing to intervene to protect their child. Gemma’s violence as a small girl and later protection of Placid by detailing the scientific death the bullies would suffer if Placid hit them with an axe, subverts stereotypes of the young virginal woman as being ‘inexperienced, helpless, childlike, and in need of protection’.\textsuperscript{70} In this way, the young, motherless, and virginal Gemma may be viewed as the mother in this scene, protecting Placid and consequently confusing the roles of virgin and mother. Indeed, it is only after Placid convinces his

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid (italics in the original).

\textsuperscript{69} Like ‘faggot’ the insult ‘pooftah’ can act to govern masculinity: CJ Pascoe, “‘Dude, You’re a Fag’: Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse”, \textit{Sexualities} 8, no. 3 (2005): 329-46.

\textsuperscript{70} Rowe, \textit{Unruly Woman}, 130.
parents to physically fight to protect him from the same bullies that Gemma and Placid kiss and begin a romantic relationship.

In requiring protectors, rather than protecting, Placid’s masculinity is produced as ineffective and arguably non-normative. In order to change this and protect himself, during his extended hospitalisation, Placid decides to become ‘normal’, to be ‘safe’. On his release from hospital Placid explicitly adopts heteronormative stereotypes: he gets a job at an insurance company, cuts his hair like former US President George Bush, and wears a grey suit.\textsuperscript{71} Noting the prevalence of commuter narratives following World War Two, Melissa Gregg notes that the grey suit was a ‘visual motif’\textsuperscript{72} shared by such narratives, and that this genre represented ‘conformity’, sacrificing ‘privacy and uniqueness, for safety, community and connection’,\textsuperscript{73} that is, ‘[t]he prospect of safe, ongoing employment, the seduction of home ownership and the love of wife and family’.\textsuperscript{74} In such narratives Gregg suggests there is ‘[a] clear juxtaposition of suburban domesticity and city-based employment’ which ‘sees company men leaving home for work while their wives suffer a dull and tedious existence in their absence’.\textsuperscript{75} As Gemma and Placid perform cohabitation, they parody the grey suit genre and Kristina Gottschall notes that in \textit{Placid Lake} ‘as much as the young people are shown to “resist” everything about adulthood, they learn lessons, develop towards adulthood and come-of-age, albeit on their own terms.’\textsuperscript{76} To become a businessman requires a ‘conformity’ which Gemma notes is at odds with Placid’s character. RW Connell suggests that today a ‘transnational business masculinity’ is hegemonic, as ‘the masculinity associated with those who control its dominant institutions’\textsuperscript{77}. Reflecting on the concept of hegemonic masculinity, RW Connell and James Messerschmidt write that although only a minority of men might enact it. … It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 255.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 243.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 244.
\textsuperscript{76} Gottschall, “May You Live Normally Ever After”, 263.
\textsuperscript{77} Connell, \textit{Men and the Boys} (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000), 51.
\textsuperscript{78} Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept”, \textit{Gender and Society} 19, no. 6 (2005): 832.
While Placid is successful at performing this business masculinity, it fails to keep him safe from the bullies later in the film and puts his relationship with Gemma in jeopardy, suggesting an alternative masculinity may be more desirable.

In his relationship with Gemma, Placid is placed in contrast with Bozo, (Socratis Otto), an unintelligent and yet highly masculine peer. Critiquing Connell’s argument of a hegemonic ‘transnational business masculinity’, particularly in relation to the representation of masculinity in Australia, Chris Beasley suggests

> Even accountants with considerable authority are scarcely deemed the mobilising model of manliness to which all men should aspire. They may exercise power, but are not able to legitimate it. By the same token, … while actual working-class men may not wield institutional power, muscular working-class manhood is sometimes employed as a highly significant mobilising cultural ideal intended to invoke cross-class recognition and solidarity regarding what counts as a man.79

Early in the film Placid sets up a practical joke after learning at a party that Bozo was ‘into’ Gemma but couldn’t ‘break through’. Placid critiques and interrogates Bozo’s misogyny; he draws on Bozo’s comment that women are ‘usually slaves to me’ and turns it on its head in an attempt to humiliate Bozo, positioning him as a slave to Gemma by telling Bozo that she is into s/m sexual practices. Returning home from the party Gemma is confronted by Bozo, naked and chained with a dog collar to her desk. She starts, smiles, then calmly unties him as he barks at her bottom, calling ‘come on boy, outside’. Bozo smiles, ‘outside? I suppose if you really wanna’. Gemma leads him onto the front porch, tells him ‘run free, boy, run free’ and leaving him naked in the street, closes the door. Watching from outside, Placid laughs at Bozo’s emasculation. Placid is a small man, and his body is placed in direct contrast with Bozo who is often portrayed as naked or shirtless. Bozo may be seen as possessing an ‘archetypal heterosexual male body’; ‘broad shoulders and large chest, tapering down to a smaller waist’ a physique deemed ‘sexually virile’; a body which is ‘muscular, but not too muscular’ and ‘devoid of fat and hair’.80 While in his practical joke Placid appears to assume that Gemma will not have sex with Bozo, months later in the film, Gemma appears to do just that. As a result of hearing Placid’s female colleague masturbating, and assuming that Placid was having sex at work, Gemma is shown intending to have sex with Bozo. Standing in her bedroom, Gemma asks ‘can we just start?’

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and as he tweaks his nipples Bozo tells her ‘I know you’re nervous, I’ve bagged hundreds of women’. Gemma rolls her eyes, ‘if you’re going to talk, this isn’t going to work’. He nods and she lies on the bed. From the street below Placid sees Bozo in Gemma’s bedroom window and he throws an apple, a sign which is used throughout the film to signify lost innocence, breaking the window and interrupting the sex that is perceived to be about to occur. When Gemma runs out of the house, questioning his actions, he tells her ‘I don’t act this way anymore’. As a businessman he should be emotionally reserved; indeed, Beasley notes that in Australian films the suit and tie represent ‘emotional and physical restraint’. Despite advocating the importance of Gemma rationally losing her virginity, Placid’s reaction betrays his desire for Gemma to have sex with him, possibly suggesting that despite his lost virginity, his statement about the need to have sex to prevent ‘a blockage on the road to partnership and love’ may apply to himself. In contrast, Gemma is shown to attempt to experiment sexually with the muscular Bozo in her laboratory bedroom.

A similar contrast of masculinity can be made between Jacob and John Barton (Matthew Newton) in *Alibrandi*. Throughout *Alibrandi*, Jacob is presented as ‘[t]he Australian “every-bloke”’, a representative of Australian working-class masculinity. This identity, Beasley suggests, ‘asserts him to be a “working man”, a “real” man. He is therefore lean, shows the wiry musculature of a sun-weathered working-class “bloke”’, but also presents ‘a relaxed confidence that is not showy or demonstrative, but ironic, self-deprecating and refuses social hierarchy.’ Beasley writes ‘the lead Australian man is precisely not an overblown bully, nor exactly an underling, but occupies an in-between “just right” location as understated manliness, as lean, weather-beaten, self-deprecating and smart.’ Comparing this identity to Connell’s transnational business masculinity, Beasley suggests

> The Australian idealisation is locatable as a hegemonic masculinity, as an honoured mode of manhood, but more specifically as a *sub-hegemonic* mode which is ‘in-between’, shaped as a legitimating idea of masculine authority alongside global forms but also at some distance from them.

Jacob’s rugged identity thus contrasts to the perfect, private school boy John Barton, who, as the son of the New South Wales state premier, suffers the pressures of expectation and commits suicide midway through the film. Speed suggests that Jacob is ‘romanticised’,
concept which is ‘evident in the film’s disclosure of his sense of humour, his popularity among his peers and his willingness to discuss his feelings about his late mother.’ And yet, Jacob’s anger, asking Josie if her virginity is a prize, and suggesting Josie ‘liked’ John, suggest his feelings of inferiority to John and his affluent family.

In this pedagogical moment between Josie and Jacob, Jacob’s insistence on sex appears to follow a normalised script of young men’s heterosexuality. Jacob is continually associated with sexuality. While Placid rides an emasculating scooter, Jacob rides a motorbike, which, like a car, may be viewed as representing ‘adult men’s sexual power’ and ‘the phallus’, and Josie experiences this sign of sexuality, and his nonchalant possession of condoms, with wariness and excitement. Josie repeats the Australian sex education responsibility discourse I outlined in chapter one in a speech at ‘Have a Say Day’, making a comment on the importance of agentively taking responsibility for preventing ignorance, stating ‘instead of saying “why me?” when it happens, maybe we should be saying “what can I do to prevent it?” It’s up to all of us.’ This speech is not specific in its content, and yet it emphasises the importance of knowledge in risk prevention, producing youth as responsible for their actions, and this reading is further emphasised when Jacob teasingly suggests he is going to teach the audience at this event how to put on a condom. Lynda Measor argues that societal scripts ‘indicate that a young male should be always wanting sex, … always be ready to have sex, and be ready and able to perform penetrative sex’ which is viewed ‘as an essential element in their performance of masculinity’, a readiness which Jacob demonstrates in the presence of condoms. And yet while Jacob suggests the presence of condoms in the Josie/Jacob scene, it does not necessarily make this sex ‘safe’. As Lynne Hillier, Lyn Harrison, and Deborah Warr suggest, ‘the promotion of a rational choice model of condom use does not adequately account for the double standards and power relations which are most often a part of heterosexual sex’. Instead, the presence of the condom may restrict Josie’s ability to say no. The secular emphasis on ‘safe sex’ prioritises penetrative heterosex, normalising heterosexuality and leaving many other experiences of sex ‘invisible’. The prioritisation of condoms to promote safe sex thus ignores the

86 Speed, “Coming of Age”, under “Looking for the ethnic other’.
89 Ibid, 399.
complexities of sexual decision making. Carmody notes the difficulty of negotiating a situation in which

A young woman may desire sex but feel she must say no to protect her reputation amongst peers or potential lovers or to avoid danger. A man may feel obliged to challenge resistance as he has learnt this is the ‘game’ to achieve sexual intimacy and establish his masculinity.\(^92\)

Jacob’s insistence and anger in this scene are suggestive of a situation of ‘pressured and coerced sex’, supporting Louisa Allen and Moira Carmody’s observation that school approaches often ‘fail to recognise that sexual encounters can move from pleasurable to dangerous in the space of seconds, and this reinforces discourses of sexual violence as happening outside the “normal” practices of sexual intimacy.’\(^93\) This scene is not explicitly coercive, however it demonstrates the ways in which sexual encounters may shift quickly from safety to danger. The power relationship in this encounter is influenced by the difference in support Josie and Jacob receive from condom-use discourses; while Jacob is supported by this discourse, acting responsibly, for Josie, reluctance to have sex in spite of the presence of a condom may produce her as frigid, deteriorating her power in this scene. In recognising the way in which these propositions reinstate conformity to heteronormative expectations, producing the young women as virgins and bolstering the masculinity of the young men, the restrictions of such sex education discourses which prioritise safe sex and pleasure may be seen; excluding the multiplicity of masculinities available and failing to recognise the ambitions and intimacies of Josie and Gemma which exist beyond penetrative heterosex.

**Ambitious Virgins: Multiple Intimacies**

While I have noted the traditional representations of virginity in terms of the double standard and masculine expectations, virginity, especially for young women, can be linked closely with ambition. Analysing Isak Dinesen’s short story “The Blank Page”, Susan Gubar notes that the metaphor of

\(^92\) Carmody, “Ethical Erotics”, 478.

\(^93\) Allen and Carmody, “‘Pleasure has no Passport’: Re-visiting the Potential of Pleasure in Sexuality Education”, *Sex Education* 12, no. 4 (2012): 461.
the pen-penis writing on the virgin page participates in a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation—a secondary object lacking autonomy, endowed with often contradictory meaning but denied intentionality.94 Importantly, in this tradition, Gubar notes that the female is excluded ‘from the creation of culture’.95 In the story, bed sheets from the wedding nights of princesses are framed and displayed, with the analysis particularly focussing on ‘the one nameless plate which displays the blank snow-white sheet that gives the story its title’.96 The blood-stained sheets of the virginal women on their wedding night are symbolic of ‘the hymen’s penetration’ and a woman’s ‘purity’97 and Gubar notes in these bloodied artworks ‘the terror of inspiration for women is experienced quite literally as the terror of being entered, deflowered, possessed, taken, had, broken, ravished—all words which illustrate the pain of the passive self whose boundaries are being violated.’98 Given this, Gubar suggests that the ‘blank page becomes radically subversive, the result of one woman’s defiance, which must have cost either her life or her honor’.99 Noting the multiple stories that may result from this image, Gubar writes, ‘[n]ot a sign of innocence or purity or passivity, this blank page is a mysterious but potent act of resistance’.100 Most significantly, the blank page represents something other than a story of virginity loss, described as ‘an act of defiance, a dangerous and risky refusal to certify purity’ but also, Gubar suggests, ‘she makes her statement by not writing what she is expected to write. Not to be written on, is in other words, the condition of new sorts of writing for women’.101 To relate this story is not to advocate abstinence but to recognise the stories that may be told outside that of virginity loss. In these films, virginity may be seen to represent an ambition for something more than relationships with men.

Gemma and Josie are depicted as more intelligent and ambitious than Placid and Jacob, potentially reflecting media and academic discourses of girls in education, which suggest that 'girls and women are … “successful” and “aggressive” at the expense of boys'.102 Jessica Ringrose notes one such description in the writing of Dan Kindlon, who she suggests

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95 Ibid.
96 Ibid, 248.
97 Ibid, 253.
98 Ibid, 256.
99 Ibid, 259.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
outlines the mythical qualities of the new ‘successful girl’, suggesting the ‘alpha girl’ is poised to change the world, economically, politically and socially, as a new hybrid that embodies the best traits of masculinity and femininity. Kindlon suggests this new hybrid is somehow confident, assertive, competitive, autonomous, future oriented, risk taking, as well as collaborative and relationship oriented but not obsessed with boyfriends or her physical appearance.  

Gemma and Josie have ambitions to attend university, they take risks, and they attempt to find independence within their lives. While boys are part of these girls’ life narratives, they do not appear at the expense of their other plans. However, while media discourses may argue the supremacy of this new brand of young woman, as Ringrose points out, inequalities remain. Ringrose identifies the conflation of ‘[g]irls’ high test scores’ with beliefs that young women ‘have conquered social barriers’, suggesting that while many matters of gender equality have not yet been achieved, ‘the postfeminist successful girls discourse … has shifted and reduced understandings of gender and education away from any understandings of wider issues of sexism’ with a focus on the need for boys to ‘catch up’.  

This presumption obscures privilege, with Ringrose suggesting that the ‘failing’ boys and girls are more likely to be working class or of other ethnicities. However, the discourse of the ‘successful girl’ also creates a binary not only with boys, but other girls: those who are perceived to be ‘at risk’ or failing. The ‘successful’ girl is always ‘at risk’ of becoming the ‘failing girl’, a fate that Gemma and Josie attempt to avoid and which may inform their sexual refusals.

For Gemma and Josie, as successful young women, plans must be made and achieved. As Angela McRobbie notes, ‘[h]aving a well-planned life emerges as a social norm of contemporary femininity’. Josie’s stated plans for her future at the beginning of Alibrandi, wanting her life to turn out differently to that of her mother and grandmother, require freedom from patriarchal constructions of behaviour and reproductive control. As I noted in chapter one, most sex education programs focus on sex as risky, intending to encourage youth to abstain by focussing on the negative consequences of sex. In a study of high

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104 Ibid, 24 (italics in the original).
105 Ibid, 25.
school students in the United States, Carolyn Halpern, Joyner Tucker, Kara Joyner, J. Richard Udry, and Chirayathet Suchindran argue that youth with ‘higher intelligence’ often ‘postpone’ acting on sexual interest.\(^{109}\) This postponement is linked to ‘intelligent’ adolescents’ focus on the future, refraining from sexual activity ‘as a commitment to conventional goals and an attempt by adolescents to safeguard these goals and their future.’\(^{110}\) However, Halpern and her colleagues suggest that this extends beyond ‘sex’, arguing that ‘brighter adolescents postpone holding hands and kissing because they believe that such activity will start them down the path to coitus’.\(^{111}\) While Halpern and her colleagues note that they perceive this finding of their participants’ perception of a “slippery slope” … hard to take seriously’,\(^{112}\) similar comments are found in Sue Jackson and Ann Weatherall’s research in New Zealand, where young women suggested that if they were taught about sex they would want to have it.\(^{113}\) Indeed, Gemma and Placid’s shared moment at the beginning of the film in which they almost kiss may be viewed in this way, with Gemma pushing Placid off the bed before they go further than an intimate look.

This separation of intelligence and sexuality is not only seen in research on adolescents, it is also a trope in popular culture, and appears to be true for Gemma and Josie. Discussing film noir of the 1940s and 1950s, Kate Stables suggests the often intelligent and sexual femme fatales were defined ‘by their hunger for independence, their unfeminine ambition or unsettling sexuality’ noting that their threat lay in their position ‘outside the conventional social structures’.\(^{114}\) While powerful, the femme fatale links sex with death\(^{115}\) and for the ambitious Gemma and Josie, sexuality may then potentially threaten their life plans. Indeed, both young women are intelligent, attractive, and wear glasses. Traditionally, as Mary Ann Doane writes, ‘[t]he woman with glasses signifies simultaneously intellectuality and undesirability’, while the removal of her glasses allows her to be ‘transformed into spectacle.’\(^{116}\) Similarly, Kath Albury notes that

the ‘superior intellect’ is not a gender-neutral concept. Think of the old-fashioned movie transformation of the mousy librarian who takes off her glasses and undoes her prim bun to reveal that she’s beautiful. If you’re brainy, you can’t be sexual—


\(^{110}\) Ibid, 222.

\(^{111}\) Ibid.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.

\(^{113}\) Jackson and Weatherall, “(Im)possibilities”, 180.


\(^{115}\) Ibid, 167.

\(^{116}\) Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator”, *Screen* 23, no. 3-4 (1982): 82.
only real women are sexual. If you’re sexual, you can’t be brainy. Although the new ‘ideal’ package is brains, beauty and earning power, it’s easy to see where the lines are drawn between ‘sexy enough’ and ‘too sexy’.117

While Josie may dye her hair before her first date with Jacob, struggle over her choice of outfit, and only wear her glasses occasionally (at school or studying), she is positioned in contrast to the ‘too sexy’ Sera. Doane notes a power in glasses-wearing women, suggesting they signify ‘an active looking, or even simply the fact of seeing as opposed to being seen. The intellectual woman looks and analyses, and in usurping the gaze she poses a threat to an entire system of representation’.118 In an early scene of Alibrandi, Josie enjoys a teen magazine instead of paying attention to her religious studies class. When her distraction is noticed by Sister Louise (Kerry Walker), Josie publicly critiques the magazine for its lack of morality, suggesting ‘everything in this magazine insults our intelligence’ and emphasising the secular, sexual nature of the magazine. In doing so, Josie precociously creates a divide between beauty, sexuality, and intelligence, critiquing her classmate Carly (Leeanna Walsman) who is the model on the magazine’s front cover. Josie’s cynical reading of the magazine ignores the importance of pleasure and desire. However, viewers know from Josie’s narration that she derives pleasure from her critique of the magazine and her rival Carly, as well as from the magazine’s content, recognising the way in which contradictions between intellect and pleasure are produced.

As I mentioned previously, Josie is ambitious and at the start of the film states her plans for the year: to be accepted to study law at the University of Sydney and make John Barton fall in love with her. While this particular romance plot is thwarted by John’s suicide and Josie’s budding relationship with Jacob, fantasy sequences used early in the film convey Josie’s ambitions. At a school function Josie flirts and chats with John, but is surprised when he reveals he will be leaving debating to join the Young Libs.119 Josie comments, ‘I didn’t know you were political’ and John tells her ‘my father’s into job security.’ Josie’s reply acknowledges his presumed future, ‘what? Being the leader of the Liberal Party?’ Josie faces forward smiling, looking off into the distance then looks at him again, nodding. The film cuts to a room full of people clapping. John walks in with Josie on his arm in a red suit. Someone yells ‘Prime Minister’. John and Josie smile, shake hands and wave as the crowd offers their congratulations. A reporter asks ‘when will you be announcing your new cabinet Mr Prime Minister?’ John replies, ‘as soon as my wife, the shadow Attorney

118 Doane, “Film and the Masquerade”, 83.
119 The ‘young libs’ are the youth wing of the Liberal Party, a conservative political party in Australian politics.
General, decides to cross the floor.’ Josie is questioned ‘and is that a future possibility Mrs Alibrandi Barton?’ Josie smiles ‘well, all I can say is that I wouldn’t be the first politician to do that’. In this fantasy Josie perceives herself as the wife of the Prime Minister. However, she also imagines herself as a successful high-ranking politician on the other side of politics. While questioning whether she will cross the floor to join her husband’s party, she fantasises a relationship of intellectual equals which accords with gendered scripts of what it is to be a proper ambitious young woman. Indeed, given that a woman did not become Attorney General in Australia until 2011, and that it is the only cabinet position that requires legal training, the suggestion that she will possess this role, even as a shadow minister, is significant. Later, viewers learn that her positioning as Attorney General rather than Prime Minister is largely based on ethnicity, not gender, as she sarcastically comments to her friends ‘I can just imagine them letting a wog be Prime Minister.’\footnote{120} While Josie does not acknowledge her own political aspirations to her friends, viewers are privy to this dream and its potential, and while it may be ‘fantasy’, it becomes part of Josie’s narrative. Carolyn Abbs has highlighted that insertions of ‘imagination’ into films are ‘a form of “excess” in that they cause a break from the realist genre’ and ‘create an alternative space for the viewer to inhabit; a space where they can develop empathy for the characters.’\footnote{121} As Ringrose notes, her participants’ fantasies of women ‘sharing high-flying careers, not marrying’ and adopting children rather than giving birth are ‘lines of flight’, an alternative ‘way of doing girl’.\footnote{122} Children are absent in Josie’s fantasy and, although married, Josie has clearly made her own way in politics. While this rupture of heteronormativity may not be sustained, the fantasy may resonate with viewers. As Ringrose writes, such fantasies are ‘not just harnessed to individual lack but to the possibility of thinking and even acting something different.’\footnote{123} Josie explicitly desires something more than the struggle experienced by her mother and large Italian Australian extended family.

*Alibrandi* ends focussed on the present, with Josie’s ambitions and plans remaining in flux. This ending may be viewed as subjunctive. In outlining this concept of the subjunctive, Susan Talburt suggests that it ‘invokes the imagination, affect, desire, and possibility, suggesting detours from the straight lines of the indicative. It is multiple.’\footnote{124} *Alibrandi* ends as it began: while Josie opened the film stating that this was the last year she would

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\footnote{120} “Wog” is a slang term, often used in Australia to refer to people of Southern European ethnicity.  
\footnote{122} Ringrose, *Postfeminist Education*, 111.  
\footnote{123} Ibid, 112.  
participate in tomato day, the day on which the family gathers to make and bottle tomato sauce, a year on, Josie incorporates her friends into this family ritual, acknowledging the multiple intimacies she shares. Josie’s coming of age has occurred without the loss of her virginity, but with the recognition of her family’s own rebellion. While Josie’s parents each give differing suggestions of what she is going to do with her life, Josie herself has the last word in her narration, which recognises her inability to predict the future and places a focus on hope and faith. The film does not present the ‘romantic couple’, Josie and Jacob, ‘as the source of all happiness’125 but rather portrays it as one part of Josie’s life, alongside her family and friends. Josie narrates,

I’d always dreamt of being someone really impressive and famous, you know someone people could sit back and envy. I wonder what it would have been like growing up an Andretti who never was an Alibrandi and should have been a Sandford and maybe never be a Coote, but I know now that what’s important is who I feel I am.

An airplane flies overhead and Josie concludes ‘I’m Christina and Michael’s daughter and I’m Katia’s granddaughter and we’re not cursed, we’re blessed’. In this way, the film ends with a focus on rupturing patriarchal lineages and converting the curse into a blessing.

The presence of the airplane flying overhead echoes the airplane that opened the film. Sara Ahmed notes the presence of airplanes in ‘diasporic films’, suggesting they act as ‘technologies of flight, signifying what goes up and away’, with happiness promised in this action.126 Discussing the film Bend it Like Beckham (2002) Ahmed suggests that ‘[t]he “up and away” does not signal a line of connection to the world they have left behind but a way of leaving a world behind.’127 While at the start of the film Josie wants to move ‘out’ of little Sicily—to be Australian and embrace her future—at the end of the film she is firmly connected to the present and her family’s Sicilian past. Ahmed notes that in such texts,

The freedom to be happy is premised on not only the freedom from family or tradition but also the freedom to identify with the nation as the bearer of the promise of happiness. To identify with the nation, you become an individual: you acquire the body of an individual, a body that can move out and move up.128

However, in this ending, positioned in the midst of Italian tradition, Josie seems to refuse this emphasis on identifying only with Australia, the new nation, and instead embraces

125 Rowe, Unruly Woman, 130.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid (italics in the original).
both cultures. Indeed, Josie invites her friends into the private space of her family. The focus on food in this scene, and the family’s tradition of making tomato sauce may be read here as an acceptable form of multiculturalism; as Sneja Gunew writes, ‘[i]n Australia, one of the few non-threatening ways to speak of multiculturalism is in relation to food’.¹²⁹ That is, this conclusion draws on a well known sign of multiculturalism to suggest Josie’s acceptance of her family and its culture, publicly sharing it with her friends.

While this ending may thus be seen as happy and hopeful, the conflict of cultures is shown through experiences of racism throughout the narrative. At the beginning of the film, Josie tells viewers of the curse that has haunted her family, a curse which Josie has been told was brought with her conception outside wedlock and subsequent birth. As the film progresses, viewers find that this curse began with Katia’s guilt at her own infidelity and her inability to leave her abusive Italian husband for her Australian lover, hoping to not subject her daughter, Christina, to racism from both Australian and Italian communities. Ahmed notes that ‘[r]acism as an explanation of migrant suffering … functions to preserve an attachment to the very scene of suffering. Bad feeling thus originates with the migrant who won’t let go of racism as a script that explains suffering’.¹³⁰ In refusing this curse, it seems that Josie is ‘getting over it’, refusing the suffering of racism.¹³¹ However, I believe this ending is more complicated. Josie herself is shown as the “other” throughout the film, an Italian Australian brought up by a single mother. Indeed, Josie’s aggressive act, violently hitting Carly with a history textbook when Carly calls her a ‘wog’ and a ‘bastard’, conveys her anger at her experience of difference. This anger is in itself accepted by Jacob; her getting into punch ups makes her a desirable ‘chick’. While Ahmed notes that ‘[m]igrants as would-be citizens are thus increasingly bound by the happiness duty not to speak about racism in the present’,¹³² here racism continues to be present and secrecy becomes the problem: these histories of bad feeling need to be spoken of.

Racism has not disappeared in this ending. It seems that Josie recognises ‘the impossibility of putting certain histories behind us; these histories persist, and we must persist in declaring our unhappiness with their persistence.’¹³³ Josie notes that she does not know whether her mother will ‘forgive’ her grandmother for her secrecy and hypocrisy, and yet

¹³¹ Ibid.
¹³² Ibid, 158.
¹³³ Ibid, 159.
Josie’s refusal of the curse takes place within her familial group, dancing with her grandmother to her grandmother’s Italian music as a sign of respect. Considering the ending of the film, Speed writes,

Josie’s final dance with Katia to an old Italian song, ‘Tintarella di Luna’, is an act of acquiescence in relation to which Katia’s authority is lessened by the latter’s professed hypocrisy. Yet this conservative affirmation of the ‘closed world’ of tradition is counterbalanced by the possibility of change, as embodied in Josie’s continuing friendship with Jacob.  

In some ways, the possibility of this relationship with Jacob may refuse her Nonna’s unhappiness: Josie repeats her Nonna’s relationship with an Australian man. As Ahmed notes ‘[t]he acceptance of interracial heterosexual love is a conventional narrative of reconciliation, as if love can overcome past antagonism and create … hybrid familiarity’. However, this relationship itself is left open. The representation of these two cultures—Italian and Australian in the girl body—allows a new space to be created. Ahmed notes that ‘[t]he experience of migration makes explicit how we always occupy more than one community’ and thus allows recognition ‘that you want things that are opposed to each other.’ Indeed, it may be that in this scene what is recognised is ‘a looser sense of being together, where we would not be required to place our hopes for happiness in the same things.’ The openness of the ending, with no acknowledgement of what will happen next, allows viewers to imagine possibilities. Importantly, the absence of a kiss between Josie and Jacob refuses to allow their relationship to be prioritised at the expense of these other relationships. In this scene, Josie appears to have come of age, possessing “virginity” but recognising the interplay of intimacies in her life.

While Alibrandi does not conclude with a kiss, Placid Lake does, bringing the romantic couple to their expected resolution. Virginia Wright Wexman notes that in Hollywood films the kiss acts ‘as a means of effecting narrative closure’ with many Hollywood films ‘end[ing] with a display of the united romantic couple’ and the kiss symbolising a ‘romantic bond’. Viewers know from the beginning of Placid Lake that Placid and Gemma are ‘meant for each other’ and this knowledge provides both tension and enjoyment throughout the film. As Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake note, the emphasis on

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134 Speed, “Coming of Age”, under “Looking for the ethnic other”.
135 Ahmed, Promise of Happiness, 145.
136 Ibid, 158.
137 Ibid, 159.
‘obstacles’ in the romance narrative, ‘both mak[es] the object desirable and … prevent[s] its exposure as nothing.’\textsuperscript{139} Given the period of Gemma and Placid’s friendship, and the tension built within the film, this kiss is a highly anticipated act. Placid parks his scooter in the drive and walks towards Gemma’s front door. He still wears his suit, but his pink shirt is untucked, his tie loosened and top button undone. Gemma runs out of the front door, and stops on the porch. Placid takes off his jacket, and Gemma smiles, taking a step towards him. Placid takes off his tie, unbuttons his shirt and starts to undo his belt but Gemma interrupts him stating ‘Placid, No.’ Placid tells Gemma he quit and Gemma smiles and steps closer to him, stating ‘I decided what I love’. The film cuts to a close-up of Placid’s face. He raises his eyebrows, questioning. In close-up, Gemma explains ‘chemistry.’ Placid and Gemma stand close to each other, and Placid comments ‘it seems obvious now you say it. I’m going to kiss you on the mouth now.’ Gemma smiles and nods, ‘I’m going to kiss you right back.’ As they kiss, in voiceover Placid explains ‘I try to find the positives in my experiences’. Diagnostically, Gemma asks ‘so what’s the plan now?’ The camera rises behind them and Placid replies ‘don’t know.’ They hug again and Placid lifts her up before the screen turns black.

In kissing, it seems Gemma and Placid have established a romantic attachment and the subversive element of their platonic relationship is lost. However, while this is assumed by narrative conventions, they have not stated their love, or declared their intentions (other than to kiss). Here, Placid has rejected the masculine persona, quitting his job and discarding the corporate world, symbolised in the suit. At the same time, Gemma reaffirms her academic ambitions, stating her love of chemistry. Early in the film, Placid had asked Gemma to come travelling with him, fishing in Montana instead of going to university, and Gemma replied ‘Bill [her father] would kill me’. Bill (Nicholas Hammond) clearly has high expectations of Gemma, telling Placid ‘some day, we are all going to be amazed, and I believe blessed by the things she’s going to achieve’, however Gemma is passionate about science, a traditionally masculine area of achievement\textsuperscript{140} and it is in science that Gemma finds her rebellion. When Placid asks ‘have you ever done anything that Bill hasn’t approved of’ she replies ‘yes, I believed the Raw-ash study of enzymes, whereas he believed the Ironbark was better’ and Placid jokes, ‘I take it back, you’re a rebel and you’ll never be any good.’ Academically, Gemma’s comment demonstrates skill and competence, assessing and evaluating scientific literature. While chemistry may have a double meaning in this


\textsuperscript{140} Ringrose, \textit{Postfeminist Education}, 15.
ending, referring to the “chemistry” in their relationship, Gemma seems to reemphasise her independence and ambition prior to this kiss. Gemma does not confess that she loves Placid: she loves chemistry. Her dilemma throughout the film has not been her friendship with Placid, but what she wants to study at university. Throughout Placid Lake, Gemma resists a relationship and Wexman argues that ‘the kiss often represents a significant moment of change for [the female protagonist] … and documents her surrender to the erotic will of the man’.

As this final scene is performed, “Naked” by Ben Lee plays non-diagonetically. The lyrics state

We all just want a way to remember,
A way to surrender,
A way to forever.

These lyrics question who is surrendering, suggesting it may be Placid finally surrendering to the fact that he is weird. While stating that he will kiss Gemma, Placid gives Gemma time to resist and refuse his statement. Indeed, contradicting the idea of surrender, Gemma states her intention to kiss Placid back, displaying her own pleasure and desire. Gemma’s friendship and relationship with Placid is important, however, academia is also shown to be prioritised in Gemma’s statement of her love of chemistry, and without chemistry and her budding academic career, arguably it would not be the ‘happy ending’ sought. This ending highlights the multiple intimacies present in Gemma’s life: Gemma is suggested to ‘get off’ on science, suggesting science provides sexual excitement, and the fact that her bedroom is her lab acknowledges the intimacy Gemma finds in her work. In emphasising her ‘love’ of chemistry, Gemma allows for the presence of love alongside ambition.

Unlike sex education discourses, these Australian films recognize the incoherence and confusion surrounding sexual decision making and the complexity of negotiating issues of gender and sexuality within different contexts. While Gemma is reasoned and scientific, she recognises the importance of affect and emotion in decision making, and works to incorporate her ambition and friendship with Placid. Similarly, Josie is shown to have a range of intersecting intimacies which influence her behaviour. The contradictory cultures that exist side by side in her life allow viewers to recognise the difficulties of negotiating multiple choices and expectations while treating these multiple dimensions with respect. In this way, the films recognise the constructed nature of virginity and gender, and the

141 Wright Wexman, Creating the Couple, 18.
contradictions young men and women must navigate which are not recognised in comprehensive sex education, whether prioritising risk or pleasure.

While in this first part of the thesis I have analysed the representations of pregnancy and virginity in film, exploring and critiquing the restrictions produced in current discourses of sex education, in part two I further the discussion I began in this chapter of the subjunctive. In particular, I consider the multiple and intersecting public intimacies between people—family, friends, lovers—depicted in the texts I analyse. In this way I argue for recognising the messy and uncertain dimensions of intimate moments.
part two

PUBLIC INTIMACY
chapter three

TOUCHING

Figure 6: Santana (Naya Rivera), Brittany (Heather Morris), Rachel (Lea Michele), Emma (Jayma Mays), Will (Matthew Morrison), Finn (Cory Monteith), Kurt (Chris Colfer) and Blaine (Darren Criss) sing “The Scientist” on the auditorium stage. Still from *Glee* (2012) Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

Figure 7: Kurt and Blaine's moment from “The Break Up”. Still from *Glee* (2012) Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

Figure 8: Santana and Brittany's moment from “The Break Up”. Still from *Glee* (2012) Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.
Having just been dumped by Rachel (Lea Michele), Finn (Cory Monteith) stands alone on the high school auditorium stage. As he sings a cover of Coldplay’s “The Scientist”; seven other characters appear around him, joining in the song. They stand still, facing the non-existent audience. Each character that appears has had their relationship placed in jeopardy in this episode and the performance is interspersed with flashbacks to one significant moment from each of these relationships. Finn and Rachel share an awkward first kiss on the auditorium stage. Kurt (Chris Colfer) and Blaine (Darren Criss) hold hands running down a hallway at Dalton Academy. Brittany (Heather Morris) and Santana (Naya Rivera) sit in glee club and smile at each other. Teachers Will Schuester (Matthew Morrison) and Emma Pilsbury (Jayma Mays) kiss in the school hallway. As the song ends, Finn looks around the empty stage. From touching lips to touching fingers, this performance closes a fourth season episode of musical comedy television show *Glee* (2009- ), “The Break Up” (4.4), and it is striking for its contrast in representation of touching between the queer and straight couples.

In this chapter I consider the multiple and varied interactions between six characters in the first four seasons of *Glee* whose coupled relationships break up in this episode: Kurt and Blaine, Brittany and Santana, and Rachel and Finn. Within the *Glee* universe, these couples are respectively referred to by the portmanteaus Klaine, Brittana, and Finchel, names I will occasionally use for convenience. *Glee* depicts the relationships, dreams, and experiences of students and teachers at William McKinley High School (McKinley High) in Lima, Ohio and particularly the experiences of the glee club, a show choir composed of misfit teens who sing, dance, and strive for popularity. With characters graduating high school and leaving town to attend college and take up new jobs, these characters begin season four in “long distance” relationships, confined by a lack of physical and emotional intimacy, with each couple’s communication restricted by work and school commitments. *Glee* presents a

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1 Covers of songs performed on *Glee* are released in conjunction with the episode by Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation with the artist listed as “Glee Cast”. A list of the original recording artists and songwriters for each song referenced in this chapter can be found in the Creative Works section of the Bibliography, along with a list of the writers and directors for each episode of *Glee* I discuss, and links to relevant videos that have been made available online.

2 In text references to *Glee* refer to season and episode.
number of queer characters, representations which can be easily accessed by young people, and considers the implications of being queer. The placement of Finchel alongside Klaine and Brittana allows the ‘strangeness of heterosexuality’ to be highlighted, rather than focussing on queerness as ‘weird’. As I noted in the introduction, the term ‘queer’ has significant history: Heather Love notes the ‘hurt’ that exists within the term and suggests it invokes a contradiction in experiences, with ‘[q]ueerness … both abject and exalted’. While recognising these complex understandings of queer, I use the term to describe specific characters, as such nomenclature allows recognition of the liminality of some characters’ identities. As I explore, in drawing on musical history, Glee acknowledges the term’s difficult past, and as Love suggests, ‘[p]laying attention to what was difficult in the past may tell us how far we have come, but that is not all it will tell us; it also makes visible the damage that we live with in the present’. For Suzanna Danuta Walters, storylines which acknowledge difficulties facing queer teens are important as ‘we see queerness mattering – to the kids who come out, to the family members who may or may not respond well, to the culture of a school in which anti-gay taunts are still … common’. While Glee is hopeful, as Sara Ahmed notes, hope can be risky as ‘it reimagines the world as if there is no discrimination’; however, Glee presents this hope alongside discrimination and as a television show with no definite ‘endpoint’, it enables and encourages the collection and experience of thoughts and feelings with a narrative that is complex and ongoing, open to possibility. Glee may in fact be viewed as subjunctive, as a narrative that encourages imagination and feeling in viewers, and sends them in multiple and alternative directions. As Frederik Dhaenens notes, Glee is more than just heteronormative, ‘exposing how the social hierarchy operates and equally subverting its mechanisms’. For all Glee pays lip service to heteronormativity and monogamy, there is an undercurrent of dissent.

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9 Walters, “Queer Kinship”, 928.
11 With regards to endpoints and feeling see Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 114.
One act that can be viewed as ‘perpetuating heteronormativity’ is the heterosexual kiss.\(^{13}\) The representation of the heterosexual kiss is described by Charles Morris and John Sloop as ‘banal’: so common in public that it sometimes seems invisible.\(^{14}\) The awkward kiss between Rachel and Finn depicted in “The Break Up” flashback first occurs in “Showmance” (1.2). Finn, who is dating cheerleader Quinn (Dianna Agron), joins Rachel for a singing lesson and afterwards they sit on the stage sharing a picnic Rachel prepared. Finn complements Rachel, she tells him ‘you can kiss me if you want to’, and Finn climbs over Rachel as she inches under him. When Finn suddenly leaves during this encounter, it is to prevent himself ejaculating, not because he feels guilt about cheating on Quinn. After Rachel and Finn’s on again, off again romance and engagement (3.11), Finn cancels their wedding and sends Rachel to New York to attend NYADA\(^{15}\) at the end of season three (3.22). When Finn does not contact anyone, including Rachel, for four months, Rachel begins a romantic relationship with third year NYADA student Brody (Dean Geyer) (4.3). The repetition of Finchel’s first kiss in the “The Break Up” (4.4) may be directly contrasted with Rachel’s first kiss with Brody in the previous episode, “Makeover” (4.3). Sharing a picnic on the floor of her almost furniture-less New York apartment, Rachel and Brody’s first kiss, seated before moving to lie side by side on the floor, is marked by repetition but also greater maturity and equality. When Finn returns at the end of this episode, he reveals his failure to call was due to his embarrassment at being honourably discharged from the army after accidentally shooting himself in the leg. After Finn finds out about Rachel’s kiss with Brody, Rachel dumps Finn, highlighting Finn’s refusal to communicate and his attempts to control her life (4.4). It is following this break up and their goodbye kiss that the performance of “The Scientist” occurs. These heterosexual kisses between Rachel and Brody, and Rachel and Finn, are explicitly repetitive and highlight Finn’s insecurities, as well as reinscribing normativity and sexual double standards. The heterosexual kisses are also foregrounded by their direct contrast with an absence of kisses between Klaine and Brittana. This distinct difference in portrayal of queer and straight relationships is not without precedent. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), Tanya Cochran suggests queer couple ‘Willow and Tara are granted little more than hand-holding, cuddling and occasional pecks on the lips. Kissing passionately and making love are rarely depicted’\(^{16}\) and Cochran

\(^{14}\) Ibid, 2-3.
\(^{15}\) NYADA, the New York Academy of Dramatic Arts is a fictional college in New York teaching singing, dancing, and acting that Rachel is accepted to attend at the end of season three, and Kurt is accepted into in season four.
notes that such a text ‘contributes to the definition of what it means—what it looks like, sounds like, feels like—to be a lesbian.” Similarly, *Glee* has an impact on how relationships are portrayed and read, with the potential that particular depictions will be repeated. Rather than indicating how relationships between heterosexual and queer characters are ‘just the same’, or should be depicted in the same way, I argue that contemplating the queer and straight couples, and their break ups, alongside one another enables recognition of experiences of difference, as well as multiple ways of representing queer.

While the three primary relationships I have introduced could be described as ‘long-term, monogamous and stable’ relationships, they are represented in addition to a series of interpersonal relationships with other characters. Santana and Finn have sex (1.15), Kurt and Brittany kiss as Kurt attempts to assert heteronormativity (1.18), Blaine and Rachel kiss while drunk (2.14), Kurt and Finn become step brothers (2.8), Kurt and Rachel become best friends (2.4) and Rachel and Santana share a musical flirtation. These multiple intimacies exist beside one another and demonstrate the varied intimacies which may exist between characters as well as the influence of these relations on other characters: these intimacies touch others. The term touch encompasses a variety of interpersonal interactions. Touch can be erotic, intimate, impersonal, painful, between lovers, friends, or enemies. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, touch demonstrates the inability to separate ‘agency and passivity’ as ‘to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself’. Indeed, Iris Marion Young notes that in contrast to the objectifying gaze, touch demonstrates that ‘the borders [between subject and object] are not firm’ always touched and touching. But these borders are further destabilised at the

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17 Ibid, 55. Cochran continues suggesting that this ‘resistance [is] complicated even more by considering the actors’ personal and professional lives in light of the world’s technologically networked culture’. While the lives of the actors in *Glee* are intriguing and the *Glee* cast’s substantial interactions on Twitter would be valuable to explore, this is beyond the scope of my thesis.


20 In “Blame it on the Alcohol” (2.14), as Rachel and Blaine sing a duet of The Human League’s “Don’t You Want Me Baby”, Santana yells, ‘I want you, I do’ suggesting an erotic potential between the characters. As part of a growing friendship, in “Dance with Somebody” (3.17) Rachel and Santana perform Whitney Houston’s “So Emotional” arm in arm.


22 Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 193-94.
atomic level of touch. At an atomic level, Karen Barad notes that touching does not involve contact, but rather ‘sensing … the electromagnetic repulsion between the electrons of the atoms’. In this way, Barad notes that ‘all we really ever feel is the electromagnetic force, not the other whose touch we seek’; ‘negatively charged particles communicating at a distance push each other away.’ That is, touch entails a response. Barad suggests that

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\text{in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: matter is condensations of response-ability. Touching is a matter of response. Each of \textit{us} is constituted in response-ability. Each of \textit{us} is constituted as responsible for the other, as the other.}
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In this way, Barad reconfigures empathetic touch, suggesting

Living compassionately, sharing in the suffering of the other, does not require anything like complete understanding (and might, in fact, necessitate the disruption of this very yearning). Rather, living compassionately requires recognizing and facing our responsibility to the infinitude of the other, welcoming the stranger whose very existence is the possibility of touching and being touched, who gifts us with … the ability to respond.

That is, touch exists beside empathy and entails dis/connection and response to others. When we communicate with others we are in touch with them whether we are far away or in intimate proximity, and the technologies we use to communicate themselves may adopt this terminology: not only are mobile phones and computers tactile physical objects that we touch, often designed to best fit our hands or fingers, but Facebook allows us to digitally “poke” our friends. To be “in touch” may mean having an understanding of the cultural production of new generations and this culture may in turn “touch us”, emotionally or affectively. Explaining the title of her book Touching Feeling, Sedgwick suggests ‘touching’ and ‘feeling’ both consist of a juncture between ‘tactile plus emotional’ and notes ‘the dubious epithet “touchy-feely,” with its implication that even to talk about affect virtually amounts to cutaneous contact.’ Physical interaction is clearly implied by these ideas of affect and emotion, broadening the acknowledged scope of the physical and emotional interactions between people.

Implicit within this experience is the disconcerting feeling of touching or sensing that which cannot be touched, an experience which is also found in the viewing of film.

\[24\] Ibid.
\[25\] Ibid, 215 (italics in the original).
\[26\] Ibid, 219.
\[27\] Sedgwick, Touching Feeling, 17.
Considering film reviews, Vivian Sobchack notes ‘the gap that exists between our actual experience of the cinema and the theory that we academic film scholars construct to explain it’, that is, Sobchack explores the disconnect between the experience of sensing that which is portrayed and yet not touching it, acknowledging ‘our capacity to feel the world we see and hear onscreen and of the cinema’s capacity to “touch” and “move” us offscreen’. Similarly, Steven Shaviro considers the experience of viewing cinema, noting that viewers ‘respond viscerally to visual forms’. In describing this experience, Shaviro draws on the metaphor of touch, noting an inability ‘to evade the touch or contact of what I see’ and yet acknowledging that ‘since the image is impalpable, I cannot take hold of it in return, but always find it shimmering just beyond my grasp.’ Film touches viewers and yet is intangible. In this way, Shaviro notes the importance of the cinematic and the body, suggesting that film stimulates and affects my own body, even as it abolishes the distances between my own and other bodies. Boundaries and outlines dissolve; representation gives way to a violently affective, more-than-immediate, and nonconceptualizable contact. Cinema allows me and forces me to see what I cannot assimilate or grasp. It assaults the eye and ear, it touches and it wounds. It foregrounds the body, apart from the comforting representations that I use to keep it at a distance.

Shaviro’s description recognise the physical and emotional consequences and the affective potential of viewing. Taking this a step further, Sobchack considers the full sensory experience of watching film, noting that ‘[o]ur embodied experience of the movies … is an experience of seeing, hearing, touching, moving, tasting, smelling in which our sense of the literal and the figural may sometimes vacillate’. She suggests that once we understand that vision is informed by and informs our other senses in a dynamic structure that is not necessarily or always sensually hierarchical, it is no longer metaphorical to say that we “touch” a film or that we are “touched” by it. Touch is no longer a metaphorical stretch in the film experience, no longer carried beyond its normal context and its literal meaning. … When we watch a film, all our senses are mobilized, and often, depending on the particular solicitations of a given

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29 Ibid, 66.
31 Ibid, 47.
32 Ibid, 259-60.
33 Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 76.
film or filmic moment, our naturalized sensory hierarchy and habitual sensual economy are altered and rearranged.\textsuperscript{34}

In this way, Sobchack argues ‘as cinesthetic subjects … we possess an embodied intelligence that opens our eyes far beyond their discrete capacity for vision, opens the film far beyond its visible containment by the screen and opens language to a reflective knowledge of its carnal origins and limits.’\textsuperscript{35} The experience of watching a film, or television as I will argue in this chapter, confuses divisions and boundaries. As Carl Plantinga notes, considering the affective and emotional experience of film, ‘the phrase “reading a film” mischaracterizes the viewing process as literary, … distracting us from the medium’s sometimes disavowed quality, namely, that film is a powerful sensual medium.’\textsuperscript{36}

This description of film as sensual highlights the feeling and embodied experience of viewing,\textsuperscript{37} an experience I explore in this chapter.

Touch is thus an intimate experience which allows acknowledgement of intimate practices other than sex. Sex is never displayed in \textit{Glee} but is ‘insinuated’\textsuperscript{38} and left to the viewers’ interpretation as an unspecified but present pleasure. Unlike ‘private’ sex which is performed ‘behind closed doors’,\textsuperscript{39} intimate acts such as touching fingers and lips are often performed in public. Just as Annamarie Jagose critiques the way in which critical attention in queer theory focuses on the transformative nature of ‘the bent rather than the straight, the subcultural rather than the dominant, the urban rather than the suburban or rural, the anonymous rather than the monogamous’,\textsuperscript{40} here I consider the potential in less transgressive acts. This does not mean that I dismiss the significance of sexual activity for youth: as Dhaenens writes, the portrayal of queer youth ‘having sexual desires and/or being sexually active’ is important as ‘a counter-narrative to the gay teen as innocent, vulnerable, or desexualized’.\textsuperscript{41} In moving away from a focus on sex I am not dismissing the importance of transgressive behaviours, but acknowledging the experiences which may sit beside them: as Shahla Haeri notes in respect of Iranian cinema, it is possible to convey desire between

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 80.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 84.
\textsuperscript{36} Plantinga, \textit{Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 112.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, 117.
\textsuperscript{38} Dhaenens, “Teenage Queerness”, 314.
\textsuperscript{39} Jackson and Scott, “Sexual Antinomies”, 243.
\textsuperscript{40} Jagose, “Counterfeit Pleasures: Fake Orgasm and Queer Agency”, \textit{Textual Practice} 24, no. 3 (2010): 519.
\textsuperscript{41} Dhaenens, “Teenage Queerness”, 314. Indeed, it has been argued that ‘desesexualisation’, coupled with an increase in display of homonormative relationships, has enabled the visibility and popularity of queer relationships on television but consequently restricts the representation of sexual relationships among queer characters: Morris and Sloop, “What Lips”, 8.
characters without touch or even direct gazing between characters.\(^{42}\) The multiple relationships represented in *Glee* present intimacy as ordinary, and while heterosexuality is clearly embedded in a range of societal practices,\(^{43}\) the multiple intimacies in play here bring the couple form into question and draw attention to otherwise banal heteronormative displays of affection. As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner note,

> affective life slops over onto work and political life; people have key self-constitutive relations with strangers and acquaintances; and they have eroticism, if not sex, outside of the couple form. These border intimacies give people tremendous pleasure. But when that pleasure is called sexuality, the slippage of eroticism into everyday social life seems transgressive in a way that provokes normal aversion.\(^{44}\)

Considering the moments between characters represented in *Glee*, I hope to open out these understandings, recognising the multiple forms of intimacy and touch represented in the publics of this text between characters.

### Touching Fingers: Klaine, Contagion, and Desire

Kurt’s experience throughout *Glee* is dominated by an acknowledgment of the importance of touch and associated metaphors of contagion. Throughout seasons one and two, as the only “out” student in a normative school, Kurt suffers harassment intended to force his conformity. As Kelly Kessler notes, introducing Kurt as gay early in the series, ‘minimizes … exoticization’\(^{45}\) and Kurt becomes a significant character with major storylines as the series progresses. Walters notes that in *Glee* ‘queer kids are not nullified by normalcy: Kurt is the over-the-top, sensitive, showtune singing, fashionista … . And his encounters with hetero family life don’t sacrifice his queerness at the altar of acceptance. His queerness changes others’.\(^{46}\) Dhaenens describes Kurt in similar terms, suggesting ‘[h]is outfits remain flamboyant, fashionable, and utterly disruptive in a high school environment of jock vests and cheerleader outfits’.\(^{47}\) Kurt’s presence visually constitutes a disruptive force and enables consideration of the disciplining of gender in his refusal to conform. Kurt’s original

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\(^{42}\) Haeri, “Sacred Canopy: Love and Sex under the Veil”, *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 1 (2009): 123. Haeri describes one film in which while too far away to see each other, characters glance at where the other character would be. One character leaves the other a snowball and Haeri writes ‘the play of glances turns into the play of hands and eyes’. Describing the scene she writes, ‘[t]he scene moves back and forth between the masculine hands turning and lovingly caressing the snowball, and Gabbeh rubbing her hands and occasionally bringing them to her mouth for warmth. She looks in the direction of her beloved, who is out of view except for his hands.’


\(^{44}\) Ibid, 560.

\(^{45}\) Kessler, “Should Suffer”, 144.

\(^{46}\) Walters, “Queer Kinship”, 928.

\(^{47}\) Dhaenens, “Teenage Queerness”, 313. See also Kessler, “Should Suffer”, 144.
portrayal is supported by his father, Burt (Mike O’Malley), who Walters suggests ‘becomes not only open and “accepting” but a brave warrior dad defending his gay son.’

In “Laryngitis” (1.18), Burt notes his difficulties in challenging his own gendered expectations, explaining ‘I will fight to the death for your right to love whoever you want. But when you were a little baby, in my arms, did I dream about taking you to baseball games and talking about girls, I did.’ Upset, Kurt replies ‘I had no idea how disappointing I was’. His father, however, stops him, stating ‘I’m talking straight to you, don’t go playing the victim. You know that’s not what I mean’ continuing ‘your job is to be yourself. And my job is to love you no matter what.’ With some exceptions based on fears for his safety, Kurt is rarely told by his father to behave in ways that conform to the heterosexual matrix.

Burt’s comment, ‘don’t play the victim’ challenges an essentialised understanding of gay youth as victim, and like Dhaenens I believe reading Kurt ‘exclusively in terms of victimization would ignore its resistibility; the complexity of the character and his representation.’ Indeed, Daniel Marshall notes the importance of moving away from such stereotypes and thus ‘making way for a more sophisticated appreciation of the diversity of queer young people’s lives and their capacity to function in agentic ways.’

Throughout *Glee*, Kurt defiantly retains a flamboyant visual performance in spite of the bullying he receives.

Kurt’s extravagant appearance and its repercussions are the focus of “Theatricality”, an episode in which the glee club dress theatrically and perform the music of Lady Gaga and Kiss (1.20). As a ‘postmodern musical’, *Glee* is driven by intertextuality with pop music and musicals that are drawn upon to create new meaning. As Catherine Driscoll notes, ‘[t]he teen musical consistently uses song and dance to add narrative complexity. The wave of 1980s US teen dance movies, … used this more expressionist story-telling to supplement PG-13 romance narratives with more controversial implications’, explaining that music may ‘suggest an alternative story’. *Glee* is also camp, elements of which include ‘a deliberately self-conscious performance, theatrical and artificial, in a context that is otherwise serious, natural, or even banal’, blending ‘seriousness with irony’.

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48 Walters, “Queer Kinship”, 928.
49 Dhaenens, “Teenage Queerness”, 313.
50 Ibid, 10.
51 Marshall, “Popular Culture”, 70.
'[c]amp, ... with its tender concern for outmoded elements of popular culture and its refusal to get over childhood pleasures and traumas, is a backward art.' In “Theatricality” Kurt joins the girls in dressing “Gaga”. In contrast to the banal halls of high school, Kurt produces an extravagant outfit complete with high shoes and wig, reminiscent of an eighteenth-century French aristocrat, an act which invokes criticism from the football team. School bully Dave (Max Adler) complains ‘you dress all freaky and then you rub it in everybody’s faces, I don’t want to look at it all day, it’s weird, it makes my eyes tired’. Kurt, however, may be seen to refuse the adoption of ‘a homonormative identity to reduce the risk of being harassed’, retorting ‘it’s called being theatrical, we’re showing off who we are, it’s the same thing you do when you go to school with your football uniforms on, you’re expressing yourself and we have every right to do the same.’ In drawing inspiration from the performances and costuming of Lady Gaga, in this episode an attempt is made to confuse the boundary between queer and ordinary. As J. Jack Halberstam notes in the book *Gaga Feminism*, it is not Lady Gaga’s speeches that are significant but ‘her performances, her costumes, her gestures, the worlds she creates and peoples are extraordinary’. Kurt draws attention to normative performances of gender while performing his own ‘cover’ of Lady Gaga’s costuming. Musical cover versions performed in the show are both ‘ordinary’ and ‘queer’; as Halberstam notes, ‘[t]he cover is like a drag act, a way of inhabiting another persona or body or voice, and it is a way of doing so while self-consciously registering the performance rather than merely blending into the original’. In an episode in which the focus is clearly on being different and refusing to conform to expectations of masculinity, this is significant. Halberstam suggests we should think of gaga feminism in the same way that Lady Gaga thinks of clothes—not as functional and utilitarian but as utopian and visionary. When Lady Gaga wears a meat dress or five-inch heels, she does so to call attention to the whimsy of personhood, the ways in which we all need to see each other anew, find new surfaces, name those surfaces differently, and confuse the relations between surface and depth.

In contrast to Lady Gaga’s own rhetoric of “Born This Way”, a well known ‘narrative… of sexual and gender identity’ which is ‘biologically based’, Halberstam argues that Lady

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56 Dhaenens, “Teenage Queerness”, 311.
57 Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*, 103-04.
60 The second Gaga episode “Born this Way” (2.18) is problematic as it demands characters conform to expectations of behaviour by stating what makes them ‘weird’, identifying themselves.
Gaga’s performances may be viewed in terms of ‘becoming’, a focus that can be seen in this episode of *Glee*, recognizing characters’ ‘deliberate deviat[ion]’. In this episode and *Glee* more generally, Kurt directly challenges expectations of normalcy in his experimental costuming, ‘deliberate deviations’ which in turn challenge those around him.

While Kurt ‘flaunts’ his challenge to normative gender roles, for normative Finn, ‘heterosexual masculinity’ must ‘be asserted, regulated and performed.’ Finn argues the boys shouldn’t have to perform the music of Lady Gaga, suggesting they would be more comfortable performing songs by the equally theatrical but “heterosexual” 1970s band Kiss. Finn dresses as Gene Simmons, who claims to have had sex with over 4000 women, and yet is still disciplined by his peers when he is caught in the bathroom putting on make-up for his performance. When the bullies try to touch his face, he pushes them away, challenging their accusations. At the beginning of this episode, Finn learnt that he and Kurt would need to share a bedroom as their widowed parents move in together, an idea Finn is ‘not cool’ with, especially given the crush Kurt has been shown to have on Finn all season. In the school bathroom, the bullies explicitly draw on a metaphor of contagion to critique Finn’s behaviour, stating ‘I knew it was contagious, you moved in with that little Kurt kid, and now you got a bad case of the gay’. Further, Finn’s defence—that it is something for glee club—is met with the suggestion that ‘you bein’ a jock and bein’ in this glee club does not make you versatile, it makes you bisexual’. While Finn’s behaviour is disciplined by the bullies, this disciplining of gender is represented as contagious in its repetition; later in the episode, Finn perpetuates these sexualised insults in conversation at home with Kurt. When Kurt asks Finn, given his position as a footballer, to ask the bullies to stop destroying his costume, Finn highlights his tenuous position noting ‘they already think we’re boyfriends.’ While Kurt suggests ignoring them, Finn comments ‘I don’t understand why you always need to make such a big spectacle of yourself, why can’t you just work harder at blending in?’ Finn responds to the pressure from his peers by requesting Kurt behave in a way that would benefit Finn. Watching Finn hopelessly remove his make-up, Kurt comments ‘you are such a boy’ and puts down the shoe he is gluing diamantes to. When he attempts to help Finn, by using a moist towelette to remove his make-up, Finn slaps his hand away and tells him ‘don’t touch me’. Finn refuses the touch of young men in

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two successive scenes here, hitting away both enemies and allies who are perceived as placing his masculinity in question.

Later in the episode Finn conveys his discomfort to Kurt in sexualised insults. When Kurt reveals their colourful and Moroccan redecorated shared bedroom, Finn tells Kurt he knows he has a crush on him, and emphasises his discomfort at Kurt’s presence in a private space, fearing Kurt will see him naked. Finn’s displeasure at sharing Kurt’s room is highlighted in his disgust at the furniture, and Finn aggressively yells about the need to remove ‘that faggy lamp and … this faggy couch’ as he touches the rug draped across it. Burt’s arrival critiques Finn’s use of ‘fag’, as he comments that just as it is not politically correct to use terms like ‘retard’ and ‘the “n” word’, the adjective ‘faggy’ implies that ‘being gay is wrong, that it’s some kind of punishable offence.’ Consequently, Burt refuses to let Finn stay in his house, potentially jeopardising his romantic relationship with Finn’s mother. CJ Pascoe notes that the insult ‘fag’ indicates more than homophobia, and is a term intended to reinforce masculinity.64 She writes, ‘becoming a fag has as much to do with failing at the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess and strength or in any way revealing weakness or femininity, as it does with a sexual identity.’65 Thus the insult acts as ‘a powerful disciplinary mechanism’ which leads to ‘boys polic[ing] most of their behaviors out of fear of having the fag identity permanently adhere’.66 Finn challenges Kurt’s rejection of straight masculine behaviour and appearance more than his sexual identity, and the encounter is shown to force Finn to acknowledge his prejudice. But Kurt resists in spite of these continued threats. When Kurt is next cornered by the bullies, he again refuses to change, stating ‘I’m proud to be different, it’s the best thing about me’. Before he is hit, Finn arrives to defend him. Dressed in a red PVC dress with massive puffed sleeves which echo those worn by Kurt and red glitter paint across his eyes, Finn states ‘I still have a lot to learn, but the reason I’m here right now, in a shower curtain, is because of you and I’m not going to let anyone lay a hand on you.’ Kurt and Finn are joined by the rest of the glee club, a force the bullies are unable to fight, and threatening ‘next time’ the bullies leave. As Kurt and Finn walk back down the corridor, Kurt pokes Finn’s shoulder and Finn squeezes Kurt’s, the playful act of touching shoulder pads acting as a type of truce and movement beyond Finn’s earlier revulsion.

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64 Pascoe, “‘Dude, You’re a Fag’: Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse.” Sexualities 8, no. 3 (2005): 330. See also Nayak and Kehily, “Gender Undone”, 468.
66 Ibid.
Despite this thoughtful touch and defence, “Theatricality” does not remove the threat posed by Kurt’s non-normative behaviour. In “Duets” (2.4) Finn requests Kurt not perform a duet with the new kid, Sam (Chord Overstreet), fearing that such a performance will lead to Sam being bullied. Upset, Kurt explains the situation to his father, who notes that perhaps Finn, ‘has a point’. Kurt questions ‘so a gay guy can’t be friendly to a straight guy without it being predatory?’ Burt’s answer highlights the difficulty of ‘unwanted advances’ and he mumbles that perhaps Kurt is ‘pushing this kid Sam around, trying to take advantage of him, because you’re interested in him’. While this possibility remains unexplored, Kurt highlights the restraints placed on touch with those around him, stating ‘I am the only openly gay kid at school, in this town, I mean, why can’t I walk hand in hand down the hall with the person that I like, why can’t I slow dance at my prom?’ Burt’s reply places a requirement upon objects of desire themselves being out, explaining that although he wants Kurt to have those experiences, ‘until you find someone as open and as brave as you’ he stumbles slightly over his words, ‘you, you’re just going to have to get used to going it alone’ and Kurt leans back and rests his head on Burt’s shoulder. Kurt is not to “out” others, and yet the loneliness envisioned by the requirement of not approaching, touching or even singing with others suggests that friendship is impossible, with association sufficiently dangerous: the threat Kurt poses is not one of penetration, but contagion.67

Indeed, despite his actions in “Theatricality”, Finn continues to display a reluctance to sacrifice his social standing for Kurt’s defence. In “Furt” (2.8), Finn self-consciously receives a dance lesson for their parents’ wedding from Kurt in the choir room. When Burt catches Dave teasing them through the open choir room door, Finn is forced to acknowledge his reluctance. In his best man speech at the wedding, Finn acknowledges his inadequacies, and forges a bond between himself and Kurt, now his ‘brother from another mother’ by giving them the portmanteau “Furt”. Finn states that Kurt has shown him what it means to be a man and for the audience, Finn’s growth and acceptance is shown to be touching: the music and glances between characters and particularly parents in this scene convey pride and joy at this resolution, which viewers are intended to share. Holding out his hand Finn leads Kurt to the dance floor and sings Bruno Mars’s song “Just the Way You Are” with the performance ending with an exchange of smiles between Kurt and Finn. The lyrics of the song emphasise that Kurt need not change and the performance

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67 For the more normative Blaine, this is not shown to be as problematic. In season three Blaine hangs out at the gym with the other guys and in season four becomes best friends with Sam who is unfazed by Blaine’s crush on him (4.17).
effectively concludes the storyline of the first two seasons in which Finn insists that Kurt should assimilate. This joy is disrupted at the end of the episode when Kurt elects to transfer schools rather than endure further bullying.

Given Kurt’s loneliness, with significant restrictions placed on touching and even singing with males unrelated to him, the scene in which Kurt and Blaine touch for the first time in “Never Been Kissed” (2.6), repeated in the “The Break Up”, is a significant moment.68 Situated between “Duets” and “Furt”, the episode shows Kurt physically bullied for being gay and identifying the failure of teachers to deal with the homophobia and gender stereotyping they witness. Kurt challenges glee coach Will for not standing up against homophobia and relying on gender normative lesson plans like ‘boys versus girls’. While Kurt’s complaint leads to Will instructing the teams to sing songs performed by the opposite gender, when Kurt reveals his choices for music and costuming to his male peers, assumptions are made that he will be wearing a dress and his choice of feather boas for their performance of Diana Ross is rejected. Kurt is instead told by Puck (Mark Salling) to make himself useful by spying on their competition at an all male school, suggesting Kurt will ‘blend right in’. While Kurt is visibly insulted, viewers next see him at Dalton Academy, an all boys school and the home of rival glee club The Warblers. The camera focuses on an ornate, domed skylight, then pans to reveal a curved grand staircase. Kurt walks among unfamiliar uniformed boys and asks a student a question, with the young man introducing himself as Blaine. Blaine tells Kurt that the other students are heading to see The Warblers who are about to do an impromptu performance. Incredible, Kurt asks, ‘so wait, the glee club here is kind of cool?’ The non-diegetic soft piano and drums which have played throughout the scene grow louder as Blaine replies ‘the Warblers are like rock stars’. Kurt raises his eyebrows at this and Blaine grabs his hand, telling Kurt ‘come on, I know a short cut’. A shot of their hands is shown before panning back up to Kurt’s face, surprised. It is here that the moment between Blaine and Kurt which is repeated as a flashback in “The Break Up” originates; Blaine awkwardly holds Kurt’s hand across Kurt’s body as they run through a hall, a moment shot in slow motion and accompanied by a piano motif that stops as they enter a room full of loud boys.69 While Kurt exclaims ‘I stick out like a sore thumb’, Blaine straightens the collar of Kurt’s blazer and tells him with a uniform jacket he’ll ‘fit right in’. Blaine pats Kurt on the shoulder and excuses himself, taking his place front and centre of the group as they sing Katy Perry’s pop song “Teenage Dream”

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68 In the first episode of season five this moment is repeated in Blaine’s marriage proposal to Kurt.
69 This piano motif was composed by James S. Levine.
acappella. Kurt is shown watching the audience who cheer on the singers, clicking and fist pumping, moving to the music. As the song continues, Kurt starts to move, a smile on his face shown as the camera pans up his body. The mood is fun: sung by a group of young men, the object of the song is not explicit with a homosocial environment of camaraderie and queerness depicted. Read in relation to the show as a whole, Dalton is depicted as a ‘teenage dream’—a high school utopia—and the lyrics foreshadow the flirtation that will build between Blaine and Kurt as the season progresses.

Music works on many levels in this scene. In an episode which is explicitly focussed on gender and sexuality, the original song and its singer, Katy Perry, are significant. Vanessa Knights argues that in a television show music assists to ‘establish character identity. Characters are coded by the music they listen to and sing’.70 Katy Perry is a popular performer, and Blaine’s enthusiasm and his peers’ enjoyment signals Blaine’s popularity and desire to fit in with his peers,71 an assumption assisted by the emphasis on Blaine’s private school uniform, which positions him as normative and indistinguishable in contrast to Kurt’s more original attire.72 Throughout Glee, Kurt has sung songs traditionally performed by women, such as “Defying Gravity” from the musical Wicked and Beyoncé’s “Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)”, however for Kurt these song choices have been controversial with his high voice potentially challenging gendered understandings of what constitutes a ‘male’ or ‘female’ voice.73 The young men at McKinley High’s fear of compromising their masculinity leads to the avoidance of songs traditionally performed by women. However while Kurt’s peers must be instructed to sing songs performed by the opposite gender, Blaine needs no such instruction, signalling a confidence lacking at McKinley High. Indeed, this performance itself may be perceived as queer. While the film clip for Katy Perry’s song is explicitly heterosexual, here the object of the song is less explicit as these young men perform for and with each other.74 Lyrically, the song is sexually suggestive and it seems that Blaine sings to Kurt. When Blaine sings ‘you make me

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72 For the ten episodes Kurt attends Dalton Academy, Kurt also dresses in this uniform, although he is shown to belong at McKinley High where he doesn’t have to conform in this way. See further Dhaenens, “Teenage Queerness”, 312.


74 Dhaenens, “Teenage Queerness”, 314.
feel like I’m living a teenage dream’ he points at Kurt, moreover, the lyrics ‘let you put your hands on me, in my skin tight jeans’ highlights the touch that has already occurred between them. While Kurt is at this point never touched by his male peers at McKinley High, Blaine has not only twice touched Kurt but intimated further acceptable touching. As the song ends, Kurt stands clapping and grinning, and the lyric ‘don’t ever look back’ signals this moment as a turning point in Kurt’s narrative as he meets other people like him.

Alongside this performance of “Teenage Dream” is a more classical piano motif which plays as Kurt and Blaine run through the corridor. The motif is introduced at this ‘turning point’ in Kurt’s story and in repeating the motif throughout the episode and series viewers are able to ‘remember its previous contexts’; it works as an “[i]ntertextual allusion”, played at ‘pedagogical’ moments in Kurt’s life. Later in the same episode Kurt has coffee with Blaine, who tells him of his own experience of homophobia at another school and comments that ‘you can refuse to be the victim. Prejudice is just ignorance, Kurt, and you have a chance right now to teach them’. As the music swells into the piano motif Kurt asks ‘how?’ and Blaine replies ‘confront ‘em, call them out’, highlighting his own regret. Each use of the motif in this episode holds meaning. The first, as Kurt and Blaine run down the hallway, ends on the second last note, with potential, signalling that there is more to come. If I don’t hear this musically, I realise it when Kurt talks to Blaine later and the music continues, ending with a more satisfying authentic cadence. This is not, however the end. When Kurt does confront the homophobic bully Dave, Dave kisses him, positioning him as potentially gay himself. While Blaine’s words make it seem like the solution is simple, with a neoliberal emphasis on personal responsibility, Kurt is neither just the victim, nor entirely resilient. The motif is played once more in the episode. As Kurt sticks a sign saying ‘courage’ and a picture of Blaine in his locker, Dave hits him against the locker and he falls to the ground. The motif plays as he sits up, back against the locker, trembling. This final repetition has neither the waiting possibility of the first, or the completeness of the second: it just is, ending an octave lower. In the next scene, Kurt is depicted performing a mashup of “Stop in the Name of Love” by The Supremes and “Free Your Mind” by En Vogue with his peers, an act which questions the veracity of the victim trope, with Kurt continuing in spite of the challenges he faces. Indeed, this piano motif comes to represent

75 With regards to such motifs see Arnie Cox and Rebecca Fülöp, “‘What Rhymes with Lungs?’ When Music Speaks Louder Than Words,” in Attinello, Halfyard, and Knights, Music, Sound and Silence, 69.
76 Knights, “Bay City Rollers”, 9.
77 When Kurt is crowned prom queen in season two he is upset, but refuses to sit beside Blaine with his back against the locker. Instead, Kurt kneels in front of him signaling that this is perhaps a position of disempowerment he refuses to experience again (2.20).
hope and potential in the face of negative moments and is played at a number of other significant moments of joy in Kurt’s story: for example, when Blaine changes school to be with Kurt (3.1), and when Kurt earns an audition for NYADA (3.11).

The motif is also played to indicate moments of joy occurring in conjunction with the disciplining of intimate touch. In “Asian F” (3.3) Kurt graciously congratulates Blaine for getting the part Kurt wanted in the school play, surprising him on the school steps with flowers that are strikingly similar to those that will be presented by Blaine to Kurt in “The Break Up”: a mixture of red and yellow roses, they traditionally indicate love and jealousy. Ahmed writes, ‘I do wonder whether a queer definition of love might want to separate love from happiness’ suggesting ‘[q]ueer love might involve happiness only by insisting that such happiness is not what is shared.’ While not getting the part limits Kurt’s chances of getting into his preferred college, he is supportive, and celebrates Blaine’s joy in this scene. Here the motif highlights joy and discipline: while their conversation is intimate and affectionate, their touch is stilted. Blaine tells Kurt ‘you always zig, when I think you’re about to zag. And I, I just, I love that about you.’ He steps to stand level with Kurt, looks at the people walking down the stairs around them, and places his hand on Kurt’s shoulder in an oddly friendly, but not intimate way. This moment, glancing at the people around them, indicates ‘the disciplinary mechanisms’ that restrict public same sex kisses. Here, hope and despair and joy are represented simultaneously, the touch both affectionate and restrained, and viewers are encouraged to feel this moment, experience its disjuncture and remember it when the motif repeats.

Both “Teenage Dream” and the piano motif are repeated in “The Break Up”. Despite cute scenes of Skype conversations, Blaine and Kurt break up following Kurt’s unavailability to talk given his exciting new job as an intern at Vogue online. Feeling left out and lonely, Blaine tells Kurt as the piano motif plays, ‘I really miss you, a lot, OK? I miss talking to you and I miss hugging you and I miss messing around with you’. Required on another call, Kurt hangs up. This is a turning point in their relationship. Blaine is shown to poke another guy on Facebook, a digital appropriation of touch that leads to a physical ‘hook up’. Later, Blaine spontaneously arrives at Kurt’s New York apartment and on a night out, performs “Teenage Dream” for Kurt at a piano in a bar. The performance is slow,

78 Red may also symbolise ‘bashful shame’. See for example, Kate Greenaway (illustrator), The Language of Flowers (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1900).
79 Ahmed, Promise of Happiness, 100 (italics in the original).
emotional and awkwardly personal with Blaine crying and his voice breaking, quite in contrast to Blaine’s generally brazen and polished performances. Close-ups of Blaine’s distraught face encourage empathy with Blaine, empathy which is tested when, after this scene, Blaine informs Kurt he was ‘with some one’ and it ‘didn’t mean anything, it was just a hook up’. Blaine’s ‘hook up’ effectively stymies any further touch between Blaine and Kurt for a number of episodes: the dream that Kurt will touch Blaine becomes just a dream. The piano motif is repeated later in the episode as Kurt looks at the note and flowers Blaine sent him to apologise for cheating. The motif in this scene is incomplete, and yet its presence suggests hope as Kurt tells a colleague ‘I’m OK. I’ll be OK.’ While the episode ends with no resolution, Blaine explaining ‘I don’t even know if we’re broken up’, Kurt persists: he will be OK. As Ahmed notes, analysing the protagonist’s hopeful ending in *Rubyfruit Jungle*, some aspirations might not be attainable simply by the fact of wishing for them. But she can work for what she wishes—and she can wish for what she works. Not only that: she recognises that if such wishes might not be given or granted, she can still wish for something, which is to endure, even to endure happily, as a queer.81

In this way, Ahmed suggests ‘[i]t is possible to give an account of being happily queer that does not conceal signs of struggle.’82 In this scene, Kurt’s words combined with the piano motif signal the devastation wrought by Blaine’s betrayal, devastation empathic viewers might share, but also the aspiration to be OK once again. More generally, this motif represents the queer promise of happiness: these moments move and change, connecting across seasons to present the potential that remains in spite of upsetting disruptions.

While I have focused on the touching of fingers and affect, a significant absence from “The Break Up” is the first kiss shared by Kurt and Blaine in “Original Song” (2.16).83 Morris and Sloop suggest that the same sex kiss, particularly between men, ‘constitutes a paramount political performance’, unexpected and confronting, and as an act outside of ‘heteronormative expectation’ such ‘same-sex kisses are therefore immediately marked, immediately suspect, and immediately susceptible to discipline’, viewed as deviant rather than ‘a mutually affirming encounter.’84 But despite the kiss’s political potential, Morris and Sloop suggest that where male same sex kisses do occur, they are ‘domesticated … shortcircuited by assimilationist logic in which lips and tongues are not allowed to exert the

82 Ibid.
83 In this moment Kurt’s motif is only briefly and partially played and thus does not detract from the significance of what is being portrayed.
same thrust as, say, impeccable grooming or wedding bands.\textsuperscript{85} In line with this critique, Kurt and Blaine have been described as in a heteronormative and/or homonormative relationship,\textsuperscript{86} however to merely define them in this way ignores their visible presence. Indeed, the disruption posed by the potential sexual practices implicit in Kurt’s sexuality is explored in the episodes preceding this kiss.

While Burt may support Kurt in whoever he wants to love, sex and desire seem to be a different matter. When Burt walks in on Kurt literally performing heterosexuality, kissing Brittany in his bedroom in “Laryngitis” (1.18), he is surprised by the sudden change in Kurt’s sexuality, commenting ‘I’ve been sort of dealing for months with you being gay and everything’. Despite this, Burt seems unfazed by the presence of Brittany in his son’s room, stating ‘you kids be careful, … you gotta respect her alright, if things get serious, use protection.’ In contrast, when in “Blame it on the Alcohol” (2.14) Burt walks into Kurt’s bedroom and finds Blaine, a young man he knows to be gay, asleep in Kurt’s bed, Burt is uncomfortable, requiring that Kurt ask permission for such sleepovers and arguing ‘I’m worried about you being inappropriate in my house.’ Kurt questions this response, asking, ‘if Puckerman had a sleepover with Finn, would that be inappropriate?’ While Burt argues that a young woman would not be able to sleepover in Finn’s room Kurt questions ‘but would it make you uncomfortable if he did?’ Burt replies, ‘hey, when have I been uncomfortable with you being gay?’ In response, Kurt states ‘so it’s not being gay that upsets you, it’s just me acting on it.’ Burt cites his ignorance of gay male sexuality and Kurt sarcastically promises to have no more unannounced sleepovers; however, Kurt also requests his father become educated in spite of his discomfort ‘so if I have any questions I could go to my dad like any straight son could’. Kurt himself is discomforted by sex and ignorant. In “Sexy” (2.15) Kurt explains to Blaine ‘I don’t know how to be sexy because I don’t know the first thing about sex’, reporting discomfort and embarrassment watching porn. Blaine offers to discuss it with him and Kurt replies ‘no, I don’t want to know graphic details, I like romance, that’s why I like Broadway musicals, because the touch of the fingertips is as sexy as it gets.’ When Blaine suggests that Kurt will ‘have to learn about it someday’, Kurt asks him to leave. It takes Blaine’s interference, suggesting that Burt should take advantage of the relationship he has with Kurt to talk to him about sex, for Burt to discuss the matter with Kurt. Pamphlets are provided by Burt to cover the ‘mechanics’, while Burt’s contribution is about the emotions of sex. He explains the

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 7.

\textsuperscript{86} See for example, Dhaenens, “Teenage Queerness”, 304-17; Walters, “Queer Kinship”, 928-29.
intimacy and vulnerability of sex and suggests sex is ‘doing something to you, to your heart, to your self esteem’ stating ‘when you’re ready, I want you to be able to do everything, but when you’re ready, I want you to use it as a way to connect to another person, don’t throw yourself around, like you don’t matter, ‘cause you matter’. Burt’s comments arguably reinforce an idea of sex as ‘special’ prioritising the idea of ‘connecting with someone’ and potentially devaluing casual sexual cultures, and yet the scene also confronts discomfort surrounding teen sex, highlighting the disconnect between the acceptance of “gay” and distancing of queer sexuality and sexual pleasure.

Klaine’s first kiss in “Original Song” (2.16) is represented as a moment of ‘the body in pleasure’ seen in Kurt’s hands. In this scene, Blaine places his hand on Kurt’s, telling him he had a ‘moment’ watching him sing The Beatles’ song “Blackbird”. Blaine stands to kiss him, and as they kiss one of Kurt’s hands spreads, fingers outstretched; then Kurt moves his hand to Blaine’s face, before dropping it to the table. Hands literally remain in the foreground of this scene. This is, of course, a performance. However, extra-textually, discussion of Klaine’s first kiss is potentially queered by straight actor Darren Criss, who complicates the perception that the kiss ‘was indeed “only an act”’ by his stated enjoyment of the kiss. Klaine’s first kiss is neither comic nor just ‘quaint romantic plotting’ but is depicted as a moment of desire, and although kisses between Kurt and Blaine are rare on Glee, when they do kiss it is connected to wanting more; wanting another kiss or each other at first, and in season three, wanting sex. To not convey Klaine’s first kiss in “The Break Up” perhaps prioritises the importance of handholding and ‘the touch of the fingertips’. However, this absence can also be viewed as expressing a concern to only

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88 In an interview on the television show Ellen, Criss commented, ‘for a while, ... maybe in an idealistic world I would say you know it doesn’t matter, because it shouldn’t, but by the same token I think its important to be explicit about the fact that I’m very ... comfortable with my sexuality, and that I am straight male playing a gay character’ : “Darren Criss sings for Ellen!”, YouTube video, 4:17, posted by “The Ellen Show”, February 2, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=649k4tPv8bI.
90 In an interview with MTV Criss states, ‘I really enjoyed it, because we’ve all been waiting for it,” ... “I was just so happy, it was like a release. ... It was very special.” Kara Warner, “‘Glee’ Stars Chris Colfer, Darren Criss Have High Hopes For Klaine”, MTV.com, March 17, 2011, http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1660151/glee-chris-colfer-darren-criss-kiss.jhtml. As a ‘straight’ man Criss’s emphasis on his own enjoyment sits in contrast with the perception of contagion I described earlier in the chapter. This complication is expanded in an interview with teen.com in which Criss is asked whether Chris Colfer (Kurt) or Lea Michele (Rachel) is the better kisser. Criss starts by explaining ‘I haven’t kissed either of them, I kissed, I kissed Rachel Berry and I kissed Kurt Hummel’. Criss continues noting that the kiss with Rachel was drunken and ‘ sloppy’ while ‘with Kurt it was you know a very beautiful moment, very tender. And so if I had to choose I’d say obviously Kurt and Chris.” Here the separation between character and actor is incomplete, indicated in naming Colfer alongside his character. “Darren Criss says Kurt Hummel is the Better Kisser - Teen.com”, YouTube video, 2:07, posted by “Alloy Digital”, April 26, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZjDkfDa2w.
connect the male same sex kiss with desire: a concern which could be undermined by
portraying their first kiss in “The Break Up”. Klaine’s kisses, while rare, are not naturalised
or de-eroticised, and other acts of touch in public demonstrate desire, such as a pan from
Kurt’s face to his hands as Kurt runs the fingers of one hand across the top of the other
following a flirtatious conversation with Blaine by the lockers (3.5). In contrast to Glee’s
explicit depictions of heterosexual intimacy, such subtle moments convey desire in public
without de-eroticising the kiss.

**Touching Lips: Brittana, Ambiguity, and Authenticity**

In contrast to the linear progression of Kurt and Blaine’s intimacy, the intimacy of best
friends and cheerleaders Brittany and Santana is represented as fluid. By season three the
girls are explicitly in a relationship; in “Pot of Gold” (3.4) while out at dinner Santana asks
if they are dating and Brittany replies ‘isn’t this a date? Aren’t you paying, ‘cause I ordered
shrimp? Wasn’t last week when we were taking a bath together, wasn’t that a date?’ While
pleased at this, the difficulty of being out in public is conveyed as Santana places a napkin
over their clasped hands. In earlier seasons, however, Santana explicitly refuses to label
herself or her intimacy with Brittany, instead insisting first on her need for physical
intimacy, and later, her love, not for girls, but for Brittany. Brittany and Santana are
portrayed as sexually intimate with each other as well as with boys throughout the first two
seasons, and considering season one, Michaela Meyer notes that the intimacy shown
between women may be ‘indicative of our cultural tolerance for experimental sexuality
among women but not among men.’

attracted to guys, I made out with a mannequin, I even had a sex dream about a shrub that was just in the shape of a person’. Although as Hispanic, Santana may ‘contribute to a discourse of female “others” acting in socially deviant ways’ this representation is diminished by her positioning alongside ‘bicurious’, white and privileged Brittany. Featured on a popular television show, their relationship may merely be perceived as produced for the pleasure of the public viewing audience. However, despite discussion of their sexuality, the representation of kisses between Brittana often seems excessively chaste and recognising the media’s eroticisation of girl same sex kissing leads to questions as to how desire between attractive young women may be portrayed without it being fetishised.

Discussing the portrayal of their relationship, the actress who plays Santana, Naya Rivera, states in one interview, ‘we have free reign to kiss each other if we see fit but a lot of the times … you don’t just want to make out to make out’. Santana and Brittany’s intimacy and sexuality is marked by ambiguity and friendship, and their interaction places what constitutes authentic sexuality in question.

As best friends, Santana and Brittany spend the first season holding hands and kissing chastely, behaviour which prior to the twentieth-century would have been expected between romantic friends. Lillian Faderman considers the history of romantic friendships between women, noting they were ‘widely recognised’ and ‘expected’, with such a friendship often central to a woman’s life in spite of marriage and family, communicating a desire ‘to share their lives, to confide in and trust and depend upon each other, to be there always for each other.’ Despite the portrayal of Santana refusing to define her relationship with Brittany (2.15), their friendship speaks for itself: Santana and Brittany are best friends as well as lovers. Faderman critiques the more recent historical emphasis on ‘categorizing love’, and throughout Glee the pressures placed particularly on Santana to formalise and label their queer relationship are shown. Brittany and Santana are able to display their relationship so long as they are explicitly heterosexual, an experience which would be complicated by any ‘identification’ as lesbian, and I will explore the way in which this balance is maintained throughout season one. Santana quite clearly wants to love and

98 Ibid, 411.
99 Ibid, 142.
100 Ibid, 311.
be in a relationship with Brittany but does not want to suffer for it, leading to two seasons of secrecy and the performance of heterosexuality.

Santana’s represented association with Madonna, who throughout her career has challenged conventional ideas of sexuality, demonstrates the way in which a safety net of heterosexuality assists to protect Santana throughout season one. While Madonna has been portrayed as sexually fluid throughout her career, links may be drawn between the season one portrayal of Santana and Madonna’s heteroflexible performance at the MTV Awards in 2003 where her ‘sexual fearlessness and fluidity’ in kissing Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera was arguably permitted given that Madonna was ‘safely ensconced in heterosexuality’ as a heterosexual wife and mother. Starting in “Sectionals” (1.13), two episodes of Glee highlight Santana’s sexual intimacy with Brittany, potentially undermining her performance of heterosexuality. In “Sectionals”, Brittany reveals to the other glee club members ‘if sex were dating, Santana and I would be dating’, a comment that leads to glances between the other glee club members, but is not discussed. In the next episode, “Hell-O” (1.14), Brittany and Santana are enlisted by cheerleading coach Sue Sylvester (Jane Lynch) to break up Finn and Rachel. Together, Brittany and Santana take Finn on a date, suggesting they will perform heteroflexibility for Finn’s voyeuristic male gaze. However, Finn is upset by the girls’ conversation with each other, ignoring him, and in contrast to the expectation that men find pleasure watching women kiss, Finn fails to find pleasure in Santana’s suggestion that his role is to be quiet and watch them make out. In this way, Finn undermines the suggestion that Brittany and Santana’s desire for each other is performed for him. As Apple notes, discussing her participants’ explanations of sexual experiences between women, ‘the participants generally described public acts of heteroflexibility as being more overtly performative and less about “authentic” sexual attraction and yet these discussions allowed for the possibility that “authentic” attraction may still be present during public acts, even while often overshadowed by the performance’. Certainly, in this moment in season one, Santana and Brittany find pleasure in each other, rather than in Finn.

It is in the context of these two episodes which reveal Brittany and Santana’s sexual intimacy that Santana attempts to reinstate her heterosexuality by having sex with Finn in

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101 Santana is again associated with Madonna in “Britney-Brittany” (2.2), performing “Me Against the Music” with Brittany in a dream. The song is full of innuendo, the girls dancing either side of a wall, symbolising their desire and the restraints upon it.

102 Peraino, Listening to the Sirens, 146-47. See also Apple, “Heteroflexibility”, 213-15.

103 Apple, “Heteroflexibility”, 220.
“The Power of Madonna” (1.15). As a cheerleading assignment set by Sue, Santana must date ‘a younger, inferior man’ and Brittany suggests Finn, arguing ‘the way to get a man to follow you forever, take his virginity.’ Santana smiles and propositions Finn, noting ‘it’s high time you lost the big V, everything about you screams virgin. You’re about as sexy as a cabbage patch kid. It’s exhausting to look at you.’ For Santana, this sex is explicitly about her own success rather than desiring Finn, noting ‘it will be great for my image and Sue will promote me to head cheerleader, it’s win-win.’ Santana is portrayed as sexually forward, using her sexuality to get ahead. In the performative sex scene Finn is positioned alongside two virginal women in a performance of Madonna’s “Like a Virgin”, as cuts are made between three couples, dancing and singing suggestively. Afterwards, Santana exhibits a clinical and non-sentimental view of sex, stating ‘it takes about twenty or so times before the feeling of accomplishment really kicks in’, while Finn notes, ‘I don’t feel anything, ‘cause it didn’t mean anything’. For Santana, sex with Finn reasserts her heterosexuality and allows her to once again hold hands with Brittany in public in the next episode “Home” (1.16). In this way, public intimacy between the best friends requires their heterosexuality to remain firmly intact.

While Santana’s ambiguous sexuality may be recognised in glee club, her public outing and its implications for her interactions with her school peers and family is explored in season three’s “I Kissed a Girl” (3.7), with the episode exhibiting a need to be able to categorise Santana and her relationship with Brittany. After Finn publicly outs Santana in the school hallway, the information is publicly used in a television advertisement against Sue, who is running for a congressional seat, suggesting Sue is unsuitable for the role of congresswoman given her selection of a lesbian as her head cheerleader (3.6). While Finn does not apologise for outing Santana and barely acknowledges the implications of his act, he stages an intervention in “I Kissed a Girl”, with the glee club to sing songs by ‘ladies’ to support her. Santana confronts Finn at the lockers and while Finn refutes he is ‘outing’ her, blaming the ads, he is adamant that he wants to help. This scene is problematic; Finn institutes his own perception of how Santana should behave and the idea that anyone needs to ‘out’ their sexuality ‘reconfirms the heterosexual as the superior sexual subject’.104 Finn bases his intervention on the need to protect Santana by showing her she is loved. He states, ‘I don’t want you to die. … You deal with your anxiety surrounding this stuff by attacking other people and some day that’s not going to be enough and you might start attacking yourself.’ While Santana refutes this assumption that she is a victim or would

harm herself, Finn’s reasoning for protecting Santana here is selfish, maintaining his own happiness. He suggests there is a connection between them, courtesy of their sex in “The Power of Madonna” (1.15), stating ‘you mean something to me. If something were to ever happen to you and I didn’t do everything I could to stop it, I’d never be able to live with myself.’ Finn suggests he would do violence against himself, basing his expectations of Santana on his own reaction. Following this conversation, Finn sings Santana Cyndi Lauper’s “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun”105 in glee club. While Cyndi Lauper’s version is upbeat 1980s pop, the slow tempo of Finn’s performance is sombre and constrained. This performance seems to indicate respect for Santana as, stripped back and emotional, the lyrics describe a girl behaving as she desires regardless of parents who will try to confine and question her behaviour. Close-ups of Santana are interspersed with mid-shots of Finn who sings directly to her. The static shots of Santana in a series of successive close-ups encourage viewers to empathise with Santana as she listens and starts to cry. Plantinga writes ‘music in mainstream films is always presented in tandem with images, other sounds, and a story, all of which supply the cognitions supposedly necessary for music to elicit emotion’,106 with music assisting films to ‘marry thinking and feeling’.107 Viewers are encouraged to respond emotionally to this performance. But this scene is not only emotional; it inflects the rest of the episode with this feeling. As Plantinga suggests ‘[e]motions also have a residual effect’108 and this melancholy performance simultaneously invokes hope and sadness, emotions carried by the viewer as the episode progresses. Finn’s performance of “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun”, and his recollection of his virginity loss with Santana connects to a performance by the glee club boys at the end of season one’s “The Power of Madonna” (1.15). While the glee club boys initially evince a reluctance to perform music by women, in “The Power of Madonna” the boys are shown to rehearse “What it Feels Like for a Girl”. As they finish, Puck refuses to perform it for the girls, leading to a discussion of the need to respect and not objectify them, and a focus on empathy, with a need to show the girls ‘we get how it feels’. The focus on performing songs by women in “I Kissed a Girl” reflects this earlier episode, and Finn’s performance of “Girls Just Wanna have Fun” as well as Puck’s later performance of Melissa Etheridge’s “I’m the Only One”, are intended to represent a respect for Santana’s sexuality, indicating

105 While Cyndi Lauper version of this song is the most well known, her song is a slightly altered cover of a song by Robert Hazard. Finn’s performance is a cover of a version by Greg Laswell.
106 Plantinga, Moving Viewers, 133.
the young men’s evolving empathy and more complex experience of gender and sexuality as the series progresses.

The title of this season three episode refers to Katy Perry’s song “I Kissed a Girl”, and the episode complicates the meanings produced by this song, which has been perceived as perpetuating the performance of same sex attraction for the enjoyment of heterosexual men, objectifying women.109 Katy Perry’s version of “I Kissed a Girl” has a ‘lesbian chic’ aesthetic in which women are portrayed as ‘attractive, conventionally feminine’,110 ‘sexually desiring’ and ‘self-pleasing’ in contrast to stereotypical ‘undesirable’ representations of lesbians111 and such representations have been critiqued for potentially excluding those who are not ‘white, pretty, slim, middle-class girls’112 with the ability to ‘erase… lesbianism both as an identity and as desire for another woman.’113 While Katy Perry sings of enjoying her kiss, there is little desire represented between the women in Katy Perry’s video; disembodied shots of women (wearing high heels and lingerie) run their hands over legs and torsos, wave lace fans flirtatiously and have a pillow fight, all framed as a dream Katy Perry has while sleeping next to her ‘boyfriend’.114 Rosalind Gill notes that such an aesthetic is associated with marketing ‘edginess’115 while Adrienne Evans and Sarah Riley analyse Katy Perry’s song, and suggest that ‘[i]n place of collective identities and the politics of same-sex sexuality, the kissing of another woman is presented as testament to the sexually experimental but ultimately heterosexual nature of Perry’.116

In *Glee*, the performance of “I Kissed a Girl”, and the scene which precedes it, highlights the debates surrounding women’s same sex pleasures and the identities that attach to ‘lesbian’, mixing sadness, hope, and sisterhood. Santana walks through the school corridor in slow motion. The camera focuses on the many young men who look at her as she walks past. She notices, worried, and keeps walking. As she stands at her locker, the camera quickly panning up her body, a man’s voice speaks: ‘saw the commercial’. The shot cuts to

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113 Ibid, 201.


a young man (David Wilson Page) who blows air through his lips and shakes the lapels of his jacket, ‘smoking’. A close-up of Santana’s upper body is shown, highlighting her breasts, before panning to her face as she asks ‘who the hell are you?’ The shots are uncomfortably close with those taken from the young man’s perspective clearly objectifying the unusually uncertain Santana. The young man confidently replies with a swagger, ‘Josh Coleman, Sophomore Rugby Captain. Girls like you are a challenge, you just need the right guy to straighten you out and I’m just the man to do it.’ Santana looks concerned but before she can speak the glee club girls arrive and stand behind her. Mercedes (Amber Riley) tells him to ‘move your busted, creeper ass’ and Tina (Jenna Ushkowitz) joins in stating ‘now’. Josh comments, ‘easy girls, I’m just trying to make her normal’. Standing behind Santana, Brittany tells him ‘she is normal.’ Santana briefly smiles and the camera quickly cuts to Quinn, who states ‘it’s not a choice idiot, but even if it were, you’d be our last choice.’ His reply taunts: ‘oh I get it, you’re all a bunch of lesbos’ but Rachel cuts in: ‘so what if we are, you don’t stand a chance either way.’ Music starts and the girls wave ‘bub-bye’ to him. The camera quickly pans in to a mid-shot of Rachel and Santana who sing “I Kissed a Girl” as a duet with the other girls as back-up singers. The performance is accompanied by the girls touching each other, both for sexy display and in joy and camaraderie. The performance is flirtatious and fun and they laugh and smile as they perform, ending with hugs between the young women.

The presence of this song in Santana’s “coming out” episode has political potential as it demonstrates the way in which ‘the social cachet of gay and lesbian chic sits alongside continued homophobic harassment in the workplace and violence on the street’.117 While Santana, as a slim and attractive young woman, potentially perpetuates lesbian chic, this performance complicates presumptions of heteroflexible behaviour. Analysing the television show The L Word, Margaret McFadden notes that ‘the fact that the main characters are conventionally beautiful, thin, gender-normative, and predominately white and upper middle class, might be read as perpetuating a very limited hegemonic ideal of beauty and womanhood’.118 And yet, McFadden also notes a more complex interpretation of The L Word, while recognising ‘the ways the program seems to conform to numerous representational conventions’ potentially ‘objectifying’,119 such a reading does not account for ‘all the ways that the program is simultaneously either reflecting on and critiquing those

117 Jackson and Scott, “Sexual Antinomies”, 238.
119 Ibid, 423.
very conventions, or attempting to redefine them.\textsuperscript{120} Similarly, \textit{Glee} both perpetuates and contests such a representation of sexuality. In the “I Kissed a Girl” scene, Josh seems attracted to the idea of Santana’s same sex desire, which he will ‘fix’. Further, ‘normal’ is used both as a justification for taunting and defending Santana. While Quinn’s statement that ‘it’s not a choice’ suggests a biological discourse, she allows for the possibility that this might not be the case, stating ‘even if it weren’t’. In using inclusive language such as ‘our’ Quinn positions herself with Santana, rather than as ‘straight’. This disturbs the dichotomy of either equal or different by producing a frame of both and. The glee club girls refuse ‘to specify who is and is not a “member”’\textsuperscript{121} complicating Josh’s attempts to control the situation. Indeed, Rachel’s comment takes this a step further, accepting Josh’s statement with the question ‘so what if we are?’ In this way, the performance of ‘I Kissed a Girl’ both disrupts and affirms a lesbian identity. Considering the ways in which sexual jibes work in schools, Anoop Nayak and Mary Jane Kehily outline a speaking back from a group of girls who were called ‘lesbian’ by their peers.\textsuperscript{122} Nayak and Kehily note that while the boys intend the term to suggest that the girls ‘are “frigid”, boring and disinterested in boys’, ‘[b]y affirming this sign (“we’re proud of it!”) and locating it through the more familiar signifying chain of same-sex relationships, the girls are able to overturn the sign’ and instead imply ‘a multiplicity of subject positions that simultaneously bespeak a heterosexual femininity, lesbianism, bisexual identifications and sexual practices with multiple partners.’\textsuperscript{123} Similarly, the girls in \textit{Glee} redefine Josh’s insult, contesting heteronormative expectations.

The glee girls present queer ambiguity, an ambiguity promoted by Santana in her early refusal to be ‘identified’ as a lesbian. As Mary Louise Rasmussen notes, ‘categories are meaningful only as a sign; intrinsically, they bear no reference to a gender, a sex, a sexuality, or a body.’\textsuperscript{124} Suggestions such as those made by Walters, who describes popular culture representations as ‘that fluid wishy-washy girlie sexuality’,\textsuperscript{125} and Gill, who argues ‘hetero flexibility’ ‘presents girl-on-girl action as exciting, fun, but, crucially, as entirely unthreatening to heterosexuality’,\textsuperscript{126} imply that an innate sexuality is more valuable.\textsuperscript{127}

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\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 422.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Lisa Duggan, “Queering the State”, \textit{Social Text} 39 (1994): 9.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Nayak and Kehily, “Gender Undone”, 462.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Rasmussen, \textit{Becoming Subjects}, 115.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Walters, “Queer Kinship”, 927.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Gill, “Sexualization of Culture”, 153.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Diamond has argued that women’s sexual practices may be viewed as more fluid than they are given credit for. See further, Lisa M. Diamond, \textit{Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women’s Love and Desire} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
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Indeed, essentialism can be seen in Tricia Jenkins’ argument that ‘lesbian chic’ representations constitute ‘a diluted version of female homosexuality’ and that this ‘does little to depict authentic or nonheterosexualized lesbianism’. Ambiguity is presumed to enable representation of queer characters on television, however, ‘[a]mbiguity … is bound to inauthenticity’ with the suggestion that the women performing in this manner are really heterosexual. In questioning the idea of authentic forms of behaviour, I am not trying to prioritise queer or LGBTI experiences, but rather acknowledge the problematic focus on identity; as Love writes, ‘I do not think it is clear … what would constitute a “mistaken” way of being or feeling queer.’ While for many viewers there may be a desire for Santana to be identifiable as a lesbian, Nayak and Kehily suggest ‘identification is a partial, split and ambivalent process that, in the moment it announces itself as “identity” … conceals its incurable multiplicity and precarious contingency.’ And yet, despite the potential openness implied in this scene, Santana is ostensibly confined by the label lesbian at the end of the “I Kissed a Girl” episode.

While in season three Santana’s sexuality is clearly categorised, throughout season two, Santana is represented in terms of “authentic” feelings rather than a prescribed sexuality, potentially recognising the ‘pliability’ of identity. Indeed, the touch represented between Brittany and Santana in season two potentially conveys a resistance to identity politics. Santana rarely describes herself as a ‘lesbian’ and explicitly positions herself as separate from musical stereotypes of lesbianism which she clearly doesn’t identify with, such as Melissa Etheridge and the Indigo Girls. Early in season two, Santana refuses Brittany’s request to perform a duet of Melissa Etheridge’s “Come to My Window” (2.4) as Santana kisses Brittany’s neck, lying in Brittany’s bedroom. While Christina Belcher suggests that Santana’s refusal to perform Etheridge’s music demonstrates that ‘lesbian musicality’ is ‘a drag in the bedroom, pulling the girls away from queer sexual pleasure and toward banal conversations about “love” and “babies”’, Belcher also notes that to not define Santana’s

128 Jenkins, “Potential Lesbians”, 494.
129 Cochran, “Complicating the Open Closet”, 53.
130 For further discussion of such media representations, see Lisa M. Diamond, “I’m Straight, but I Kissed a Girl: The Trouble with American Media Representations of Female-Female Sexuality”, Feminism and Psychology 15, no. 1 (2005): 104-110
Duggan, “Queering the State”, 5.
132 Love, Feeling Backward, 23.
133 Nayak and Kehily, “Gender Undone”, 466.
134 Rasmussen, Becoming Subjects, 117.
sexuality may allow viewers ‘to feel freer in their sexual explorations without the requirement of often regulatory labels.’ 136 In an episode which demonstrates the disciplining of gay male youth, with the performance of a same sex duet tantamount to coming out, Santana’s choice is unsurprising: while Santana happily performs Ike and Tina Turner’s “River Deep, Mountain High” with African American student Mercedes, “Come to My Window” is associated with Etheridge’s coming out. Indeed, “Come to My Window” has an upsetting emotional intensity. In the music video, Juliette Lewis plays a psychiatric patient in hospital screaming the lyrics ‘you don’t know how far I’d go’ and pacing the room with her bandaged wrist suggesting self harm, 137 an act, I have noted, that Santana explicitly refuses. Later in season two, as Santana does Brittany’s hair following an implied make out session in “Sexy” (2.15), Brittany wants to discuss feelings and Santana asks ‘why’ as she applies lip-gloss, arguing that sex is better without feelings or eye contact. In this scene, Brittany compares her relationship with Santana to her relationship with another glee club member, Artie (Kevin McHale), and Santana prompts Brittany to note that this is not cheating as ‘the plumbing’s different’. While repeating markers of femininity by applying lip-gloss and doing Brittany’s hair, Santana disrupts the requirements of hegemonic femininity and a ‘normalised’ lesbianism, as she denies the importance of feelings and monogamy. 138 This emphasis on non-monogamy itself foreshadows the performance of “I Kissed a Girl”, the lyrics of which suggest sex between women is acceptable so long as the women are ‘really’ heterosexual, performing for the enjoyment of men. And yet, hidden in bedrooms, the privacy implied in their location suggests an intimacy not necessarily present in public performances of same sex attraction, with intimate touch for each other, rather than others.

Indeed, given the emphasis on lesbian chic in the media, this private intimacy may be perceived as more “authentic”, something shared rather than performed, while recognising Santana’s fears of the implications of coming out. In “Sexy” (2.15), Brittany, Santana, and substitute teacher Holly Holiday (Gwyneth Paltrow) sing Fleetwood Mac’s “Landslide” in glee club, a song which invokes images of being unexpectedly and forcefully surrounded and tumbled by emotion. Following the performance, Santana explains privately to Brittany that she loves her: ‘I’m a bitch because I’m angry, I’m angry because I have all of these feelings, feelings for you that I’m afraid of dealing with, because I’m afraid of dealing with

136 Ibid, 416.
the consequences’. As I have noted, while recognising social change, being “out” is shown to be difficult in *Glee*, and Santana is shown to experience anger at her own reluctance, recognising the conflict between her feelings for Brittany and her reluctance to come out. Noting the continued presence of feelings of ‘shame, isolation, and self-hatred’ among those experiencing same sex desire, Love suggests “[t]he embarrassment of owning such feelings, out of place as they are in a movement that takes pride as its watchword, is acute”139 and Santana appears to experience this as frustration. The song “Landslide”, Belcher suggests, allows for the ‘possibility’ of sexuality in this space of the Midwestern town, rather than waiting to graduate and move to the city140 and unlike “Come to My Window” is somewhat ambiguous, demonstrating friendship rather than romantic love. And yet Rachel’s comment on the ‘sapphic charm’ of their performance leaves Santana defensively stating ‘just because I sang a song with Brittany, doesn’t mean that you can put a label on me’. Santana assumes this comment is about her and Brittany, rather than the three women’s performance. At the same time Santana’s dismissal of Sappho is interesting for the way in which it dismisses the multiple meanings that may surround the term: Judith Peraino writes ‘Sappho, as a lesbian, was projected as imbued with phallic power, and therefore as active, even predatory’,141 a description that could be applied to Santana in her approaches to Finn, for example. While Santana may suggest her anger emerges from the social need for secrecy, this links to a sense of injustice. As I will explore, Santana’s bitchiness and anger will not subside merely because she is “out”. Indeed, this moment challenges the need for “public” behaviour, presenting an “authenticity” in Santana’s expression of private feelings.

Santana, however, particularly suffers pressure from Brittany to be out and honest. In “Born this Way” (2.18), Santana describes her bitchiness as innate, literally wearing her bitchiness on her shirt. Brittany, however, brings her an alternative shirt that says ‘LEBANESE’. Confused, Santana comments, ‘I’m Hispanic. Wait, was that supposed to be lesbian?’ Brittany, assuming that is what the shirt states, comments on how much Santana’s honesty, acknowledging her love in “Sexy” (2.15) meant. While Brittany comments on Santana’s ‘awesomeness’ and labels herself as ‘bicurious’, Brittany suggests that Santana does not love herself, as if she did Santana would ‘put that shirt on and dance with me’. Considering this episode and the debate surrounding Lady Gaga’s “Born this Way”, Dhaenens suggests the experience ‘implies that desires need to be reified in a fixed

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141 Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens*, 120.
However, this episode also highlights the hypocrisy of this position. Brittany refuses to allow Santana to sing and dance with her unless she will perform her sexuality, and come out, while Brittany highlights her stupidity rather than her own sexual curiosity, wearing a shirt that states ‘I’M WITH STUPID’ with an arrow pointing to her head. As ‘bicurious’, Brittany’s sexuality may thus be perceived as sufficiently normative to be accepted, hierarchised over Santana’s identifiable sexuality which she must label and be ‘honest’ about, despite recognition of the potential implications of being “out”.

In this way, Santana’s “outing” in season three has significant cultural implications for recognising the privilege entailed in discourses of coming out. While white, attractive, middle-class Brittany experiences her fluid sexuality without consequence, Santana’s coming out leaves her estranged from her beloved abuela (grandmother). Santana frames her coming out to her abuela by noting her anger and stating ‘I just need to be me’, an identity based statement which sits in contrast to the more ambiguous interpretation that may be offered of Santana’s behaviour at other points in the narrative. As Rasmussen notes, ‘[t]ropes of choice have a tendency to cause discomfort, whereas tropes of essentialism are sometimes perceived as more politically stable.’ However, while drawing on such an argument in this scene, Santana’s ‘honesty’, is rejected by her abuela who states ‘it is selfish of you to make me uncomfortable … the sin isn’t in the thing, it’s in the scandal when people talk about it out loud.’ For her abuela, Santana’s openness about her sexuality is culturally unacceptable. Santana and her abuela each talk about their feelings, feelings which remain in conflict as her abuela states she never wants to see Santana again. This interaction recognises a difference in ‘specific cultural values (social avoidance and discretion when faced with sexual deviance versus being “out” at all costs as a matter of cultural pride)’ and acknowledges that ‘LGBTQ movements … reflect the specific socio-economic interests of white, middle-class gay men and lesbians’. Jodi O’Brien notes that in focussing on sexuality rather than recognising such aspects of privilege ‘we reify and perpetuate a monolithic form of “being queer”’ and in this way, Santana’s experience with her abuela identifies ‘the overall complexities of homophobia and its widely varying manifestations’ by depicting individual circumstance in which different standards may be

142 Dhaenens, “Teenage Queerness”, 309.
144 Rasmussen, Becoming Subjects, 109.
146 Ibid (italics in the original).
As in my discussion of *Looking for Alibrandi* in chapter two, Santana is placed at a complex intersection between cultural expectations, and yet while Josie manages to bridge this divide, in coming out, Santana’s abuela turns away from her, and Santana loses her valuable support.

Acknowledging this difficulty, “I Kissed a Girl” ends with a hopeful, yet melancholy performance of “Constant Craving”, the single which coincided with k.d. lang’s coming out in 1992. Santana initially refuses the idea of lesbian community, historical or otherwise, and Love notes that while such a refusal to ‘touch’ others may ‘serve… as protection against the blows of normal life, the family, and homophobic violence, it also works against other forms of community and affiliation, including, of course, queer community’.149 Despite Santana’s early reluctance to acknowledge herself within a historical lineage of queer female performers, her performance of k.d. lang allows acknowledgement that such a lineage in the popular music scene is relatively recent. While Santana ends her performance of “I Kissed a Girl” smiling, such happiness and acceptance is tempered by her experience with her abuela. As Ahmed notes ‘[i]t is because the world is unhappy with queer love that queers become unhappy, because queer love is an unhappiness-cause for the others whom they love’.150 In spite of this, “Constant Craving” indicates that Santana will find this ‘bearable’. Ahmed writes,

> A bearable life is a life that can hold up, which can keep its shape or direction, in the face of what it is asked to endure. To bear can also then be a capacity; a bearable life is a life that we can bear. A bearable life suggests that the conditions of livability involve a relationship to suffering, to ‘what’ a life must endure. … The unbearable life ‘breaks’ or ‘shatters’ under the ‘too much’ of what is being borne.151

The lyrics of “Constant Craving” focus on surviving in spite of challenging circumstances, emphasising personal strength: ‘always someone marches brave, here beneath my skin’. Santana’s life is bearable: not desperate or unlivable. Rather than viewing ‘gay adolescence’ as ‘a troublesome phase one has to go through’,152 Santana is represented as present in this moment. Indeed, while Santana may crave something more, her happiness, anger and sadness exist simultaneously. Ahmed argues that rather than just seeing heteronormative relationships as a ‘sign of assimilation’ they might represent ‘the struggle to have a bearable

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148 Ibid, 510.
151 Ibid, 97.
For this period of high school, Santana participates in a normative relationship with Brittany, an experience which itself challenges her peers and in close-ups of her face as she sings, viewers are reminded of the empathy they share as her ‘struggle continues’.

Following “I Kissed a Girl”, Santana and Brittany’s intimate touch becomes public and yet in contrast to their heteroflexible touch in season one, as explicitly ‘lesbian’, it is disciplined. In this way, the contradiction in narratives of “outing” is shown; just as private touch suggests a lack of honesty, public touch too is problematic, challenging acceptable boundaries. In “Heart” (3.13), the episode from which Brittana’s moment in “The Break Up” emerges, Brittany presents Santana with a playlist of songs as a gift for Valentine’s Day. Santana thanks her and they lean in to kiss in slow motion, the camera focussing on one of them, and then the other. Before their lips touch, the shot cuts away to the school principal, who states ‘teen lesbians, I must see you in my office’. Santana demands to know why they can’t kiss in public, asking whether it is because they’re girls, to which Principal Figgins (Iqbal Theba) replies ‘please don’t make this about your sexual orientation, this is about public displays of affection. PDA simply has no place in the sacred halls of McKinley High. We’ve had complaints’. The complaint is from 12.16pm the day before, and the episode cuts to a flashback of Brittany and Santana kissing quickly and chastely on the lips. Santana is incredulous. ‘That? Our lips barely even grazed, and by the way, did you get any complaints about that hideous display that started at 12.17pm and lasted for several uncomfortable minutes?’ A close-up of Finn closing his eyes and moving towards the camera is shown, followed by a shot of Rachel doing likewise, her tongue moving forward. Santana looks at them with disgust as they kiss. Figgins informs her ‘believe me, I’d much rather see you and Brittany kiss than that so called Finchel but if a student files a complaint because of religious reasons…’ Santana cuts in, complaining, ‘oh, great, so it was some bible humper that complained? … All I want to be able to do is kiss my girlfriend but I guess no one can see that because there’s such an insane double standard at this school.’ This scene explicitly contrasts the way in which some behaviour is disciplined while heteronormative kisses are barely noticed. Contrary to Figgins’s assertions, this is clearly about their sexuality and visibility as queer young women in a heteronormative school.

“Heart” draws attention to the contrasting experiences of Finchel and Brittana. Following this scene, Rachel and Finn announce their engagement in glee club to a great deal of criticism, particularly the concern that their relationship is doomed given their age. Outside

153 Ahmed, Promise of Happiness, 114.
the classroom, however, Santana tells Rachel ‘I fully support your right to be unhappy with Finn for the rest of your lives. You should be able to love whoever you want.’ Santana’s critique of marriage in relation to happiness scripts is interrupted by the performance of a vocal valentine ordered for Rachel by Finn and performed in the schoolyard by the religious God Squad, composed of the three Christian glee club members and new Christian kid Joe (Samuel Larsen). Given that the God Squad are offering to sing vocal valentines for $10, after this performance Santana challenges them to sing for her ‘girlfriend’ Brittany, a demand which unsettles Joe. Santana’s abrupt request disrupts the happiness in the celebration of Rachel’s heterosexuality, just as the principal earlier in the episode interrupted her own happiness with Brittany. Echoing the previous season’s Valentine’s Day episode “Silly Love Songs” (2.12), Santana’s acerbity may be linked to honesty: ‘I just try to be really, really honest with people when I think that they suck, you know?’ Santana is a troublemaker, in accordance with Ahmed’s understanding, where trouble is ‘an affective politics; acts of deviation mean getting in trouble but also troubling conventional ideas of what it means to have a good life’.154 While Santana is herself in a stable relationship, she critiques marriage using the language of unhappiness, as one form of bearable life. It is following this scene that the moment used in “The Break Up” occurs, as Michael Bublé’s “Home” is sung in the classroom. Given the nebulous nature of Santana and Brittany’s relationship, a flashback to their first kiss would not be possible, but for those who recognise the origins of this moment in “The Break Up”, this moment invokes Santana’s demand for recognition of her relationship with Brittany, the desire to be publicly intimate, the double standard that restricts their relationship, as well as the comfort and love she finds with Brittany. But the performance, both in song title and imagery, also refers back to “Home” (1.16) in which Santana linked fingers with Brittany and rested her head on Brittany’s shoulder as Kurt sang Dionne Warwick’s “A House is Not a Home”. At that point in the series, Santana’s sexuality was neither in doubt nor labelled and the scene invokes nostalgia, highlighting the restrictions labels place on relationships. Despite the disciplining their relationship undergoes, for this moment Santana seems happy: Santana ‘encounters the world that is unhappy with queer love, but refuses to be made unhappy by that encounter’.155 As Ahmed notes, ‘reading about characters who are happily queer in the face of a world that is unhappy with queer lives and loves can be energizing, can give us hope.’156 While this moment is located within an episode in which Santana demands her pleasure be visible and presence felt, it is significant that the moment used in “The Break

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154 Ibid, 115-16.
155 Ibid, 117.
“Up” is not their passionate public kiss at the end of the episode as the God Squad performs for them, but this momentary glance and smile they share which is unrelent on the knowledge of their acceptance.

The ending of “Heart” is itself hopeful. After ‘thinking and praying about it’, Joe from the God Squad states that of course he will sing a song for Brittany as ‘love is love’. Focus on the love between people rather than sexuality is acknowledged as a method for acceptance. In “Sexy”, Santana and Brittany struggle with the demand to define their relationship and Miss Holiday tells them ‘it’s not about who you are attracted to, ultimately it’s about who you fall in love with’. While a focus on love can lead some to ignore the sexual dimensions of relationships, as Sue Jackson and Tamsyn Gilbertson suggest, a romantic discourse can be a useful way to frame relationships as it ‘circumvents notions of sexuality as essentialist in the sense of being “born” lesbian or gay, since love and not biology determine attraction. It also derails the notion of a freely chosen sexual identity in that love, spontaneous and uncontrollable, decides the matter’. Love is also a focus of Christian congregations which are accepting of lesbian and gay Christians. O’Brien writes ‘Queer Christians find doctrinal support for their homosexuality in the principle, “God is love.” A loving God loves and accepts all Her/His creations; a Church founded on these principles must make room for all that God has created and loves’. “Heart” contemplates an intersection of religion with sexuality, refusing to perceive them as mutually incompatible.

The episode suggests people respond to religious discourses in different ways and argues that Christians should make decisions based on their own convictions, with a responsibility, according to Quinn, to ‘look at the hard topics and dilemmas and be honest and truthful.’ The God Squad sing Brittana a mashup of songs titled “Cherish” by The Association and Madonna, and Santana and Brittany dance and kiss as they sing. The older “Cherish” by The Association is about unrequited love, while Madonna’s “Cherish” reminds viewers of Santana’s performative fluidity and acknowledges this current period of relationship stability, intimating the relationship is forever, and in these contradictions this mashup represents conflicting feelings. The mashup reflects both the unrequited moments of Brittana’s relationship in contrast to their current stability, and emphasises the importance of cherishing moments and experiences with hope for a continuation of such pleasure.

157 Jackson and Gilbertson, “Hot Lesbians”, 220.
159 The full version of Madonna’s “Cherish” includes the line ‘I was never satisfied with casual encounters’.
Touching Intimacy: Prioritising Friendship

While these coupled relationships are significant within *Glee*, and at times appear to be the very picture of normativity, they exist beside a series of intimacies between characters which demonstrate the messy and undefinable nature of many of our relationships, prioritising friendship. *Glee* performs wider debates of sexuality and identity, representing a range of relationships and scenarios. Cheating is discussed by all three couples in “The Break Up”. While Rachel may be perceived by Finn as cheating by kissing Brody, ‘cheat’ literally means deception,160 and here Finn’s reaction appears hypocritical. Finn himself has cheated in relationships: in his first kiss with Rachel he cheated on Quinn. In contrast, Rachel’s kiss with Brody follows four months of silence from Finn, a silence which is itself deceptive given his anger on his return. Indeed, these “straight” characters appear to repeat a heteronormative narrative form in which Halberstam suggests ‘the obstacles to true love must be created, crafted, nurtured, and then quickly discarded’.161 Focussed on deception, cheating both confines and defines heteronormativity, restricting the intimate experiences that can be shared with others. In “The Break Up”, Rachel’s kiss with Brody and Blaine’s hook up are perceived by their partners to constitute unjustifiable behaviours in the context of their relationships. That is, these behaviours have their own symbolic meaning beyond any meaning Blaine or Rachel may provide, as indicated in the performance of No Doubt’s “Don’t Speak” following their confessions: words are unnecessary as such acts speak for themselves. In a time in which technologies such as mobile phones, the internet, and text messaging enable youth to be in ‘constant touch’ with peers and lovers, Emma Bond notes that for some youth ‘[n]ot receiving texts or calls was associated with uncertainty and feelings of isolation and loneliness’.162 Rachel’s cheating, therefore, contains some ambiguity: for Finn to call off their engagement and then not call for months implicitly indicates his lack of commitment to his relationship with Rachel. In contrast, Kurt and Blaine’s intentions and boundaries for their relationship are clear. In “Dance with Somebody” (3.17) flirting via text message was represented as an intimate act central to a monogamous relationship, with flirtation with someone outside the primary relationship defined as cheating. Broadening the scope of infidelity in this way constrains the many different forms of engagement we share with others. For Blaine, whose communication


with Kurt is disrupted by Kurt’s new job, Kurt’s work becomes an intimate, distracting and potentially additional partner in their relationship. As Laura Kipnis writes, ‘[a]dultery is … at heart a drama about change. It’s a way of trying to invent a world, and a way of knowing something about what we want. By definition, then, a political form'.¹⁶³ Without a range of intimacies, friends, and community on which to depend, Blaine is lonely when Kurt moves to New York. While Blaine may claim his cheating indicated to him that he was meant to be with Kurt, it also indicates that change needs to occur, that there is a need for a range of intimacies, for what Melissa Gregg calls ‘a wider ecology of care that allows long-term intimacies of all kinds to flourish’.¹⁶⁴

Friendship, then, offers the possibility to acknowledge such a wide range of intimacy. In the interview “Friendship As a Way of Life” Michel Foucault notes the discomfort that may be perceived ‘in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie and companionship, things which our rather sanitized society can’t allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force.’¹⁶⁵ Friendship offers one such possibility, existing beyond ‘identity politics’ with potential found particularly in its ‘unstructured nature … as a mode of intimacy’¹⁶⁶ While ‘queer thought has generally presented friendship as trouble free’, Love asks us ‘to think about queer ways of life and forms of intimacy that include trouble and make it central.’¹⁶⁷ As I will note, friendship may represent ‘queer community’ and ‘mutual care and respect’,¹⁶⁸ however, that does not exclude the possibility that queer friendship may also be ‘marked by impossibility, disconnection, and loss’.¹⁶⁹ Friendship holds a significant place in Glee with multiple intimacies between the characters I have discussed in this thesis, and it is important to recognise friendship as an intimate relationship which coexists alongside other intimacies.

While Blaine develops friendships subsequent to his break up with Kurt, finding new forms of intimacy, Kurt is portrayed as sharing a significant and intimate relationship with Rachel. Rachel and Kurt’s friendship, begun in “Duets” (2.4), is one of mutual support and

¹⁶³ Kipnis, “Adultery”, 34.
¹⁶⁶ Love, Feeling Backward, 77.
¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 81.
¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 79.
¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 75.
exists beside their other relationships. While “Duets” places significant restrictions on Kurt’s touch with other men, it is also linked to the world of pre-Stonewall musicals and particularly Judy Garland. Kurt wants to sing “Make ‘em Laugh”, performed by Donald O’Connor in Singing in the Rain (1952) with Sam, however having agreed to Finn’s request not to perform a duet with Sam, dressed as half man and half woman Kurt sings “Le Jazz Hot”, Julie Andrews’s part in Victor Victoria (1982). This performance provides a musical interruption to ‘stories of heartache and frustration’; as Peraino suggests, in musicals, “[i]nterrupting harsh reality for a song represented defiance, and an exaltation of “personal will” regardless of what is happening in the world of the text.” For Kurt, homophobia is at this point ever present, trapped in a midwestern school, and significance may be found in Kurt’s connection with Judy Garland at the end of this episode. Analysing Garland’s representation as a musical icon, Peraino suggests Garland can be seen to ‘represent… resistance through failures and a refusal to behave, to fulfil expectations’ and ‘is tragic in her fundamental solitude, heroic in her fortitude, unique in her very essence.’ Garland’s death in 1969 is linked to the Stonewall riots and gay liberation, and thus her musical presence in this episode demonstrates ‘the continuity between individual experience “before” and “after” such transformations.’ This performance recognises the feeling that persists today, with Love noting that ‘[s]uch continuities suggest that direct experience of the pre-Stonewall moment is not solely responsible for a range of feelings that we today designate as pre-Stonewall.’ Standing at Kurt’s locker towards the end of “Duets”, Rachel (Kurt’s main singing rival), notes the similarities between them, suggesting ‘I know you’re lonely, I can’t even imagine how hard it must be to have feelings in high school that you can’t act on for fear of being humiliated, ridiculed, or worse.’ Rachel continues, highlighting that Kurt is part of a community as she details his importance to the glee club, concluding ‘I know you’re lonely, but you’re not alone’. Rachel suggests they perform a duet in a performance that echoes Judy Garland and Barbra Streisand’s performance in 1963 of “Happy Days are Here Again/Get Happy”. In the skit preceding Garland and Streisand’s original performance, the singers perform mutual admiration tinged with competition as they state how much each hates the other given her talent, and the melancholy performance of these happiness songs may be seen to reflect Garland’s

170 Peraino, Listening to the Sirens, 121.
171 Ibid, 129.
172 Ibid, 121.
fortitude, fortitude Kurt similarly possesses. Kurt and Rachel’s performance, singing and clasping hands, begins a significant relationship that survives their other romantic relationships, and yet rather than excluding isolation, in repeating Garland and Streisand’s performance, it actively draws upon it;\footnote{Love, Feeling Backward, 96-98.} this moment of community touches the past and forms a connection to prior loneliness in the present.

Portrayed as significant for both characters, this intimate relationship between Rachel and Kurt contains romance and has primacy within their lives but is in no way sexual. Holding hands with Kurt in guidance councillor Miss Pilsbury’s office at the start of season three (3.1), Rachel states ‘I have an important announcement to make’. Assuming they are dating Miss Pilsbury hands them a pamphlet with the title “ME and my HAG”. Kurt quickly explains ‘we’re not dating’ but takes the pamphlet as Rachel announces their ambitions for college. Indeed, in an unscreened scene from season three, released by series creator Ryan Murphy on YouTube, Rachel tells Kurt he is her soulmate, even as she is engaged to Finn, highlighting the intimacy of their relationship.\footnote{“Rachel’s Yearbook Message to Kurt Scene,” YouTube video, 1.10, posted by “MrRPMurphyExclusive,” August 6, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD7Dhb0qYHk.} As a woman who loves a gay man, Rachel could be described as a ‘fag hag’, a description given to Tina when she falls in love with Blaine in season four. Deborah Thompson suggests ‘the fag hag is contained within heterosexist discourse with the stereotype that she “substitutes” “non-erotic” relations with gay men for “real” sexual relationships with heterosexual men’\footnote{Thompson, “Calling All Fag Hags: From Identity Politics to Identification Politics”, Social Semiotics 14, no. 1 (2004): 41.} as if relationships between men and women must exist only one at a time. Unlike such negative stereotypes however, Thompson argues ‘the new fag hags of mainstream representation often have quite healthy heterosexual, and decidedly sexual, relationships with straight men, and are still fag hags, who derive primary pleasure from their fag-hagness’, arguing that ‘the new mass-media fag hag is generally smart, sexy, sassy, and \textit{happy}.’\footnote{Ibid (italics in the original).} The movement away from this terminology to describe Rachel seems to suggest she is this ‘new’ form; her relationship with Kurt is not sexual, but rather involves an identification with a community, ‘family’.\footnote{Ibid.} Indeed, for Rachel whose family literally are gay men—her parents are described as ‘two gay dads’ (1.1)—this identification with Kurt produces a relationship of equal or greater importance than her relationship with her boyfriend.

\footnotetext{176}{Love, Feeling Backward, 96-98.}
\footnotetext{177}{“Rachel’s Yearbook Message to Kurt Scene,” YouTube video, 1.10, posted by “MrRPMurphyExclusive,” August 6, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD7Dhb0qYHk.}
\footnotetext{178}{Thompson, “Calling All Fag Hags: From Identity Politics to Identification Politics”, Social Semiotics 14, no. 1 (2004): 41.}
\footnotetext{179}{Ibid (italics in the original).}
\footnotetext{180}{Ibid.}
Living together in New York in season four, Rachel and Kurt’s friendship persists beyond the break up of their romances. Noting a focus on friendship in romantic comedies of the 1990s, Celestino Deleyto writes that in *My Best Friend’s Wedding* (1997) ‘Julianne’s failures in love are caused by her coldness, her inability to show her feelings and, … her tendency to overvalue her career and her personal freedom. Yet in her scenes with George, all of these problems cease to exist, and she is honest, affectionate and sharing.’\(^{181}\) In this friendship between a straight young woman and gay young man, similar themes can be seen. While Finn finds Rachel’s ambition threatening, particularly in light of his own aimlessness and uncertainty, Rachel and Kurt have a competitive yet mutually fulfilling relationship which allows for the ambitions of both. This relationship between Rachel and Kurt is significant in its strength and importance in its participants’ lives, but also in its simultaneous presence beside other significant sexual relationships. Considering late modernity, Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott question whether any ‘queering of heterosexuality’\(^{182}\) has occurred, noting that the representation of sexuality is ‘definitive of the only relationships that matter, downgrading significant relationships, such as close friendships, which are not sexual.’\(^{183}\) In contrast, the presence of this significant friendship foregrounds the possibility of such non-sexual alternatives. Indeed, “The Break Up” gives rise to a strengthening of friendships alongside an increased casualisation in sexual encounters.

While Rachel and Kurt build a relationship dominated by friendship, Santana and Brittany’s relationship has continually transcended definition. Santana and Brittany’s intimacy is begun in friendship, but as I noted in “Touching Lips”, this intimacy is marked by significant unease. Santana and Brittany’s break up in “The Break Up” (4.4) is focussed on an acknowledgement that love and happiness may be found outside the couple form: Santana may be seen to recognise ‘the unhappiness that is concealed by the promotion of happy normativity’.\(^{184}\) As they sit together in the choir room, Santana tells Brittany she would never cheat on her, but explains an ‘energy exchange’ she shared with a girl at college, stating they should be ‘mature’ and ‘this is not an official break up, let’s just be honest that long distance relationships are almost impossible to maintain because both people aren’t really getting what they need, especially at our age.’ Brittany, crying, says ‘this sounds a lot like a break up to me’ and Santana, also crying, replies ‘you know this isn’t working, you know I will always love you the most’. The instigating factor for Brittana’s

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\(^{182}\) Jackson and Scott, “Sexual Antinomies”, 239.

\(^{183}\) Ibid, 237-38.

break up is not deception but honesty, recognising the importance of intimacy and acknowledging it may be found in an alternative form, with happiness potentially found beyond the space of heteronomative relationships. While treated in subsequent episodes as broken up Santana states explicitly that that is not the case; rather, she reserves the right for them both to see, touch, and act on impulse with other people, acknowledging the multiple loves, desires, and intimacies people have. While their subsequent relationship is not necessarily experienced this way, the conversation envisages such a possibility. Santana and Brittany’s relationship has always been fluid with multiple sexual partners, sometimes simultaneously. However, throughout, Brittany and Santana have been portrayed as best friends, and it is this friendship which Brittany most regrets the loss of when Santana leaves for college (4.2). Later, in “Diva” (4.13), they acknowledge the persistence of their friendship, with both characters stating the other is their best friend and parting ways with a chaste kiss on the lips, acknowledging their friendship’s potential to exist despite its previous sexual incarnation. While Brittany is now in a new relationship with Sam, the kiss shared by Brittany and Santana, and the lack of drama that surrounds it, suggests maturity in contrast to other adult relationships which are ended or placed in jeopardy by a kiss. Indeed, this kiss may symbolise Brittana’s romantic friendship, with this romance continuing beyond their sexual relationship. As Kipnis writes, ‘[r]omance is, quite obviously, a socially sanctioned zone for wishing and desiring and a repository for excess. Mobilized as it is in unconscious fantasy, it’s potentially a profoundly antisocial form as well—when unharnessed from the project of social reproduction’. Here Santana and Brittany envision a new form of intimacy which exceeds conventional heteronormative understandings.

“The Break Up” and the relationships and experiences it alludes to hold potential for developing multiple understandings of intimacy, pleasure, and happiness that move beyond conventional understandings and expand sexual literacies. But most importantly, Glee represents a wide range of intimacies that exist beside each other and interact. Like Halberstam I believe ‘that other ways of being do … exist’ but ‘we lack imagination to see and comprehend them’. Significant friendships between characters allow other intimacies to be observed which are touching in their significance, and observing the subtleties of touch throughout Glee allows the intricacies of these relationships to be considered.

185 Kipnis, “Adultery”, 43.
186 Halberstam, Gaga Feminism, 127.
However, *Glee* is composed of hope and pain: it is present and backward rather than forward moving. Drawing from the novel *Summer Will Show*, Love argues that intimate experience … offers a model for an alternative form of political feeling, a non-utopian expectancy: a kind of hope without reason, without expectation of success. Such a form of political affect may be the kind of feeling we need to learn how to use in contemporary politics, when hope in its old idealizing and utopian form—of optimism—seems to have lost its hold on many of us.\footnote{Love, *Feeling Backward*, 143.}

Love questions the focus on action or activity in contrast to passivity, instead arguing for politics more akin to suspension and stasis,\footnote{Ibid, 152.} acknowledging that the future is not only unknown but that we do not know what to do about it. Similarly, Ahmed suggests that ‘the struggle for a bearable life is the struggle for queers to have space to breathe. … With breath comes imagination. With breath comes possibility. If queer politics is about freedom, it might simply mean the freedom to breathe.’\footnote{Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 120.} These couples in *Glee* may “break up” but their presence continues, requiring viewers to continually reevaluate their understandings of relationships and imagine possibilities.

Throughout this chapter I have considered the public intimacy shared in the touch between characters on *Glee*. As I have noted, *Glee* presents a wide range of intimacies, identifying both the joy that can be found in intimacy, and the simultaneous restrictions that may be placed upon it, highlighting hope without certainty. In the next chapter, “Flirting”, I continue this emphasis upon hope and uncertainty as I contemplate attempts to reinstate and undermine normative behaviour in the suburban space of *The Black Balloon*, exploring the intersection of an emerging and uncertain public flirtation with private family life.

\footnote{Love, *Feeling Backward*, 143.} \footnote{Ibid, 152.} \footnote{Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 120.}
Figure 9: Thomas (Rhys Wakefield), Simon (Erik Thomson), Charlie (Luke Ford), and Maggie (Toni Collette) in the backyard. Still from *The Black Balloon* (2007) Black Balloon Productions.
The screen is black and the sound of crickets or cicadas plays, at once annoying and repetitive and indicating the absence of other sounds. A tapping noise is heard, then the screech of cockatoos and radio commentary of a cricket game; Allen Border and David Boon play, setting the scene as sometime before 1994. A low shot focuses on the back of a truck, blue sky, telephone and electricity wires and then a teenage boy, Thomas (Rhys Wakefield), walks into the frame holding a moving box of his ‘stuff’. A series of shots show Thomas standing as he notices the neighbours doing banal everyday activities and staring: a couple walk their dog, a woman takes out the bins, a man washes his car, a dog howls. The setting is suburban; the cricket plays as the Mollisons move into a conventional mission brown house in a cul-de-sac. Thomas’s parents unpack the car and a woman peaks out through venetian blinds and barbed wire. Charlie (Luke Ford), Thomas’s older brother, sits cross-legged on the ground tapping a wooden spoon on the concrete, then starts to hum, rocking back and forward. Thomas sighs. Simon (Erik Thomson), Thomas’s father, states ‘welcome to the neighbourhood, again’. In the foreground of the next shot three boys sit on bicycles, watching as items of furniture are carried into the house. One of the boys (Sam Fraser) asks Thomas ‘why’s your brother a spastic?’ Thomas, in a mid-shot, looks at them and replies ‘he’s not a spastic, he’s autistic’. The boy on the bike, divided from his friends, rolls his eyes and replies ‘same diff’. Thomas looks at him, ‘nah, not really’. The boy continues ‘he doesn’t talk and shit’. An exasperated Thomas affirms this and the boy replies ‘then why does he make all that fuckin’ noise?’ The shot cuts to Maggie (Toni Collette), Thomas’s mother, who is heavily pregnant, reaching into the car. She stands and smiles, says ‘hello boys’. The boys turn as one to look at her. ‘Where do you live?’ Not waiting for an answer, she shuts the car door, looks away, and lifts a cricket bat over her shoulder, the suggestion of violence in her act. Thomas looks at the boys and then turns to walk inside. The woman at the venetian blinds leaves the window. Non-diegetic music, Josh Pyke’s “When We Get There (Beautiful Days)”, starts to play and the lyrics emphasise memory and
nostalgia as the family unpacks: ‘these are the beautiful days’.\(^1\) Overlaying the filming of these activities are white labels naming each object: door, tiles, man, shelf, eggcups, sky, car. The shots highlight the obvious and the unexpected; there are locks on every cupboard and a kitsch doll in a knitted dress in the window of the bathroom. In one shot, Charlie takes the lid off a wooden model of a man, and the arms and a penis as large as one of the legs, which are connected by springs to the body, stand erect. Charlie sits close, tapping the penis with his index finger to make it bounce, giggling. In another shot, Simon stands in his bedroom and unpacks a box labelled ‘BEARS’, greeting one ‘g’day mate’ before placing it on his pillow. As this opening scene concludes the camera is positioned low, at Charlie’s eyeline, as he sits on the ground in the backyard tapping, moving, and humming. Around him, Simon whipper-snippers\(^2\) the lawn, Thomas sits on the trampoline, and Maggie hangs out the washing on a Hill’s hoist.\(^3\) As Sherry Turkle notes, ‘[p]ostmodern theory is dramatic; lived postmodernism is banal, domestic’,\(^4\) and here are represented the incongruous elements of “normative family life”. The repetitive noise that opens the film encourages viewers to listen, but also to be acutely aware of monotony and the moments that diverge from it.

*The Black Balloon* (2007) is an Australian film directed by Elissa Down, set in the early 1990s as Thomas starts at a new high school, and explores his relationship with his brother Charlie. Throughout the film, Thomas is shown to be embarrassed by his brother, worried about his reputation at school and his developing relationship with Jackie (Gemma Ward). In this chapter, the concept of flirting acts as a reminder of the presence of uncertainty throughout the film and I argue for considering disability beside flirtation. A consideration of both disability and flirtation demands recognition of alternative forms of looking, speaking, and listening; identifying intimate non-verbal communication and shared moments. While in chapter three I considered the public intimacy produced in *Glee*, particularly focussing upon the restrictions on queer intimacy in schools and reflecting on

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\(^1\) Josh Pyke, “When We Get There (Beautiful Days)”, written by Michael Yezerski and Josh Pyke, released 2008, Mushroom Music/Ivy League Publishing.

\(^2\) A whipper-snipper is a machine which uses a fast spinning piece of line to cut grass and other vegetation, also known as a line trimmer, lawn trimmer, or brushcutter.

\(^3\) The Hill’s hoist is an iconic Australian rotary clothesline consisting of two crossed bars around which lengths of line are threaded, creating squares of decreasing sizes. Often smaller items of clothing, such as underwear, are hung on the inner most line.

the presence of friendship which exists beside and touches other intimate relationships, in this chapter I explore the tensions created in the Mollison family by Jackie’s presence. As Jackie finds her place in the Mollisons’ lives, the line between public and private is blurred, and she is privy to intimate moments which exist outside notions of normative behaviour. Such blurring is present in this opening scene; watching neighbours are shown to stare, their excuses—walking the dog, watering the garden—highlighting the inappropriate nature of their looks and creating uncertainty as to whether privacy is ever available in a suburban setting. Just as in chapter three, where “touch” demonstrates the sensuality of film, in this chapter “sight” broadens what constitutes listening, foregrounding communication beyond speech. Charlie and Thomas talk little throughout the film, focussing viewers’ attention on sounds, sights, body language, affect, and disgust. In this first section I contemplate these alternative forms of listening and communication, as well as drawing from disability theory to recognise the way in which each Mollison family member is impaired in some way. I then move to consider “looking”, highlighting filmic theories of the gaze and the communicative nature of glances. Finally, I outline a series of moments in which everyday yet hidden and “private” bodily fluids are made public, with this public presence creating uncertainty for the normalcy-desiring Thomas. This highly political film flirts with discourses of disability alongside intimate relationships between Thomas and Charlie, and Thomas and Jackie. As Thomas attempts to find space for each relationship in his life, the film offers an opportunity to recognise uncertainty and find intimacy with this family in their alternative communication.

Throughout The Black Balloon, Thomas flirts with the idea of being a “normal” teenager with a “normal” brother and parents, aspirations that repeat throughout the film in conversations with his parents and Jackie. The concept of flirtation is defined by Adam Phillips as an ‘uncertain’ behaviour; he writes,

> If our descriptions of sexuality are tyrannized by various stories of committed purpose – sex as reproduction, sex as heterosexual intercourse, sex as intimacy – flirtation puts in disarray our sense of an ending. In flirtation you never know whether the beginning of the story – the story of the relationship – will be the end; flirtation, that is to say, exploits the idea of surprise. … [O]ne could say that a space

is being created in which aims or ends can be worked out …. Flirtation, if it can be sustained, is a way of cultivating wishes, of playing for time.\textsuperscript{6}

There can be both innocent and erotic pleasure in these acts of flirtation. As Phillips notes, flirtation’s lack of intention and uncertainty alters its acceptability, acting beyond heteronormativity in refusing to abide by a linear frame. Thomas explicitly “flirts” with Jackie but Charlie’s behaviour may also be perceived as flirtatious; both boys attempt to determine what possibilities their relationship with Jackie holds. But uncertainty is particularly reflected within the film in Charlie’s unpredictable presence; throughout the film Thomas is shown to attempt to control Charlie and make his behaviour accord with public expectations. Flirtation, however, also reconfigures the concept of waiting. Phillips suggests that ‘flirtation does not make a virtue of instability but a pleasure. It eroticizes the contingency of our lives by turning doubt – or ambiguity – into suspense. It prevents waiting from becoming a useless passion.’\textsuperscript{7} Rather than providing an ending, flirting perpetuates this waiting presence, and in remaining in the present, complicates the expectation of completion. In this way, flirtation is more than a pleasurable means to an end, and exists in a state of play, disturbing the order of relationships and our idea of “what counts”.

The opening of \textit{The Black Balloon} is itself a playful pedagogical moment, toying with signs of the banal which are used unpredictably to highlight the importance of listening throughout the film. While the tapping sound in the film’s opening blends into the banal background noise of crickets and cricket, it also returns as a continual reminder of Charlie’s presence throughout the film. Medically labelled as autistic and ADHD, Charlie doesn’t speak, instead signing and repeating the sound ‘duh’. However, as Maggie states, ‘Charlie gets his point across’. While viewers see Thomas first, Charlie is foregrounded—heard rather than seen—before the screen changes from black. In this way, the opening moments of the film indicate the importance of sound, with listening encouraged. Given that Charlie cannot “talk”, listening becomes embodied, experienced through signs and body language as well as speech. As a result, in this chapter I define listening to include seeing. In outlining the importance of an ethics of listening, Gerard Goggin considers sign language, highlighting ‘the activity or investment required to listen when communication takes place through unfamiliar or de-authorized modes’.\textsuperscript{8} Similarly, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson notes the

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid, xxiii.
importance of ‘bodily and gestural cues’ in communication, suggesting people’s discomfort at the disabled body may emerge from ‘people’s inability to read such cues’.

This emphasises a different method of listening; as Garland-Thomson suggests, ‘[o]ne listens to speakers; one stares at signers’ and Goggin writes ‘the turn to listening, as a corrective to emphasis on voice and speaking … needs to engage with the varieties of listening to be found in the socio-political space of disability.’ In this way, Goggin suggests that any ‘communication impairment … lies in the ableism at the heart of our society, which actively shapes hegemonic practices of listening’ and notes that ‘a new ethics of listening’ will require significant social changes, particularly ‘an embrace of people with disabilities’.

What is significant about The Black Balloon is that this form of listening is embedded in the mise-en-scène. Kathleen McHugh notes that ‘cinematic narration refers to the way in which a film text composes story information and discloses it to the spectator’ with a film’s elements combining to ‘shape not only what information the spectator receives but how s/he receives it’. In The Black Balloon, sound provides a rhythm viewers respond to and subtly reminds viewers to notice the looks and glances; to visually as well as aurally listen.

At the end of this opening scene, even hidden in the suburban backyard, out of sight, Charlie announces his presence. The Mollisons’ backyard represents an Australian ideal, and yet the gaps between palings in the wooden fence indicate that this private space is uncontainable. Indeed, throughout the film fences fail to confine; later Thomas, Charlie, and Jackie trespass in the army reserve, climbing through a hole in the fence. While a fence acts as a divide creating privacy, it also demonstrates the transparency of that distinction: towards the end of the film the nosy neighbour watering her garden as an excuse to stickybeak joins in the tapping, unconsciously hitting the hose against the fence. Regardless of Charlie’s capacity to “speak” his capacity to be heard is represented as diegetic sound which interjects into people’s lives.

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10 Ibid, 121.
12 Ibid, 494.
13 Ibid, 499.
15 While sound is significant in The Black Balloon, it is not foregrounded to the extent of some texts. For example, Anna Hickey-Moody writes, referring to Dance Me to My Song (1998) “[w]hen listening to the sound track wearing headphones, Julia’s breathing reverberates through the listener’s body, as it would do through her own small frame. This diegetic sound is intended to “fold” the experiences of the protagonist into the subjectivity of the spectator/aurator and operates to blur and re-align relationships between disabled and non-disabled bodies’ suggesting this creates ‘pedagogies of the disabled body that constitute a step towards erasing clichés attached to the disabled body’: “Corporeal and Sonic Diagrams for Cinematic Ethics in Rolf de Heer’s Dance Me to My Song”, Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education 31, no. 4 (2010): 501.
However, in behaving outside community expectations, from the opening scene Charlie, and consequently his family, are constructed by the community in this street as “other”, their neighbours attempting to label them through their glances and the bicycle boy’s rude questioning. Indeed, this “normative” suburban setting is itself symbolic. As Chris Healy suggests, ‘suburbia has been a way of talking about other things; about change, family, community, childhood and the tenuous habits we sometimes imagine as tradition.’ Healy notes that ‘the terms “suburb” and “suburbia” have functioned as imagined spaces on to which a vast array of fears, desires, insecurities, obsessions and yearnings have been projected and displaced.’ Power relations are constructed in this scene; the Mollisons are produced as other, with the family’s welcome composed of stares and insults. As Garland-Thomson suggests, ‘[s]taring … [is] used to enforce social hierarchies and regulate access to resources’.

Moreover, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder note that ‘[t]he (re)mark upon disability begins with a stare, a gesture of disgust, a slander or derisive comment upon a bodily ignominy, a note of gossip about a rare or unsightly presence’. Just as Charlie is remarked upon and in these stares rebuked, the film represents Maggie’s recognition of the proper way to behave in the suburbs. As Maggie’s pregnancy sees her bedridden early in the film, Simon takes over the washing, and Maggie’s admonishment to Simon that ‘the underwear goes on the inside’ as she looks out the kitchen window at the Hill’s hoist washing line, suggests both the lack of privacy the suburban backyard entails, and the impropriety of showing even one’s clean intimate laundry to the neighbours. Situated in a cul-de-sac, without frontyard fences, this suburban setting is intended to allow for privacy in ‘individual domestic spaces’ alongside community, facilitating ‘a sense of public space’.

Considering such a setting, Ian Hoskins notes a great emphasis on community conformity and discipline, indicating that ‘[o]ne disorderly house and garden could undermine the effect of the whole streetscape’. In this way, Maggie’s recognition of embarrassing behaviour acknowledges a suburban code of behavioural conformity.

While produced in 2007, The Black Balloon is heavily invested in its 1990s setting, a setting which produces a sense of nostalgia, but can also be linked back to what was a significant

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17 Ibid, xiii.
18 Garland-Thomson, Staring, 40.
20 Ian Hoskins, “Constructing Time and Space in the Garden Suburb”, in Ferber, Healy, and McAuliffe, Beasts of Suburbia, 8.
21 Ibid.
time for disability issues in Australia. For some viewers, this normative suburban setting may create nostalgia. As Rose Lucas notes, ‘the iconography of the suburb—with its Hill’s hoists, backyards, gendered division of labour, sound of the TV, etc.—inevitably evokes a realm of personal memory and childhood as well as representing facets of social or group history.’22 In *The Black Balloon* the setting acts to create a familiar, if imagined space of normativity, incorporating Australian music from the 1990s which assists to locate the story in a particular time and place. Although “When We Get There (Beautiful Days)” is an original song composed for the film, as Adam Trainer writes, ‘[b]y enlisting a popular musician to score a film, the director is harnessing the popular memory of that performer and their work.’23 Certainly, Josh Pyke’s music is particularly dominated by metaphors of memory and nostalgia, but the overlay of labelling as the song plays, together with the locks on the cupboards, visually reminds viewers of the presence of disability and pedagogy within this film.

Katie Ellis notes that the 1990s saw the introduction of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth),24 and considers the impact of ‘neoliberalism’ at this time which, she suggests, ‘focused on the individual and denied the existence of community, thus negating the responsibility of the state to intervene in the form of welfare.’25 That is, there was an emphasis on ignoring the experience of disability and its social construction. Looking back from 2007, however, Ellis notes that *The Black Balloon* ‘highlights the impact of both impairment and disabling attitudes on the lives of disabled people’.26 Drawing from the social model of disability, Goggin notes that

> impairment is the material, bodily diversity, where people are born with, acquire, and develop particular kinds of bodies, conditions, and capacities. Disability is what happens to people with impairments in their encounters and dwelling in society and the world. It is socially created by particular relations, architectures and environments. People do not have disabilities, … [t]hey are disabled through the way that they are treated in society.”27

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25 Ibid, 16.
26 Ibid, 121.
In this way, as explained by Kath Duncan, Gerard Goggin, and Christopher Newell, “[t]he social model directs attention to how power relations construct disability.”\(^\text{28}\) Noting this ‘disablism’, Fiona Kumari Campbell argues for considering ‘what the study of disability tells us about the production, operation and maintenance of ableism.’\(^\text{29}\) Indeed, Ellis argues ‘[t]he 1990s was a significant period in establishing a disability cultural identity in Australia’ and suggests this was ‘a period that influenced and was influenced by an ableist interpretation of disability.’\(^\text{30}\) Campbell defines ‘ableism’ as ‘a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human’, requiring the ‘disabled body’ to establish ‘the “truth” of the “real/essential” human self’.\(^\text{31}\) Campbell advocates the need for ‘storytelling, or counter-storytelling’ in order ‘to interrogate the impact of ableism and speak of the injuries it causes for disabled people’.\(^\text{32}\) Throughout *The Black Balloon* the disabling process of attempting to achieve an unrealistic ideal is contemplated and critiqued as it does violence to others, with the diversity of all bodies highlighted.

While traditionally films and television narratives are shown to ‘kill or cure’ disabled characters,\(^\text{33}\) in *The Black Balloon* the social implications of Charlie’s impairment are shown rather than glossed over or ignored.\(^\text{34}\) In *Narrative Prosthesis: Disabilities and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Mitchell and Snyder argue that disability is a ‘crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight’.\(^\text{35}\) Similarly, outlining a history of the representation of disability in Australian film, Ellis notes that ‘[t]he majority of Australian films made during the 1990s that featured either minor and major characters with disability used impairment to rehabilitate a previously marginalized other’, with disability ‘peripheral’.\(^\text{36}\) Despite this, *The Black Balloon* may be viewed as a counter narrative in contrast to ‘the “normalcy narrative” present in “dominant” golden-age Hollywood cinemas and popular stories of overcoming’.\(^\text{37}\)

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\(^{28}\) Duncan, Goggin, and Newell, ““Don’t Talk about Me… Like I’m Not Here’: Disability in Australian National Cinema”, *Metro Magazine: Media and Education Magazine* 146/147 (2005): 154. See also Ellis, *Disabling Diversity*, 11.


\(^{30}\) Ellis, *Disabling Diversity*, 21-22.

\(^{31}\) Campbell, “Refusing Able(ness)”, under “What Normate … Ableist Normativity”.

\(^{32}\) Campbell, *Contours of Ableism*, 28-29.

\(^{33}\) Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 164. See also, Campbell, “Refusing Able(ness)”.

\(^{34}\) Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 56.

\(^{35}\) Ibid, 49. See also Duncan, Goggin, and Newell, ““Don’t Talk about Me””, 158; Ellis, *Disabling Diversity*, 1.

\(^{36}\) Ellis, *Disabling Diversity*, 66.

\(^{37}\) Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 164.
and Snyder define counter narratives as ‘poetical and narrative efforts that expand options for depicting disability experiences’ and suggest ‘postmodern narrative does not seek to fully repair or resolve a character’s impairment, but rather delves into the social, personal, political, and psychological implications of impairment as bequeathing a social awareness.'

Indeed, Thomas’s desire for Charlie to talk may be viewed as a form of prosthesis, with an attempt ‘to return one to an acceptable degree of difference’, and as the narrative progresses, Thomas must come to terms with the fact Charlie will never speak.

Throughout *The Black Balloon*, Thomas attempts to “pass” as “normal” and escape the stigma of having a disabled brother. On his first day at his new school, Thomas watches his peers throw a bottle of water at the ‘spastic bus’ on which Charlie sits. Thomas had smiled as he signed hello to Charlie, but his pleasure at the sight of his brother is complicated as he watches the young men laugh at their abuse. It is this collapse between his public and private life that creates problems for Thomas. The young men’s jibes affect Thomas in his connection to Charlie, and Thomas’s reaction suggests that Thomas is contaminated by societal suggestions ‘that to be disabled is to be less than, a world where disability … is inherently negative.’ While Thomas may desire ‘one of the major liberties accorded to the ordinary … the freedom to be inconspicuous’, this is unavailable and arguably Thomas’s experiences of shame at school are in accordance with his ‘deep desire to fit in and an abiding interest in being able to do so—to belong where you don’t belong.’ In this way, a tension is represented between Thomas’s investment in his family and his desire to fit in at school. While Thomas shares moments of pleasure in his family and Charlie, for example smiling with pleasure as he watches his mother bathe Charlie and make shapes with his hair, as the private space of the home and public space of the school begin to intersect, problems arise.

In writing and directing *The Black Balloon*, Elissa Down drew from her own experience of living with the disability of her two autistic brothers, and potentially it was her position.

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38 Ibid, 164-65.
39 Ibid, 7.
40 With regards to “passing”, see Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 3.
41 Campbell, *Contours of Ableism*, 17.
within this ‘disability household’ that enabled her to represent the complexity of life as the sibling of a disabled person within *The Black Balloon*. However, Charlie is performed by Luke Ford, an able-bodied actor, and the performance of disabled characters by able-bodied actors is viewed as problematic and controversial by some authors. In outlining the preparation Ford undertook for the role, Down places emphasis on the fact that he was playing a ‘character’ rather than a ‘condition’. As Mitchell and Snyder suggest,

an underlying issue is always whether their disability is the foundation of character itself. The question is not whether disability is cause or symptom of, or distraction from, a disturbing biological trait, but whether its mystery can be pierced by the storyteller.

In *The Black Balloon*, Charlie’s representation goes beyond disability. In considering literary depictions of disability by ‘able-bodied authors’ Mitchell and Snyder write ‘these works provide glimpses of artists who … attempt to cross the threshold of disabled subjectivity’ and regardless of the able-bodied status of the author they suggest ‘a willingness to imagine disability proves tantamount to a literary revolution within the cultural imaginary. … The constructed cultural estrangement from disabled people’s perspectives that have been shrouded in mystery must fall away.’ While Garland-Thomson notes a general ‘refus[al] to see disability’, with people ‘obliged to act, feel, look, and be normal—at almost any cost’, in *The Black Balloon*, disability is at the forefront of the film, not ‘unusual or foreign’ in the lives of the Mollisons.

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50 Ibid, 174.
51 Ibid, 175.
54 Ibid, 20.
In addition to the emphasis on Charlie’s subjectivity, *The Black Balloon* flirts with the uncertainty of being able bodied, presenting a series of moments in which each family member is conveyed as non-normative. That is, Thomas and his parents’ status as able bodied is brought into question, with the boundaries between normality and disability not as definite as might be assumed. In representing characters who are neither “disabled” nor ‘endowed with masculinist attributes of certainty, mastery and autonomy’, *The Black Balloon* confuses the dis/abled binary, highlighting ableist assumptions. At school swimming practice, Thomas struggles to swim, unable to breathe or see in the pool. Indeed, as the new kid, Thomas is shown to have difficulty forming friendships with his peers, while Charlie is portrayed as part of a community with ‘a shared social identity’, his seat at the back of the bus a sign of social competence. Maggie’s pregnancy, restricting her ability to run the household, may also be perceived to constitute impairment; she becomes bedridden and is eventually hospitalised given her high blood pressure. Campbell notes a history of ‘viewing women as intrinsically deficient, as mutations of males; profoundly disabled’ and in debates surrounding consideration of pregnancy as disability Campbell notes a focus on ‘the notion of “naturalness” (of pregnancy) juxtaposed with anomaly (in this case disability)’. In this way, Campbell suggests that ‘[a]bleism forces a game of disassociation, obstructing consideration of gender and disability in terms of sameness by deploying a politics of fixed difference; in the case of disability an ethos that affirms disabled people as an insular minority’. While Maggie’s impairment is temporary, her reluctance to accept her impairment and succumb to bed rest highlights a desire to not acknowledge the temporary restrictions placed on her body.

Similarly, Simon fails to live up to expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Employed by the army, Simon emerges from a history of bushmen and diggers that have dominated Australian narratives, a character who is ‘loyal to his mates, egalitarian … the active, masculine agent who, … battles to protect his hearth and homeland while his women folk wait and keep those justifying home fires alight’. However, taking over domestic duties in the absence of his wife, Simon is portrayed as domestically incapable, continually

55 Campbell, *Contours of Ableism*, 162.
56 Ibid, 11.
57 Mitchel and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 55. This reading of *The Black Balloon* may be contrasted with readings of other texts by Mitchell and Snyder, and by Duncan, Goggin, and Newell, “Don’t Talk about Me”, 156.
58 Campbell, *Contours of Ableism*, 133.
59 Ibid, 141.
60 Ibid, 145.
61 Lucas, “Round the Block”, 122.
associated with childishness. While cleaning, cooking, and looking after Charlie are shown to be difficult work, Simon’s workplace, an army reserve, is portrayed as a playground explored and enjoyed by Thomas, Charlie, and Jackie. Simon’s immaturity is particularly emphasised by his discussions with his toy bear Rex. Simon “listens” to the obnoxious bear Rex, refusing to shower at the bear’s command. While Thomas refuses to acknowledge the bear, Maggie speaks to it directly, asking ‘Rex, why can’t Simon have his shower?’ as she joins Thomas in the doorway to their bedroom. Thomas looks at the bear, arms crossed. Simon, lying on his bed in his undies, explains that ‘Rex reckons because you’re the one giving the talk, that, ah you should go to the meeting’. Maggie responds, ‘ah, but Rex, I think some of the husbands might be interested in Simon’s viewpoint on sex and pregnancy’. While more information is not given, viewers are led to believe that Maggie is giving a talk on sex and pregnancy, a talk Simon is reluctant to attend. In the next shots, the interceding bear is removed and Maggie and Simon speak directly to one another: Simon replies ‘No they wouldn’t’. The film cuts to a headshot of Thomas and Maggie: ‘Yes they would’. The shots get closer as the scene gets more intense. ‘Alright, well ah’ Simon looks at Rex, ‘Rex also reckons that if I come to the meeting I should get some, how’d you put it again mate?’ the shot cuts to Rex ‘oh yeah, special attention tonight’. Thomas pulls a face of disgust at this implicit acknowledgement of his parents’ sex life. Maggie replies ‘ah see but Rex, Simon gets nothing but special attention from me, that’s why I’m out here. ... Hop to it.’ Thomas expresses discomfort both at his father’s conversation with the bear and his parents’ unembarrassed sexuality. For Thomas, who wishes to be perceived as normative, it is “normal” to be embarrassed about such matters.62 Similarly, while obviously desiring the pregnant Maggie, and happy to discuss this at home in front of their son, Simon shows a reluctance to discuss sexual matters outside the house at Maggie’s talk. The home may thus be viewed as a safe space, albeit one in which Thomas must nevertheless convey his embarrassment. As Sara Bragg and David Buckingham note, the home is also a space in which ‘gendered and sexual identities are performed and come under surveillance’,63 and this is particularly the case when Jackie is present in the family home, the men asserting their masculinity. It is the confusion of this barrier between private and public life that produces narrative conflict within the film and an understanding of the way normativity confines lives.

63 Ibid, 457.
Flirting with Looking: Gazing and Glancing

Public looking and glances comprise Jackie and Thomas’s early interaction and establish intimacy, a flirtation that exists prior to speech between the pair. Set in summer, school scenes in The Black Balloon are shot at an outside pool and this school space is portrayed as objectifying and normalising, with students yelling insults to discipline behaviour. Comprised of boys wearing speedos⁶⁴ and girls one-piece bathing suits, these young people are undressed but also physically intimate as they touch peers to “rescue” them, attempting to achieve their Bronze Medallion,⁶⁵ and glances between the boys and girls are shown throughout the school scenes. Silvan Tomkins suggests that looking can be intimate and pleasurable, provided the parties enjoy looking and being looked at, although enjoyment can also arise without looking at each other, or awareness of the other looking.⁶⁶ Of course, phrases such as “love at first sight”⁶⁷ suggest the significance given to glancing in romance discourses. Tomkins writes that “adolescent loving is not infrequently carried on at a distance, with each party stealing glances at the other.”⁶⁸ Similarly, Richard Dyer describes, that scene of Young Love, where, … the Boy and the Girl first see each other. … We have a close-up of him looking off camera, followed by one of her looking downwards (in a pose that has, from time immemorial, suggested maidenliness). Quite often, we move back and forth between these two close-ups, so that it is very definitely established that he looks at her and she is looked at. Then, she may look up and off camera, … but it is only briefly, for no sooner is it established that she sees him that we must be assured that she at once averts her eyes.⁶⁹

Early in the film, this viewing practice is reversed, as Thomas watches Jackie practicing rescuing a friend from the pool. Thomas sits hunched on the edge of the pool, body language which suggests he is withdrawn.⁷⁰ His head is turned to the side and he watches as Jackie first helps her classmate, then pulls out her wedgie.⁷¹ Noticing Thomas, Jackie

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⁶⁴ Otherwise known as swimming briefs, Speedo (a swimwear brand name) has become genericised and is now used to refer to any brand of male brief swimwear.


⁶⁸ Tomkins, Shame and Its Sisters, 86.


⁷⁰ Iris Marion Young, Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 189.

⁷¹ A wedgie is slang for when a person’s underwear becomes wedged between the person’s buttocks.
smiles, and Thomas looks away, up and down, embarrassed, confused, smiling. While Thomas appears to indicate his interest by looking, Jackie’s responding gaze and smile suggests the interest is mutual. The smiles in this scene exhibit enjoyment, but also neutralise the dominance implicit in the stare.72 Jackie’s gaze is not ‘surreptitious’,73 rather Jackie’s capacity for sight, wearing pink goggles as she swims in the pool, is significant: she is able to see where others, particularly Thomas, cannot.

In this way, mutual glances may be read as flirtatious in contrast to the objectifying gaze we may be more familiar with. The school boys are introduced to viewers standing poolside, watching the girls and assessing their appearance: ‘Hey Bucko, you seen the hickey on Sally’s neck?’ — ‘What, she’s got a hickey?’ — ‘Yeah look, she’s trying to cover it up with her hair.’ — ‘Steve said he put one on her tits.’ — ‘What about Kylie’s rack? I mean I didn’t even realise.’ — ‘Check out the legs on Jackie.’ — ‘Nah, I’d definitely prefer a decent set.’ These boys objectify the young women, singling out body parts and stating desires, enacting the male gaze while Thomas in turn watches them. But these young men do not merely objectify the young women, they highlight “desirable” physical attributes. As Jessica Taylor notes, ‘when objectifying the female body, her natural sexual differences are emphasised, such as the size of her breasts, in order to identify her as hyper-feminine’74 and here Jackie and her long legs are dismissed, because she lacks the large breasts of the other girls. Of course Australian super-model Gemma Ward plays Jackie and thus these comments indicate both her desirability and capacity to be observed, the comments implicitly recognising that models are often critiqued for possessing abnormal and unique bodies and perhaps repeating the suggestion that such models are “too skinny”. While Jackie is attractive, by placing her slightly outside this feminine ideal, her otherness is highlighted. At the same time, the young men’s masculinity and soon to be acquired ‘dominance’ is demonstrated in ‘muscles or height’75 and the young men’s defined torsos.

Despite the dominating gaze of the boys, the power this gaze entails is placed in question in this scene. At the pool Thomas watches the girls from afar, and then the young men watching the girls, before viewers are offered a close-up of the young women, panning up their bodies while the girls play and push. In her article “Visual Culture and Narrative Cinema”, Laura Mulvey argues that

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75 Ibid.
pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. … In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.76

As bell hooks, notes ‘[t]here is power in looking’77 and Dyer suggests that the practice of looking or staring at women ‘re-establishes male dominance.’78 However, Dyer questions the active/passive binary of looking, noting the construction behind such images: ‘the image that the viewer looks at is not summoned up by his or her act of looking but in collaboration with those who have put the image there.’79 Instead, Dyer describes ‘activity and passivity’ as ‘shifting relations’.80 Further, Garland-Thomson suggests that ‘[r]egardless of which sex the partners in the exchange identify with, looking masculinizes, … and being looked at feminizes81 and the interactions between the young people in The Black Balloon confuse the binary of the male gaze. Indeed, Mulvey’s argument has been critiqued for ignoring other ways of looking. Jackie Stacey suggests, in her study of British female spectators’ memories of 1940s and 1950s Hollywood stars, that women indicated ‘homoerotic pleasure’ as well as ‘the desire to become’,82 noting that some women may identify with men and women in such representations.83 Similarly, Catherine King suggests that some women may desire to retain the gaze themselves, with the gaze enabling exploration of women’s sexuality.84 Indeed, analysing the 1980s teen film Little Darlings, Lisa Dresner considers the way the camera ‘lingers’ on the chests of the young men, indicating ‘[t]he female viewing pleasure in the male form’.85 Similarly, in The Black Balloon it is not only the young women who are positioned as the object of the gaze; the boys soon strip off and are filmed as headless bodies in a line to demonstrate Thomas’s difference, wearing board shorts rather than the ubiquitous speedos. In this moment of near nakedness, the boys’ objectifying comments can be seen as a ‘ritual … to stop the

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77 hooks, Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies (New York: Routledge Classics, 2009; first published 1996 by Routledge), 197.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
83 Ibid, 31.
homosociality of communal nakedness sliding into homosexuality. Indeed, the half-naked boys are objectified; static, they are ‘passively positioned’ in contrast to the kinetic young women who earlier playfully tried to push one girl into the pool and are clustered in a group. Because they are teenagers, these young men’s passive positioning may be read as possible only ‘until they themselves gain the much more potent power of the male gaze’. But this scene also displays a flexibility in viewing practices, unaccounted for by Mulvey’s notion of the gaze.

Mulvey’s theory of the gaze does not account for the slippage between object and subject represented in these images. This school space is one in which eroticism is continually present, in the touch of rescues, the verbal insults, playful tussles and looks between characters. Considering diverse experiences of nakedness, Rob Cover proposes focussing on the instability of such moments, suggesting the anxiety surrounding public nakedness results from ‘the “postmodern” destabilization of contexts, frames and reading practices which formerly “protected” the naked in certain sites from slipping into significations of the sexual.’That is, when Jackie, Charlie, and Thomas strip to their underwear and go swimming in a river, this may be viewed as a rural swim in a hot summer or an erotic sexual display, with the sexual implicated regardless of intention. In this way, Cover notes that queer theory offers an opportunity to acknowledge that ‘[t]he gaze in all its many forms is, by virtue of its in-signifiability, always sexual, always erotic’ with erotic defined as what occurs in the encounter between performative subject-bodies and other bodies. … An encounter with other subjects, such as meeting, greeting, sharing space, gazing, speaking and listening is always erotic in that it infuses the subject’s body, alters the significations of the signifiers cited by which the subject maintains his or her subjectivity and sexual identity.

Indeed, as Cover suggests, ‘[o]nly when the erotic breaks free from its sexual classifications, regimentations and codes is it acknowledged that the erotic is both pervasive and innocent’ and ‘[b]y admitting this, nakedness under the gaze can continue to be harmless, yet erotically and pleasurably charged.’ In this way, the looking represented between Jackie and Thomas may be acknowledged not as objectification but an erotic encounter between subjects.

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87 Taylor, “Romance and the Female Gaze”, 11.
88 Cover, “Naked Subject”, 55.
89 Ibid, 68.
90 Ibid, 69.
Such erotic encounters can be found in the intimate interactions between Jackie and Thomas outside school, precipitated by Charlie’s presence and particularly his failure to recognise distinctions between public and private space. One morning, Thomas leaves his keys in the front door and Charlie escapes with glee, leading Thomas on a chase before running unasked into Jackie’s house and bathroom to urinate as she showers. Thomas politely flushes the toilet and grabs Charlie to get him out of the house, but not before he sees Jackie and she sees him. Thomas is unsure how Jackie will respond and her knock at Thomas’s door after school catches him by surprise, representing the danger of discovery. Charlie is excited that there is a girl at the door but Thomas bribes him into his room and locks him in, apologising to Jackie for taking so long. Jackie starts to smile, ‘hey something a bit weird happened to me this morning. While I was in the shower two boys broke into my house in their undies’. Her voice inflects up on this, as though she is asking a question. She continues ‘they used the toilet, and um, they left these’. Jackie holds up Charlie’s monkey ears. Jackie is smiling, head slightly tilted to one side. She twirls them round, ‘see it has C. Mollison on it’ she points to the label, ‘right here’. Thomas looks disconcerted. He starts, fills his cheeks with air, stumbling and repeating his words ‘um, I, you know that’s, that’s not weird, I’ve actually, um, I’ve heard of people who um they dress as monkeys and they, they break into people’s houses and use the toilet or something.’ The camera focuses on Jackie’s smile and she laughs. Thomas continues ‘oh, what, yeah it was me. Chimp Mollison my alias. Ooh ooh eeh ah’. Jackie says ‘it was exactly like that you’d just have to be in your undies to get it right.’ Thomas takes off the hat and she takes it back, telling him ‘well, I’m just going to have to get to the bottom of this. I can see through shampoo you know.’ Thomas looks at her with a bemused smile, unsure yet intrigued. Mid-conversation, Thomas is called to by his mother, angrily. She stands in the doorway of Charlie’s room, grimacing, and they both look. The film cuts to Charlie sitting on the floor of his room running his fingers through a brown substance on the carpet, joyfully laughing and signing thumbs up. In a wide-angle shot, Maggie dispels his pleasure, signing and exclaiming ‘no Charlie, bad, you don’t rub poo on the carpet’. They shrink at the smell and Thomas stands holding his nose in the doorway as Maggie walks into the room. Carl Plantinga notes the ‘visceral’ experience of viewing disgust, writing ‘to feel disgust means to feel what it is like to see something, smell something, or be put in the presence of something disgusting’. On film, Plantinga notes that this is generally achieved by ‘eliciting the imagination of tastes

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and smells through the evocative presentation of sights and sounds. In this scene viewers not only see the poo, but the reactions of disgust demonstrated by Thomas and his mother at the smell. She comments ‘I don’t know what’s got into you Thomas’ as she undresses Charlie and passes the soiled clothes to Thomas, telling him to ‘deal with it’. Thomas walks to the laundry as Jackie walks into the house holding the monkey ears, asking ‘do you want these back?’ She stops as she notices the soiled clothes Thomas is holding, shown in close-up, before Charlie runs through the hallway, pooey bottom in sight. Thomas looks at Charlie and then back at Jackie who turns and leaves, shocked, Thomas looking after her.

Throughout the conversation that begins this scene, Jackie conveys pleasure, smiling, while Thomas seems both scared his secret will be revealed, and intrigued by the stunning girl standing on his doorstep. Indeed, Jackie flirtatiously creates intimacy. In her statement that there were two boys, Thomas recognises that he may have been mistaken for Charlie, an idea Jackie affirms. Here Charlie’s innocent desperation to urinate is interpreted as perversity, an attempt to sneak a look at the naked Jackie. Jackie’s comments about seeing him in his undies and being able to see through shampoo directly reference the fact that they shared a bathroom while she was naked, eroticising the situation, but also highlighting that she has looked at him in his underwear. This interaction exists shared in a moment, and yet, it is based upon a tense uncertainty, with Thomas unsure as to the direction the experience will take and how Jackie will react to his family life, expressed through his attempt to “pass” as “normal” by hiding Charlie in his room. This tension and uncertainty is both a primary experience of flirtation and yet it also reflects narrative construction, with this moment creating an obstacle between the pair which puts in question the possibility of future flirtation.

Jackie is depicted as curious in this scene, her curiosity similarly intruding upon the private space of the Mollisons as she inquisitively arrives at Thomas’s house. Garland-Thomson notes that staring is a form of ‘knowledge gathering’ and a way ‘to recognize one another in new ways.’ Similarly she writes, ‘[l]ike staring, curiosity seeks. Both are acquisitive, grasping, appetitive. Staring is an ocular inquiry; curiosity is an intellectual inquiry.’ Jackie’s curiosity is similar to that of the interfering neighbour who is depicted peaking through blinds and continuously watering her garden; ‘[l]dle curiosity makes us busy

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92 Ibid.
93 Garland-Thomson, Staring, 15.
94 Ibid, 47.
bodies’,95 and in walking uninvited into the house, Jackie may be viewed as making ‘a grab for unauthorized knowledge, a presumptuous overreaching.’96 Garland-Thomson suggests that ‘[o]ne person’s remarkable scene is another person’s mundane landscape. To stare, then, is to barge into someone’s place. As such, curious looking is meddlesome, prying into someone else’s life.’97 While within the Mollison household Charlie has obviously defecated on the floor before, Jackie’s shock indicates that this is unusual, but also highlights her interference, positioned as other in the space of the Mollisons’ home. The difference between the neighbour and Jackie is Jackie’s apology the next day as she moves from curiosity to recognition. Garland-Thomson notes that ‘[b]ad staring fails to make the leap from a place of discomfort, shock, or fear toward empathic identification. This unethical stare, in other words, is looking without recognising’.98 While the neighbour calls child protection to complain about the noise coming from the house, Jackie, after her initial shock, continues to seek Thomas and Charlie’s company and protects them from others at school.

But Jackie’s entry into the lives of the Mollisons itself unsettles the relations between family members. While as Plantinga notes, teen and horror films99 ‘gleefully exploit the disgusting aspects of bodily existence to offer viewers pleasure in a kind of adolescent rebellion against the norms of polite society’,100 in The Black Balloon this representation of disgust acts to critique Thomas’s act of locking his brother away, hiding him. ‘Disgust’, Plantinga suggests, ‘is an unpleasant emotion, causing aversion to its object’101 and ‘can function to regulate social norms’,102 creating ‘moral or ideological antipathy toward certain characters and their actions’.103 Here, viewers are encouraged to focus their attention on Thomas and his actions, rather than Charlie’s failure to use the toilet. While viewers take cues104 from Maggie and Thomas to view the poo with disgust, the scene produces a plethora of affect and emotion as Thomas and Maggie argue after Jackie leaves, demonstrating anger and frustration. Because of the disgust viewers feel, sympathy is established with Thomas’s anger and Maggie’s frustration at Thomas’s behaviour, and the mess that must be cleaned. While Thomas yells at his mother, ‘he shat everywhere, yell at him’, Maggie highlights

95 Ibid, 64.  
96 Ibid, 63.  
97 Ibid, 65.  
98 Ibid, 186.  
99 Plantinga, Moving Viewers, 209.  
100 Ibid, 204.  
101 Ibid, 212.  
102 Ibid, 207.  
103 Ibid, 212.  
104 Ibid, 211.
Thomas’s role, asking ‘what was he supposed to do?’ When Thomas argues ‘he’s not my responsibility … he’s a freak’, Maggie slaps him, before kneeling back to the floor with difficulty, shaking her head.

You know your brother will never be able to do the things you can Thomas. He’ll never get a job or have a family, he’ll never be able to look after himself, he will live with us for the rest of his life. So if there’s anything that your father or I can do to help make your brother’s life a little happier...

Maggie gets increasingly upset, hyperventilating and Thomas tries to stop her attempts to scrub the floor. As Maggie later leaves for the hospital and enforced bed rest, Thomas scrubs the poo-stained floor, with low camera angles used to align viewers with Charlie who lies under the bed. No words are exchanged in this scene; rather a series of glances are shown between Thomas and Maggie who stands in the doorway, and between Thomas and a silent Charlie lying under the bed. While Thomas seems to fear he will be unable to live this “normal” life with Charlie around, viewers are simultaneously encouraged to critique his behaviour, which demonstrates that Charlie is not abject in this scene but ‘abjected’ through Thomas’s actions. Charlie’s behaviour is not premised on disability but is ‘an outcome of environments and practices that exclude, marginalise and discriminate.’

While Thomas attempted to create certainty by preventing Jackie from looking at Charlie and his family, it is Charlie’s uncertain actions that provoke Jackie’s curiosity and instigate her relationship with Thomas. As this family’s intimate moments become public, shared with Jackie, tension is created between these privately normalised behaviours and the recognition that such behaviours exist outside convention.

**Flirting with Fluidity: Recognising Intimate Moments**

In this final section I present a series of moments which complicate the “privacy” generally accorded to bodily fluids. The public presence of fluids such as the faeces in the scene above creates uncertainty for the normalcy-desiring Thomas, and yet it is the presence of these everyday fluids which can allow familiarity and recognition to be found within this family. *The Black Balloon* collapses and complicates boundaries: as Mitchell and Snyder suggest, ‘the literary encounter with deviance at first heightens alienation and then ultimately seeks to collapse the distance between disability and the inherently social

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105 With regards to the concept of being ‘abjected’, see Catherine Simpson and Nicole Matthews, “Dancing Us to Her Song: Enabling Embodiment and Voicing Disability in Heather Rose’s *Dance Me to My Song*”, *Australian Feminist Studies* 27, no. 72 (2012): 144.

106 Ibid, 145.
processes that mark bodies as falling outside acceptable norms.\textsuperscript{107} Just as Cover notes the instability in meanings produced around bodies in states of undress, the pedagogical moments with which I conclude this chapter highlight the instability of sexual and abject experiences of the body. Indeed, the implicit presence of fluids such as vomit, urine, faeces, blood, semen, and breastmilk suggest the presence of lived bodies. Drawing from the idea of ‘being as fluid’ Young notes the femininity of fluidity writing, ‘[f]luids surge and move, and a metaphysic that thinks being as fluid would tend to privilege the living, moving, pulsing over the inert dead matter of the Cartesian world view’,\textsuperscript{108} that is, they draw attention to the present moment. Many “normal” acts and processes relating to fluids are generally hidden in film. As Lauren Rosewarne notes, with the exception of blood, bodily fluids are rarely ‘portrayed as natural, everyday happenings’ in popular culture,\textsuperscript{109} writing urination and defecation are still considered private activities; … while a given character may experience all kinds of private ablutions off screen, showing such events is unnecessary for most plots and can simply be inferred to happen in the background, if at all.\textsuperscript{110}

As such, fluids find presence in \textit{The Black Balloon} and signify difference within a normative frame. Even those events termed familiar are not fixed in meaning; while these everyday fluids may be normative, their presence in public exists beyond our expectations of everyday experiences.

In this way, \textit{The Black Balloon} continually reveals hidden and stigmatised aspects of life, such as menstruation, and makes them familiar. One day, following Jackie’s visit to Thomas’s house, Jackie rides a bike towards Thomas wearing her school dress and a pink helmet. They smile at each other and Jackie asks ‘do you want to walk home with me?’ Thomas turns her down, explaining ‘ah, nah, I’m getting a lift.’ Jackie replies ‘well that’s lazy of you’ and Thomas’s face changes from a smile to a grimace, before smiling as he reasserts his masculinity, joking that he refuses to wear the pink helmet. Jackie pokes her tongue at him and he smiles back. Charlie’s presence in Thomas’s life creates tension and intensifies the potential loss existing in all relationships; Thomas cannot simply walk home with Jackie as he is supposed to be catching the bus home with Charlie. Unexpectedly, however, Jackie invites Charlie to walk home with them and he carries her bag for the lollies it contains. The scene is interspersed with shots of Charlie walking, doing something with Jackie’s bag,

\textsuperscript{107} Mitchell and Snyder, “Representation”, 211.
\textsuperscript{108} Young, \textit{Throwing like a Girl}, 193.
\textsuperscript{109} Rosewarne, \textit{Periods in Pop Culture: Menstruation in Film and Television} (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), 212.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 212-13 (italics in the original).
and Jackie and Thomas walking, talking about what it is like to live with Charlie. Jackie states ‘it must be hard on you’ and Thomas pauses, but Jackie breaks the seriousness stating ‘it’s gotta be fun if you get to run into other girls’ showers.’ She gives him a friendly push on the shoulder. At this point Thomas and Jackie catch up to Charlie. As Jackie jokes ‘isn’t that right Charlie?’ she notices Charlie has a tampon in his mouth. ‘Oh my God.’ Thomas yells ‘Charlie! No’ and chases after him, yelling apologies to Jackie. There is a struggle as Thomas tries to grab Charlie and pull the tampon out of Charlie’s mouth by the string. ‘Spit it out. Charlie, open up your mouth, open. Thank you.’ He removes the tampon, and places it on the ground. ‘Yuck. Jackie, I am so sorry. He doesn’t usually do things like this’. Charlie rolls over and takes the tampon once again in his mouth. ‘Fuck, Charlie, open up your mouth, this isn’t funny all right? Spit it out. Charlie, spit it out, I SAID SPIT IT OUT.’ Charlie spits the tampon and it hits Thomas’s face. Thomas picks it up by the string and carefully places it back in Jackie’s bag, zipping the section up. Jackie has stood still throughout the scene, watching. She picks up her bike and Thomas hands her back her bag, farewelling her with a ‘see ya’ as he turns and walks away. Jackie calls out ‘at least it wasn’t a used one’ and walks up laughing, giving him another friendly push. Thomas looks towards her, confused and surprised and the next shot shows the three of them walking together down a road.

Despite being an ordinary part of the lives of many women, menstruation is often stigmatised and viewed as taboo, embarrassing, kept discreet, as a symbol of the leaky nature of the female body.¹¹¹ And yet, in this scene, it is Thomas who implies the presence of the tampon is abnormal; Thomas expresses incredulity at Jackie’s positive reply and her prompt dismissal of his anxiety. The sterile tampon is viewed by Thomas as an object of revulsion and Thomas’s lack of knowledge and experience of young women is signalled by his gingerly placing the tampon back in her bag. In contrast to Thomas’s embarrassment, Jackie references the incident and unproblematises it, dismissing this episode with laughter. Thomas’s disgust at the tampon is not uncommon; as Rosewarne notes ‘[i]n lieu of blood, disgust is often directed at aspects of menstruation’ particularly ‘menstrual products’.¹¹² However, in contrast to the portrayal of disgust, in some texts, Rosewarne notes, a change of context allows the destigmatisation of tampons.¹¹³ This scene is far removed from bathrooms and vaginas. While viewers are not told whether Jackie is menstruating, it is

¹¹² Rosewarne, Periods in Pop Culture, 102 (italics in the original).
¹¹³ Ibid, 111.
intimated by the presence of tampons, and as in tampon advertisements featuring athletes, Jackie is shown to be active, swimming and cycling.\textsuperscript{114} Moreover, in featuring Gemma Ward, an internationally recognised super-model, tampons and menstruation are positioned as ‘far removed from the realities of actual women with stray hairs and messy body fluids’, providing viewers with distance, and thus reducing the feelings of disgust towards such products.\textsuperscript{115} Indeed, Jackie may be viewed as the ‘sexy menstruator’, advertising ‘a product routinely considered unsexy’, with the presence of menstruation potentially encouraging viewers to reflect on the young woman’s ‘emerging sexuality more generally.’\textsuperscript{116} In spite of this distance, Charlie placing the tampon in his mouth, and Jackie’s flippant comment ‘at least it wasn’t a used one’ links sexuality and disgust: a product generally associated with insertion into the vagina is placed in the mouth, potentially intimating cunnilingus, but also the consumption of menstrual blood.\textsuperscript{117} The disgust occasioned by the linking of menstruation, tampons, and eroticism may be viewed in light of a publicised private conversation between Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles commonly known as “Camillagate” in 1993. Charles’s statement that he wanted to live in Camilla’s pants moved to a joke that he could be reincarnated as a tampax.\textsuperscript{118} As Rosewarne notes, the conversation ‘does allude to the products associated with menstruation being potentially construed as erotic’, with the idea of ‘an imagined way for a lover to reside inside his partner’ indicating ‘a manifestation of intimacy’.\textsuperscript{119} More significant than the conversation, however, was the media response: David Linton argues the linking of menstruation and eroticism ‘was seen by the media … as so repugnant as to warrant distortion’ as well as ‘social control and discipline’ through ‘ridicule and disgust.’\textsuperscript{120} In this scene, sexuality, eroticism, and disgust are linked, with laughter dispersing an otherwise significant taboo.

The film draws to a climax at Thomas’s birthday dinner, a scene which portrays a series of flirtatious and sexual words and glances between the family members and Jackie. Jackie complements the dinner and Maggie invites her over any time, Simon adding ‘just as long as you do the dishes’. Jackie laughs nervously, and Maggie gives him a censorious look. Jackie helps Charlie put the yellow holders in the corn and Maggie comments on how good

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 73-74.
\textsuperscript{116} Rosewarne, Periods in Pop Culture, 125-26 (italics in the original).
\textsuperscript{117} For discussion of eroticism and the consumption of menstrual blood, see Rosewarne, Periods in Pop Culture, chapter five.
\textsuperscript{119} Rosewarne, Periods in Pop Culture, 144-45 (italics in the original).
\textsuperscript{120} Linton, “Camillagate”, 350.
he is being, ‘you’ll do anything for a pretty girl, won’t you mate?’ Simon comments as he ruffles his hair. Charlie signs thank you to Jackie and she asks whether Charlie will ever talk again. While Thomas immediately says ‘yes’, Maggie comments ‘well, probably not, actually. You know we hoped he might have when he hit adolescence, but unfortunately, he didn’t. But you get your point across, don’t you sweetie’. Charlie puts his arms up in success. Thomas says, ‘yeah, well maybe if we stopped signing, he’d start talking, Mum’. Maggie looks at him, ‘I think that’s unlikely Thomas’. The baby makes a noise and Maggie asks ‘are you hungry too?’, picking her up. Jackie coos ‘she’s so tiny’ and Maggie comments, ‘she didn’t feel so tiny coming out’. Maggie unbuttons her top and Simon watches as he chews his food. ‘You know I wasn’t much older than you when I had Charlie’, Jackie looks at Charlie then back at Maggie. Thomas hisses ‘Mum!’ A close-up is shown of the baby’s head and Maggie’s breast as baby Sophie suckles. ‘What? She’s hungry’. Maggie looks at him. ‘I fed you this way’. Maggie looks devious, and Thomas looks back at her awkwardly, unsure of what she’s going to say next, ‘you loved it’. Thomas sighs, embarrassed, as she continues ‘you couldn’t get enough’. Thomas rolls his eyes and Maggie laughs. After they blow out the candles on the birthday cake, Jackie kisses Thomas on the cheek and then Charlie, and Simon asks ‘how ‘bout one of those over here hey?’ They laugh as Maggie tells Simon to ‘leave the poor girl alone’. Charlie watches Jackie, rocking, with his hand down his pants. Jackie notices. ‘Oh my God’. She stands and stares at the wall. Maggie and Simon exclaim and stand Charlie up. Maggie states and signs ‘you know that’s private. You do that in your bedroom’. The voices intersect and overlap, Simon states ‘put your dick back in your shorts mate’. Thomas looks shocked as Jackie still stands looking at the wall. ‘Bad, Charlie, bad’, ‘don’t laugh’. Maggie kneels to pick the birthday cake off the floor, ‘I’m so sorry Jackie’. ‘How many times do we have to tell you that? You say sorry to Jackie and go and wash your hands all right mate?’ Thomas jumps up from the table, picks up the Super Nintendo and holds it above his head. The camera takes a moment to catch him and the rest of the family turn to look. ‘Thomas, don’t be ridiculous’ — ‘you put that down right now’. The scene slows to a pause before Thomas slams the Super Nintendo towards the floor and it splinters into pieces. This pause heightens the intensity of the scene and a fight immediately starts between Charlie and Thomas: Charlie hitting Thomas with a lamp and biting him, and Thomas hitting Charlie in the face, yelling ‘I hate him, I hate you’ as their parents desperately try to separate them. The violence is confronting, shot in close-up with a hand-held camera, viewers are positioned both alongside Charlie on the floor being hit repetitively by Thomas, and Thomas as he hits Charlie. As the fight ends, and the baby screams, Jackie and Thomas look at each other across the room with the camera settling on each of them for seconds, questioning the implications of Thomas’s act.
Like the tampon scene, this moment at the dinner table indicates the multiple fluid meanings that may be found in the fluids related to reproduction, both occasioning disgust and potentially erotic, particularly when experienced in public. Maggie breastfeeding at the table may be viewed as challenging this public/private divide. Young suggests ‘breasts are a scandal for patriarchy because they disrupt the border between motherhood and sexuality’ as a sign of ‘femininity’ and ‘sexuality’. Indeed, Garland-Thomson argues that in public space ‘the maternal breast has vanished’ with the rise of the ‘erotic breast’. That is, it is suggested that public breastfeeding is restricted due to its potential links with sexuality. It is this linking of sexuality and maternity that creates problems. As Young writes, ‘[t]o be understood as sexual, the feeding function of the breasts must be suppressed, and when the breasts are nursing they are desexualized.’ In the dinner scene this border is disrupted: Simon’s glance at Maggie breastfeeding as he eats highlights the juncture of the maternal breast both as a source of food and as erotic. As a ‘sensuous activity’, Alison Bartlett suggests breastfeeding in public disrupts expectations of public and private activities, with ‘lactating breasts when they are taken outside the home … capable of disrupting the borders of morality, discretion, taste and politics’ and ‘transforming legislation, citizenship, and cities themselves.’ While not exactly “public”, Jackie’s presence produces this moment as embarrassing for Thomas, with Maggie’s breastfeeding not just discussed in terms of food but enjoyment: ‘you loved it’, suggesting an erotic experience between baby Thomas and his mother. While Maggie’s comment merely teases Thomas’s censorious reaction, in this scene breastfeeding appears to be pleisureably experienced by Maggie, Simon, and baby Sophie.

Both erotic and ordinary, Charlie’s masturbation should be considered in light of the discursive positioning of breasts and tampons in the preceding scenes. Just as Thomas indicates that producing a breast to feed Sophie while Jackie is present at dinner is unacceptable, Charlie’s masturbation—demonstrating his sexuality as a young disabled man—explicitly challenges notions of acceptable behaviour. Throughout The Black Balloon, Charlie is constructed as explicitly sexual. While home with Thomas one night early in the

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121 Young, *Throwing like a Girl*, 190.
122 Ibid, 191.
124 Young, *Throwing like a Girl*, 199.
film, Charlie smiles as he draws a stick figure image of a man with a massive penis and a woman with massive breasts, labelled Charlie and Elle. When Thomas sees the image he pulls a face of disgust, pushing a cassette player towards Charlie, crumpling his picture. This rather crude image demonstrates Charlie’s similarity to the young men at Thomas’s school, demonstrating “normative” sexual desire and objectifying a woman alongside what may be assumed to be an image of himself. Thomas is, however, discomforted by the picture’s deliberate demonstration of Charlie’s sexuality. Sexuality is restricted for those deemed disabled, either associated with ‘asexuality’ or ‘hypersexuality’. While Charlie’s behaviour is criticised by Thomas, all three Mollison men publicly behave sexually toward Jackie: Simon’s flirtatious sexual insinuations reinstate gender norms throughout the dinner, while Thomas is only ever shown kissing Jackie in public. In this way, viewers are aware of both the pleasures and risks associated with public sexuality. Practicing CPR at school, Jackie asks whether Thomas is all right, pretends to scoop things from his mouth and leans close, listening to his breath. As she pretends to compress his chest her hair falls across his eyes. On her fourth pretend breath, she kisses him and he smiles as she returns to her compressions. After this shot, filmed in close-up, Jackie is shown to be in the middle of a class, demonstrating the pleasure in flirtation; in a secret stolen kiss, in desiring and being desired in a public space. This moment is shown in a sequence of intimate close-ups as viewers switch between Thomas’s and Jackie’s perspective; water drips onto Thomas’s face from her hair, and looking up, Jackie is shown in soft focus, sunlight on wet tendrils of hair backed by a blue sky. Later, while playing in the army reserve and caught in a storm, Jackie and Thomas kiss clad only in their underwear while sheltering in a concrete pipe with Charlie beside them looking on. In ignoring Charlie’s presence, Thomas and Jackie’s public sexual display may itself be viewed as inappropriate. The dinner scene, however, indicates a tension in the flirtations represented. Each male family member flirts with Jackie, attempting to determine what possibilities their relationship may hold, with Jackie’s presence requiring the relations between the family members to be reconfigured. What is different, however, is that while Simon’s and Thomas’s flirtatious advances are normalised, Charlie fails to correctly recognise the possibilities of his relationship with Jackie and

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128 Miriam Taylor-Gomez, “The S Words: Sexuality, Sensuality, Sexual Expression and People with Intellectual Disability”, Sex Disability 30, no. 2 (2012): 238. See also Tobin Siebers, Disability Theory (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008): 138; Duncan, Goggin, and Newell, “Don’t Talk about Me”, 157. The restrictions upon sexual experience for those who are physically and intellectually disabled are noted by Kath Duncan and Gerard Goggin who acknowledge restrictions on queer desires, suggesting “[i]f we take sexual access to mean that all disabled people should have the right to full expression of their sexualities, in whatever form they choose, then we indeed have a long way to go, both inside and outside of disability movements: “Something in Your Belly’ Fantasy, Disability and Desire in My One Legged Dream Lover”, Disability Studies Quarterly 22, no. 4 (2002): under “The Love Goddess Fantasy”.

129 CPR stands for Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.
quickly crosses the boundary between allowed public flirtation and disallowed masturbation, occasioning anger and violence from Thomas who is embarrassed by the uncertainty his brother’s behaviour creates.

Although masturbation is emphasised as a ‘private’ activity in this scene, little in Charlie’s life is “private”. Indeed, Tobin Siebers notes that

the idea of a sex life is ableist … . Being able-bodied assumes the capacity to partition off sexuality as if it were a sector of private life: that an individual has sex or a sex life implies a form of private ownership based on the assumption that sexual activity occupies a particular and limited part of life determined by the measure of ability, control, or assertiveness exercised by that individual.130

In this way, *The Black Balloon* highlights the privilege implicit in privacy.131 Siebers notes the provision of masturbation training to some intellectually disabled people, training which places emphasis on cause and effect and makes masturbation into a symbol of competence and agency, which Charlie fails to demonstrate in this scene.132 Similarly, throughout *The Black Balloon*, the Super Nintendo is highlighted as a tool of training, earned through Charlie’s good behaviour. While Simon and Maggie indicate with words and sign language that Charlie’s masturbation is inappropriate, Thomas attempts to “teach” Charlie a lesson, punishing him with the destruction of the Super Nintendo. Like locking Charlie in his room, this destruction constitutes an attempt to contain Charlie and make him acceptably normal. However while Thomas suggests at dinner that to not teach him to speak is to give up, Charlie fails to change throughout the film and viewers are positioned to see Thomas’s violent behaviour as unjustified.133 Thomas’s reactions of violence in the tampon and dinner scenes reflect the manner in which Thomas’s peers attempt to reinforce norms of sexuality and masculinity, but also the symbolic violence of normalisation. Thomas’s attempts to make Charlie talk constitute an act of ‘enforcing normalcy’134 with a need to ‘overcome’ disability,135 echoing past practices in which sign language was ‘historically coded as aberrant, undesirable or unhealthy’.136 In contrast, the film is coded to produce an equalising effect with the changing viewpoints during the fight creating empathy and

130 Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 138 (italics in the original).
131 Ibid, 143.
132 Ibid, 162-63.
133 Indeed, this fight may be viewed as a fight over Jackie or a fight over her honour. Violence is not unusual in the romance genre where it is viewed as a demonstration of love and ‘a precursor to happiness’: Taylor, “Romance and the Female Gaze”, 7. That is, while Jackie may tell Thomas later that night that ‘you scared the shit out of me’, Thomas is shown to be suitably repentant: he learns his lesson.
134 Goggin, “Ethics of Listening”, 495.
136 Goggin, “Ethics of Listening”, 495.
motivations for both characters. Mitchell and Snyder note that this ability to see disability as ‘socially lived’ in literature allows for intimacy, enabling ‘a unique space for contemplating the complexity of physical and cognitive differences that is absent from nearly every other discursive space.’137 In this way, *The Black Balloon* clearly links the body with significant social issues and highlights the problematic social focus on normalcy, critiquing Thomas’s attempt to reinstate “private” behaviours.

In this light, the concept of privacy may itself reinstate ideas of privilege. Arguing the inadequacy of theories of citizenship, Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi acknowledge the importance of recognising that public and private dimensions of life cannot simply be separated and yet they note that the ‘notion of citizenship as active public participation privileges “hegemonic masculinity” … as well as marginalizing women, amongst others, given their association with the private sphere.’138 In this way, Beasley and Bacchi note that ‘feminist citizenship literature construes the private as an obstacle, not as a resource’.139 In contrast, Beasley and Bacchi note that the body literally is what is social, since subjectivity is always embodied. Subjectivity, including political subjectivity, is fleshly, is made out of flesh. Indeed, the great insight of the body literature is that it highlights the point that ‘we’ do not ‘control’ our bodies, that ‘we’ are not separable from our bodies.140

In this way, *The Black Balloon* may be viewed as a representation of Beasley and Bacchi’s concept of ‘social flesh’, comprised of uncontrollable and fluid bodies which concentrate attention on the hidden processes of daily life. Beasley and Bacchi suggest ‘[a]ny attempt to consider embodied citizenship must for instance enable breastfeeding mothers and persons with disabilities to be constituted both as corporeal social actors and as citizens, as fleshly social participants’.141 They argue that

The aim of these examples is precisely to loosen citizenship from its almost exclusively public location and make bodies (e.g., birth, breasts, breastmilk and spinal cord damage) part of the participating subject, while at the same time grounding the notion of the Body, not just by gesturing towards the plural (bodies) but by lodging bodies in their physical and social particularities.142

That is, there is an emphasis on removing hierarchies of public and private experience.

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137 Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 166.
139 Ibid, 343.
140 Ibid, 344 (italics in the original).
141 Ibid, 349.
142 Ibid.
In displaying a series of very personal aspects of life, *The Black Balloon* demonstrates the very political and socially constructed nature of these personal matters. As Beasley and Bacchi argue, ‘this kind of reconfiguration is intended to give political substance to embodiment (that is, to give substance to the notion that all bodies need care and that bodies differ)’ rather than solely focussing on the disadvantage experienced by women and disabled people. Indeed, challenging neo-liberalism, Beasley and Bacchi suggest that a focus on ‘care’ can re-establish the hierarchy of neoliberalism with ‘this active independent self/citizen of neo-liberalism, … distinguished from dependent others.’ In contrast, they argue for an ‘embodied co-existence, in order to develop a new vocabulary which brings together embodiment and the socio-political.’ Beasley and Bacchi suggest that social flesh ‘conceptualizes citizens as socially embodied – as interconnected mutually reliant flesh – … it resists accounts of political change as making transactions between the “less fortunate” and “more privileged” … . Social flesh is political metaphor in which fleshly sociality is profoundly levelling.’ Further, they argue that social flesh marks our diversity, challenging the privileging of normative over ‘other’ bodies. While Maggie’s words to Thomas early in the film emphasise his responsibility towards his brother and suggest a discourse of care, mutual pleasure and enjoyment are also shown to be vital to this family. In *The Black Balloon* these characters sit beside one another, and while they may “care” for Charlie there is a sense of existing together, contributing to each others’ lives. Indeed, a focus on the diverse bodies of the Mollisons, each impaired at various stages of the narrative, highlights mutuality; Thomas is forced to move away from feeling sorry for Charlie, or sorry for himself, and instead recognise their coexistence.

This recognition emerges out of the violence of the dinner scene. Following the film’s climax, Thomas is portrayed hunched or in the foetal position in three successive scenes—as he listens to his brother getting stitches in the hospital; seated in a ball on the floor of the toilet; waiting on the curb outside Jackie’s house—crying and bodily expressing shame. Physically, shame is represented in the body: ‘[b]y dropping his eyes, his eyelids, his head, and sometimes the whole upper part of his body, the individual calls a halt to looking at another person, particularly the other person’s face, and to the other person’s looking at

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143 Ibid, 350.
145 Ibid, 285 (italics in the original).
146 Ibid, 292.
147 Ibid, 293.
him, particularly at his face'. While Garland-Thomson argues a smile is the opposite of a 
stare, Tomkins argues that ‘looking and smiling’ are the opposite of shame. Here 
Thomas’s shame indicates that he cares about his family, and the film demonstrates his 
attempt to reconcile the feelings of love and frustration. Down notes the film is intended 
to express ‘[w]hat it is like to be a sibling: frustrating, upsetting and embarrassing but also 
funny, uplifting and joyful’. Thomas represents Down within the film, and Down has 
noted that the decision to have two brothers instead of a brother and a sister allowed her 
to ‘explore a bit more, especially with the sexuality of Charlie’; a statement which 
acknowledges the unstable eroticism present within the film. In drawing from her own 
experience, Down produces a portrayal which recognises the emotional complexity of 
living with disability. In an interview with film reviewer David Stratton, Down states 
‘mostly the emotions of the film are, are sort of based, especially the character of Thomas, 
of the sort of resentment, the love, the embarrassment, you know, all that is very much 
how I felt growing up.’ As Elspeth Probyn writes, ‘[s]hame goes to the heart of who we 
think we are. … [W]hatever it is that shames you will be something important to you, an 
essential part of yourself’ and ‘is productive in how it makes us think again about bodies, 
societies, and human interaction.’ While this is not to say ‘that the person who has felt 
shame will always reflect consciously on the mechanism that caused him to blush’, Probyn 
suggests ‘that acknowledgement of fragility may serve as a basis from which to reevaluate 
one’s existence.’ Unlike guilt, which Probyn states ‘prompts recompense and then is 
done’ shame has ‘shades’ and ‘can revisit you long after the particular moment of shaming 
has passed.’ Thomas is not only shown to experience shame, but as a viewer I empathise 
with it; I feel discomfort watching, and much of this discomfort is experienced as shame 
as I reflect on my own experiences.

*The Black Balloon* concludes with laughter between Thomas and Charlie as they share a bath, 
an ending which makes both Thomas and Charlie recognisable. Garland-Thomson notes 
the importance of recognition, suggesting ‘[t]o be recognizable a person must appear as 

150 Tomkins, *Shame and Its Sisters*, 134.
153 Stratton, “The Black Balloon Interview”, *At the Movies*, February 27, 2008, 
154 Probyn, *Blush*, x.
155 Ibid, xviii.
156 Ibid, 64.
157 Ibid, 46.
158 See also Ellis, *Disabling Diversity*, 121.
distinct from a generic, generalized figure. To be recognized is to become familiar, no longer strange, to be seen and accorded the status of a fellow human.159 After staring at Thomas and Charlie for the duration of the film, viewers are encouraged to react favourably to the familiarity portrayed between Thomas and Charlie. Thomas explains his reactions to Charlie, relating a humourous anecdote from childhood of their father farting in the bath. While there is an erotics at play here in the depiction of pleasure, it is separated from the sexual, and when the film ends with Thomas questioning ‘did you just piss on my leg?’ this moment is shared with amusement and humour rather than disgust at the presence of another bodily fluid. Although Thomas makes a serious speech about his coming to terms with Charlie’s unpredictability, this is not as important as the breaking of tension created by their laughter as they play and splash within this familiar domestic environment; Maggie yells asking Simon if he has mowed the lawn ‘yet’, and Simon blames Rex, Maggie replying ‘I’m going to kill that bear’. In ending with the baby’s cry as the screen turns to black, it is indicated that this is not the end, suggesting a potential circularity of experience. This ending is playful and irreverent, with the urination demonstrating forgiveness, a recognition of the anecdote Thomas told, substituting farts with urine, and returning to the behaviour that created the narrative of the film: Charlie’s need to urinate leading Thomas into Jackie’s house. Moreover, their presence within the bath is intimate, a space which at the beginning of the film Thomas looked upon with joy. As Anna Hickey-Moody notes, ‘[m]oments of intimacy and physicality construct a diagram for an ethic of assembling the liveable, realistic, and inherently “human” disabled body on screen.’160 Viewers are encouraged to relate to Charlie in ways that move beyond abject or clichéd understandings and empathise with movement and sound. Considering the film Dance Me to My Song (1998), Hickey-Moody writes,

The pedagogical moment through which the film challenges its spectator and aurator to be worthy of these affects (to become in relation to them), constitutes a public pedagogy of disability through which both the body on screen and the body of the beholder/listener can be re-assembled in relation to the lived experience of disability.161

Intimacy is not merely depicted between Jackie and Thomas in this film, but between Thomas and Charlie, as Thomas learns to recognise the multiple intimacies his life entails. In this way, The Black Balloon contains a series of pedagogical moments which enable affect, empathy, and identification, and it is the feeling of flirtatious uncertainty produced by The

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159 Garland-Thomson, Staring, 158.
161 Ibid, 509.
Black Balloon—discomforting and joyful; sexy and gross—which allows for this recognition of the Mollisons.

While in this chapter I have considered the fluid and flirtatious intimacy in pedagogical moments throughout The Black Balloon, in chapter five I consider the ending of Easy A as a pedagogical moment, which, in highlighting the possibility of “passing” and repeating the endings of a range of texts, undermines the “happy” heteronormative ending. Like The Black Balloon, Easy A calls attention to the futile divisions between public and private and plays with conventions, making them visible, flirtatiously producing and sustaining confusion.
chapter five

ENDINGS

Figure 10: The shot pauses as Olive (Emma Stone) and Todd (Penn Badgley) ride away on Todd's neighbour's lawnmower. Still from Easy A (2010) Screen Gems.
Ending Embrace: Narrative Conclusions and Fake Orgasms

As the aspersions cast on her reputation come to a head, Olive (Emma Stone) arranges to perform at a school pep rally,¹ to market her website freoolie.com. Love interest Todd (Penn Badgley) organises for the band to play ‘the sexiest song in their repertoire’, “Knock on Wood”, and Olive, dressed in a corset, hotpants and fishnets with a red feather boa, emerges from a wood pile brought in by Todd. Olive ends this performance by suggesting she is going to have sex with Todd, who she stripped from his costume as the school mascot—a woodchuck—to a half-naked blue devil, stating ‘would you prefer to be here watching the Woodchucks, or watch me do one?’ The film then cuts to the conclusion of Olive’s webcast confession, in which she attempts to set the record straight, revisiting the events of the previous two weeks. The shot is taken from behind Olive’s shoulder, watching the webcast on the computer screen. As Olive talks, young men are shown watching the webcast at a basketball game, in a bedroom, and crossing the street. Olive states, ‘here you all are, waiting outside the bedroom door for me to kiss Todd, listening to me pretend to have sex with Brandon, paying me to lie for you, and calling me every name in the book.’ Her teacher Mr Griffiths (Thomas Haden Church) is shown watching, as Olive continues ‘and you know what, it was just like Hester in The Scarlet Letter …’ Mr Griffiths smiles and nods at her comment. Watching on a laptop downstairs, Olive’s parents (Patricia Clarkson and Stanley Tucci) also smile as she continues, ‘except that that’s the one thing the movies don’t tell you, how shitty it feels to be an outcast, warranted or not.’ As Olive finishes this statement, the opening chords of The Simple Minds’ song “Don’t You (Forget about Me)” play. As the song with which John Hughes’s The Breakfast Club (1985) concludes, this suggests both the ending of the film and the repetition of an eighties film: looking down from Olive’s bedroom window, Todd is shown standing on a red ride-on lawnmower, holding speakers above his head. Viewers alternate between looking up at Olive in her window from behind Todd’s shoulder, and looking down at Todd from behind Olive’s head. Olive asks ‘how did you know I love that song?’ While Olive explains she is still doing the webcast, Todd replies ‘screw ‘em they’ve had

¹ Often held at high schools or universities prior to sporting events, a pep rally is intended to garner support for the school team.
enough of you, figuratively speaking, I ah, borrowed my neighbour’s mower, I came right over.’ They joke and Olive laughs, ‘I’ll be right down’. Looking at the webcam, Olive explains ‘that’s Todd, not that I owe you guys any more confessions, but um, I really like this guy and ah, I might even lose my virginity to him’. Brandon (Dan Byrd) is shown watching, smiling, lying on a bed, while Olive’s younger adopted brother (Bryce Clyde Jenkins) raises his eyebrows. Olive continues, ‘I don’t know when it will happen, you know, it might be five minutes from now or tonight, or six months from now or on our wedding night, but the really amazing thing is, it is nobody’s God damn business.’ She smiles and runs away from the computer, towards the bedroom door. A series of shots show her male viewers, including a pastor, angry at her disappearance and their thwarted expectations: ‘I thought she was going to take her clothes off, Demi Moore took her clothes off’. We also see her more sympathetic viewers, her peer Marianne (Amanda Bynes) touches the cross that hangs around her neck and Olive’s best friend Rhiannon (Aly Michalka) looks at her phone and the camera slowly pans to a close-up of the message it contains: ‘Rhi- Sorry I lied to you.’ When the camera cuts back to Rhiannon’s face she looks as though she is crying. In Brandon’s room, an African American man comes and lies behind him, running his fingers through his hair, and they smile as they watch a scene from The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1939). From Olive’s bedroom window the camera pans, looking down as Olive runs out of the house with a screech of joy and jumps into Todd’s arms. He spins her around and then puts her down, and they embrace and kiss with the sun behind them producing a romantic glow. They climb on the lawnmower and, holding their fists in the air, ride away. The image pauses, as in the ending of The Breakfast Club, and a punk version of the same song begins, altering the lyrics to include an additional demand, ‘don’t you forget about me, suckers’ as Olive and Todd are shown slowly driving the lawnmower up the hill away from her house.

There is something odd about this normative ending of Easy A (2010) directed by Will Gluck. In concluding with a kiss—a romantic sign that signals the conclusion of the narrative and implies that the characters will live ‘happily-ever-after’—Easy A seems

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heteronormative; Olive reinstates her good girl status and begins a relationship with Todd, intimating future marriage. *Easy A* is framed by Olive’s live webcast and in the opening of the film Olive is shown to record her story, the webcast footage lacking the more polished finish of other scenes. In a scene which moves between Olive’s narration and enacted events of that same narrative, Olive recounts her lie that she had a date to get out of camping with her best friend Rhiannon’s family. At school the next week, Rhiannon quickly assumes she had sex and Olive reluctantly agrees in what constitutes her second lie to her best friend. Their conversation is overheard by a Christian peer, Marianne, who disciplines Olive by spreading the rumour that Olive had sex. As the film progresses, Olive’s sympathy for Brandon, who identifies as gay, leads to Olive agreeing to perform sex with Brandon at a party, assisting Brandon to pass as heterosexual and ‘a man’. Capitalising on her newfound notoriety, Olive is then asked to help the numerous young men who fail to conform to expectations of masculinity, and they pay her for the ability to spread rumours they were intimate with her. In intimately sharing Olive’s version of events, *Easy A* may be perceived as a public diary. Indeed, Olive’s website exacerbates this intimacy; freolive.com both symbolises her desire to become free of the rumours of her reported sexuality and implies free pornography. While Olive suggested to the pep rally audience that she would have sex with Todd in this ending, Olive replaces the “happy ending” of orgasm with the happy ending of the romantic comedy.

However, this happy ending is undermined by significant elements of the narrative. Firstly, Olive’s lie to Rhiannon is central to the plot, highlighting the importance of their friendship. As Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey note, “[p]leasure in the “progress of romance” lies in the solution to the narrative problems, and the affirmation of the desire to see “love conquering all”.” The major obstacle to be overcome here, however, does not reside with the love interest. Todd asked Olive to lie for him when they were twelve as he was too scared to kiss her and consequently Todd never believes the rumours about Olive’s reputation. Indeed, it may be the fact that the romantic ending is never in jeopardy that leads Christina Zwarg to suggest in an analysis of the film that Olive’s reputation is ‘never really tarnished’. In this way, the “happy ending” between Olive and Todd distracts from the real relationship at stake here, that between Olive and Rhiannon. Secondly, the rumours that surround Olive’s reputation and her performative sex with Brandon centre the concept of passing within the narrative. Just as in chapter three I noted the

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prioritization of friendship in *Glee*, suggesting touch enabled recognition of the intricacies of multiple relationships between characters, in this chapter I consider the way in which the concept of passing foregrounds the complex intimacies between Rhiannon and Olive which are left open in this heteronormative ending. I argue that this ending, like Olive’s sexual reputation, may be considered fake, merely repeating other texts and conventions. That is, I consider the ending of *Easy A* as performative, undermining the forward momentum of the heteronormative conclusion, and, in its repetition, focussing viewers on the present.

While throughout this thesis I have focused on film and television moments, drawing on the ethnographic work of Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose to suggest the potential resonance of moments of rupture, even after they have been reterritorialised within heteronormative expectations, in this chapter I consider the ending itself as a pedagogical moment. As a romantic comedy and teen film, this heteronormative ending is predictable: Celestino Deleyto notes that ‘[t]he intense focus of romantic comedy on gender relationships … means that its endings are almost universally placed within the context of a stable union of the heterosexual romantic couple’, that is, a ‘happy ending’. However, by deconstructing this moment in relation to the rest of the text, it is possible to recognise the challenges to convention that are implied. Endings are perceived as defining a text, described by Deleyto as holding the potential to ‘embody the ideological stance of the text’ and yet this ideological stance is undermined by the multiple ways in which a text may be read. As David Bordwell notes, considering textual interpretation, ‘the film’s ending plays a summarizing role in ordinary comprehension. … And the ending offers great freedom of interpretation because critics have available several heuristics for making it mean.’ Pointing to art cinema, Bordwell notes that ‘[i]f the plot or argument seems “deliberately” to leave some events or effects unresolved, the interpreter can find correspondingly “open” meanings’, indeed he suggests that ‘the interpreter may find a diegetically “closed” film semantically “open.”’ This undermining tendency may be found in the intertextual form of the text itself. Writing of melodrama, Christina Gledhill suggests as ‘a form founded on

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9 Ibid, 193.
plagiarism, the notion of an original or singular meaning is particularly inappropriate. While I will consider *Easy A*’s intertextual repetition later in the chapter, this repetition highlights that endings may be rendered inconclusive by the multiple readings which may be made of a text.

In ‘superficially’ wrapping up the romance ending but leaving open issues of friendship, Olive’s reputation, and the inequalities posed by the sexual double standard, viewers may be encouraged to ‘think further’ and question *Easy A*’s “happy ending”. Such analysis has held a significant role in feminist film criticism, with viewers encouraged to seek ‘narrative inconsistency … to elaborate and make visible the cracks in the supposedly airtight case that is male-dominant imagery.” Noting the way in which women are often recuperated in the closure of the ‘classic Hollywood narrative’, and restored to a “‘normative” female role” Annette Kuhn suggests that this attempt at recuperation ‘may not always be completely successful, … particularly in cases where the narrative sets up questions that cannot be contained by any form of closure.’ In determining this ‘excess’, Suzanna Danuta Walters notes the practice of ‘reading against the grain,’ where films or television shows are ‘read’ for their absences and ruptures in an attempt to reveal the internal contradictions and produce a reading or interpretation that challenges both the dominant reading of the film and its coherency and closure.

However, Walters warns ‘we must be careful not to “find” resistance and ideological slippage under every apparently hegemonic rock of popular culture, simply because we want it to be there’ suggesting the need to ‘expos[e] the male-centered plots of popular culture as well as that of constructing alternative readings which tell a more empowering story.” In ending the film with an embrace, *Easy A* repeats a convention of romance and the romantic comedy, and yet it seems fake, unreal, overborne, a ruse to which we return. In this chapter I explore the excesses that appear to undermine this ending and leave doubt in the mind of the viewer, drawing from Annamarie Jagose’s theory of fake orgasm to consider the way in which intimacy is performed and distanced in *Easy A*.

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14 Ibid, 35.
16 Ibid, 78 (italics in the original).
The film’s ending, with its suggestion of pornography and orgasm, can be linked to the teleology of sex, the “orgasmic” ending perceived as the natural conclusion of narrative. In her essay exploring desire and narrative, Teresa de Lauretis draws from the work of Robert Sholes to note ‘what seems to be the inherent maleness of all narrative movement’.18 She quotes his suggestion that ‘[w]hen we look at fiction with respect to its form alone, we see a pattern of events designed to move toward climax and resolution, balanced by a counter-pattern of events designed to delay this very climax and resolution.’19 Jagose also notes the narrative dimensions of ‘climax’ which ‘refers to both a sexual and a story payoff’,20 but in considering the film’s ending, I draw an analogy between the romantic ending of Easy A and Jagose’s theory of fake orgasm. In her book Orgasmology, Jagose considers the twentieth-century orgasm, suggesting that while in queer theorisations orgasm has been perceived as normative, it should be viewed as ‘a complexly contradictory formation, potentially disruptive of many of the sedimenting critical frameworks by which we have grown accustomed to apprehending sexuality’.21 and ‘an irregular and unpredictable formation’.22 Jagose considers the multiple contradictions inherent in the idea of orgasm, at once ‘biological and cultural, representable and unrepresentable, as well as personal and impersonal’ and analyses ‘the ways twentieth-century orgasm cannot be persuaded to pull itself together in a single authorizing narrative.’23 Just as representations of young women cannot be defined, so too orgasm refuses definition; like the texts and characters I have discussed in this thesis, orgasm may be understood in conflicting ways. Fake orgasm has been perceived as ‘unfeminist’,24 dominated by an emphasis on ‘male sexual gratification, the masculinist measure of which can be seen in its indifference to securing female pleasure’ and foregrounding heterosexuality.25 Jagose writes ‘[i]nsofar as the fake orgasm fakes orgasm, it has tended to be read as a poor semblance of the real thing’.26 Instead, Jagose suggests that ‘fake orgasm needs to be conceptualized outside … the logics of deceit … or dissatisfaction’ and argues that

[i]f … we resist classifying fake orgasm as a problem … it is possible to recognize fake orgasm as a sexual practice in its own right. … Fake orgasm, therefore, is not simply the simulation of orgasm but a dense complex of effects enfolding an

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20 Jagose, Orgasmology, 207.
21 Ibid, xii-xiii.
22 Ibid, 9.
23 Ibid, 34.
24 Ibid, 177.
26 Ibid, 197.
indexically female, twentieth-century heterosexual practice that, by putting into prominent circulation the problem of the legibility of sexual pleasure, troubles the presumed truth or authenticity of sex itself, recognizes that norms are self-reflexively inhabited by a wider range of social actors than is commonly presumed, and asks us to rethink the conditions of legibility for political agency.27

As a repetitive performance, fake orgasm ‘draws on the conventions or protocols of orgasm’ which are perceived as ‘impersonal’, requiring a conscious performance of intimacy28 and thus undermining the discourses of truth and authenticity that surround intimacy. Later in this chapter I consider the textual repetition within *Easy A* and the way in which it pulls the text in multiple directions, producing intimate moments and questioning their sincerity. But first, I analyse the concept of passing. Starting from the point of Olive and Rhiannon’s friendship, I consider Olive’s construction as a slut and the possibilities passing offers for undermining perceptions of authenticity, creating deception and placing definite understanding in question.

**Passing Conclusions: Performance, Reputation, and Unresolved Friendship**

It is Olive’s lie to best friend Rhiannon, a lie which demonstrates the virginal Olive’s ability to pass and perform as sexual, which forms the premise of *Easy A* and must be put right throughout the film and webcast. The webcast is clearly set up as a performance in this film and may be considered as a public speech, As Eleanor Hersey writes,

> Although kisses do not always represent the heroine’s constraint or surrender, the shift to public speeches reminds women that they are not going to find all their fulfilment in men. That may be a ‘real impossibility,’ but public speaking is a real possibility for any woman who wants to make a difference in the world.29

In a similar vein, Anita Harris notes that ‘[t]here is a new understanding that young women ought to make their private selves and “authentic voices” highly visible in public’30 and the webcast constitutes one such form, with ‘[y]oung women’s private thoughts, conversations, and feelings … cultivated as suitable for public scrutiny.’31 As Harris notes, ‘[t]he popularity

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27 Ibid, 205-06.
28 Ibid, 197-98.
29 Hersey, “Love and Microphones”, 152. Discussing the public speech in the conclusion of romantic comedies, Hersey suggests it may signal a shift to ‘comedy about women fighting to achieve their educational and professional goals, who fall in love as part of the story’: 158.
31 Ibid, 123.
of websites that offer live streaming video from a young woman’s bedroom or entire home is indicative of the immense interest in exposing and observing the private lives of girls.\(^{32}\)

While often such webcasts show nudity or sex, here Olive merely uses the suggestion of such a performance to obtain her audience. Olive’s video is ‘personal’, ‘emotion-laden’, and encourages identification\(^{33}\) and within the film it must be public to effectively express her opinions. This emotion finds a counterpoint in her explicit emphasis on the truth, a concept which sits uncomfortably with Olive’s ability to perform. Early in the webcast Olive mimics court procedure and the emphasis on determining one true meaning, commenting ‘let the record show that I, Olive Pendergast, of sound mind and below average breast size, swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Starting now.’ Noting the tradition surrounding confession, Feona Attwood comments, ‘[t]he remaking of confession as entertainment is, of course, symptomatic of a culture in which sex signifies both the truth of the self and its performance; authenticity and artifice.’\(^{34}\)

Here, the internet enables Olive’s performance, and her explicit blurring of public and private.

Social media use and particularly blogs have been associated with fears for youth privacy and ‘victimization’.\(^{35}\) Olive ironically addresses the concerns of those who express fears surrounding privacy in the opening of the film when she sarcastically states ‘what better way to share my private thoughts than to broadcast them on the internet’, responding to her own very public image within the school and the multitude of rumours about her sexuality. In this way, the webcast represents an empowering taking back of the story. As Sonia Livingstone notes, youth must continuously ‘make judgements that are difficult offline as well as online – whom to trust, what to reveal about yourself’,\(^{36}\) while danah boyd suggests ‘[i]n some sense, people have more control online—they are able to carefully choose what information to put forward’;\(^{37}\) certainly, Olive intentionally presents herself to persuade her audience. That is, Olive chooses what to disclose, an act which is itself

\(^{32}\) Ibid, 122.


performative. In the first part of the webcast, Olive directs the camera to face her, ‘[s]o here it is, part one’ Olive holds up a piece of paper to the camera. Torn from a book, it has a long subtitle, and Olive turns the camera so that both it and her can be seen in the frame, “The Shudder Inducing and Clichéd, However Totally FALSE Account of How I Lost my VIRGINITY TO A GUY At COMMUNITY COLLEGE”. Olive reads the title and continues, ‘let me just begin by saying there are two sides to every story. And this is my side. The right one.’ This presentation style is intimate: Olive sits in her bedroom and speaks directly to viewers. Considering the inclusion of television news in film, Carolyn Abbs writes that the news, ‘as “face-to-face” communication, … initiates the viewer into a “spatiality” within the context of real events, even as he/she remains observer.’ Similarly, Jo Henderson suggests that in the first person monologue ‘intimacy is particularly created by the proximity of the subject to the lens, which suggests a lack of mediation, thereby naturalising the pro-filmic events.’ In this way, the form of the webcast encourages viewers to see Olive and her story as real, sympathetic and identifiable, but most importantly as authentic, with the webcast enabling Olive to ‘manage’ her identity.

While Olive is the object of young men’s gaze in her webcast performance, she exploits the young men’s expectation of nudity in order to speak back, presenting her own opinion and discussing public details of a personal and private nature. This webcast is political and, located on the internet, is both public and private. Olive’s webcast and website constitute a border space, a space which Harris suggests ‘challenge[s] the notion that young women are politically disengaged by questioning meanings, places, and modes of engagement’ with ‘the borders between public and private … being reworked in a way that enables new modes of community, activism, and participation to be crafted.’ Indeed, like the content produced by young women in border spaces, this film acts to ‘trouble the notion that young women are now free of concerns and ready to embark on exciting lives of prosperity and opportunity’. Olive’s self-representation as a slut and her reflection on this process represent her agency within social constraints. Moreover, Olive demonstrates her

40 Livingstone, “Taking Risky Opportunities”, 394.
42 Harris, Future Girl, 158.
43 Ibid, 181.
44 Ibid, 159.
technological aptitude in producing this webcast. Like the camgirls Attwood considers, Olive may be seen to take on the power relations of looking, defying objectification and experimenting with ways of refusing, commanding and controlling the spectators’ gaze. … Here, agency is always a form of ‘making do’, but it is also one which exceeds the limitations within which it is necessarily produced, becoming a new way of doing femininity and making culture. Of course this is itself a contradiction; representations of Olive “authentically” managing her webcast appear within a Hollywood film, that is, while this is represented as authentic, the form itself is defined by artifice. Indeed, Harris notes that such forms of production are often appropriated for commercial purposes: ‘adapted, cleaned up, and sold back to [young women]’. As a commercial film, *Easy A* may simply represent just one more ‘stage managed’ presence. But in spite of this commercialisation there are a range of readings that may be made of this film. Considering *The L Word*, Margaret McFadden suggests that ‘[t]he show makes visible the contradictions inherent in its location on cable television, while simultaneously disrupting or reframing our familiar ways of seeing.’ In particular, McFadden suggests the representation of subversive artists and their artwork on the show ‘thematizes the ways that representation of gender and sexuality have shaped our understandings of ourselves and the world’. In representing artists ‘who are explicitly challenging and redefining the conventions that have historically had so much power’ McFadden suggests ‘*The L Word* invites viewers to consider that much the same work might be done within the convention of series television’. That is, Olive can be seen to present a space for critiquing gender conventions, and while the form of the film may be read as commercialising alternative representations, the film nevertheless portrays Olive communicating her personal experience of the sexual double standard, becoming a feminist who ironically chastises her peers for condemning her as a slut.

*Easy A* is presented as a response to the governance of gender and sexuality that occurs in school, particularly the rumours used to discipline those who are perceived to step out of line. The emotion-laden events articulated by Olive expose significant social issues, merging the personal and political. As Melissa Gregg notes, women’s blogs are often

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45 Attwood, “Through the Looking Glass”, 212.
46 Harris, *Future Girl*, 165.
49 Ibid, 435.
50 Ibid.
perceived as less valuable given ‘their often domestic and personal sphere of reference’, however such blogs allow issues, experiences, and voices generally ignored to be considered. In contrast, David Buckingham notes that video blogs, can contain ‘intimate personal confessions’, leading him to suggest they are ‘video diaries’, or they can journalistically ‘address… social and political issues’. In this pedagogical moment Olive combines these two elements: she discusses intimate personal matters, confessing to the events revealed in the film, but these issues also correspond to important social concerns in the media, such as teenage sexuality, reputation, homophobia, and bullying. As such, Olive can be viewed as rupturing expectations of young women’s journalistic ability, giving authority to the voices of young women and emphasising the importance of respecting the dual political and personal nature of blogs rather than devaluing them for their intimate style. Olive also denies the expectations of the male viewers, leaving them wanting and reserving her right to have sex in her own time. Noting in the conclusion to the film that it ‘is nobody’s God damn business’, Olive reinstates her right to sexuality and to pleasure.

Olive’s good girl status is complicated by her passing as slut throughout the film, positioned at the juncture of contradiction: innocent yet sexual, virginal but a slut, like Juno challenging conceptions of the girl body. As white, heterosexual, and middle-class, with the support of understanding parents, Olive is in a privileged position and able to disrupt gendered understandings of the girl. The presence of this contradictory body can, like riot grrl, be seen to act as a ‘practice of bricolage which messed up child and adult, girlish girl and man, practicality and glamour, mainstream and alternative style’ and it ‘work[s] to reinvent and recirculate all kinds of meanings.’ In this way, Olive both visually and verbally refuses to remain silent, embracing contradictions. Such contradictions around female sexuality are themselves a convention of teen film. Catherine Driscoll writes, ‘[t]een film plays out the questionable sex of girls in relation to a developmental narrative for which sex names multiple possible but not predetermined markers’ and notes that ‘sex as a transformative right of passage’ is ‘one convention teen film routinely cites but rarely fulfills’. In performing, but not actually experiencing, this right of passage, Olive preempts

32 Ibid, 153.
35 Driscoll, “She’s All That’: Girl Sexuality and Teen Film”, in *Girls’ Sexualities and the Media*, ed. Kate Harper et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 94.
its fulfilment, an action which places the transformative presumptions that surround the sex act in question. While _Easy A_ may be seen to repeat the morals of the teen film, that unless sex is positioned as ‘romantic’ it is ‘potentially harmful’, as Driscoll notes, ‘if the sex of teen film is pedagogical it teaches less normative sexuality than the problematic relations to normative sexuality that good citizens should have.’ Olive’s ability to pass and the contradictions that surround her representation potentially produce her sexuality as non-normative and clearly imply that appearances can be deceiving.

Passing is particularly highlighted in Olive’s interactions with Brandon. While initially Olive merely wears tighter clothes and high heels following her lie, the rumours snowball after a student in English class suggests Olive, like Hester in _The Scarlet Letter_, should sew an “A” on her shirt, the symbol used in _The Scarlet Letter_ to identify and shame an adulterer. Olive calls the girl a twat in response, landing herself in detention with Brandon, who states he is in detention for calling the principal a fascist, noting the principal’s homophobia. Discussing the abuse Brandon receives at school, Olive suggests he too should pass, that is, use the school’s rumour mill to position himself to produce an alternative public persona. While Brandon notes this is problematic, Olive suggests ‘you have to do everything you can to blend in, or decide not to care.’ The governance Brandon and Olive face from those at school, given their perceived transgressive sexuality, demonstrates ‘the cultural demand that we produce and articulate ourselves as coherent, intelligible, integral and recognizable, and very often in ways which Foreclose on the possibility of being seen, read and understood as complex, multiply-constituted and always-contingent subjects’. Passing enables the possibility of existing as something else, beyond ‘the requirement or demand for explanation that regiments and regulates the sexual self into a constrained category of sexual identity coherence.’ Indeed, analogy may be made to Sandy in _Grease_ (1978). Michael Borgstrom suggests that Sandy passes, writing that ‘[b]y claiming an identity different from the good girl audiences believed her to be, Sandy disrupted cultural binaries that aimed to organize personal identity into neat, understandable categories.’ While Olive’s performance as bad girl appears to be reterritorialised at the end of the film,

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proclaiming to reveal her “true” self in her narration, Olive uses ‘the ostensible knowledge generated by identity politics for its utility as critique’. This knowledge recognises the ambiguity continuously in play, with Olive unable to be definitively categorised as good or bad.

Identified as gay by his peers, however, this ambiguity does not appear to be available to Brandon. When Brandon asks Olive to help him pass he highlights the current unbearable circumstances at school, ‘every day at …’ he stutters, ‘at school is like I’m being suffocated and sure we can sit and fantasise all we want about how things are going to be different one day, but this is today and it sucks … just help me, ‘cause I can’t take another day of this, I don’t know what I’ll do.’ While Brandon’s experience of exclusion is not restricted to queer youth in Easy A and he is positioned alongside other characters who sit outside a white attractive heterosexual ideal of masculinity, his comment places focus on an unbearable present rather than a hopeful future, implicitly addressing issues present in the It Gets Better social media campaign launched soon after the film’s release. Consisting of a website to which videos are uploaded in which people ‘demonstrat[e] first-hand that there is reason for troubled, vulnerable and at-risk queer youth to maintain a sense of hope and thus not fall into despair or hopelessness that exacerbates suicide risk’, It Gets Better suggests ‘no matter how unbearable or painful life is, a queer life will be – in the future – and as an adult – a liveable life.’ Rob Cover notes that this produces ‘youth within a linear pattern of development towards a sense of stability and normalcy as queer adult’ with resilience found in ‘the capacity to wait patiently for adulthood’. However, as Brandon identifies, it is the present that is the problem, and while It Gets Better advocates waiting over ‘research, preventative change or interventional resources’, in Easy A, one solution posed is to pass. While Cover notes that the idea of passing is rarely thought of in positive terms, ‘frequently … presented as a risk factor for suicidality, an added pressure on queer youth’, he notes that in situations where vulnerability exists through the portrayal of ‘non-

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61 Ibid, 155 (italics in the original).
63 Easy A was released on 17 September 2010 and the It Gets Better campaign was launched on 21 September 2010.
64 Cover, Queer Youth Suicide, 59.
65 Ibid, 62.
66 Ibid, 59.
67 Ibid, 72.
68 Ibid.
normative sexuality’, passing is neither ‘unethical or dishonest’. As Lynne Hillier and Lyn Harrison note, for queer youth the sense of multiple identities may be constant, with many experiencing their homosexual identity in private, while publicly working to ‘pass… as heterosexual’.

While passing is explicitly discussed in this film in relation to homosexuality, the concept places characters and their sexual identities in question, highlighting that there is no way of “knowing” any of the characters. Indeed, while in Olive’s bedroom Brandon suggests he is sexually experienced, using sexual terms and telling Olive she doesn’t understand them as she is a virgin, during the performative sexual encounter it is the virginal Olive who directs Brandon what to do, instructing him of the noises to make as they literally perform heterosexuality for the audience at the bedroom door. In spite of her sexual inexperience, Olive exhibits popular sexual knowledge, stuffing her underwear into his back pocket as ‘evidence’ before he leaves the room, a reference to the film *Sixteen Candles* (1984) in which a young woman’s underpants are taken as evidence of having had sex. Discussing film classification, Driscoll notes ‘[t]o be cleanly teen the genre’s characteristic reference to sex must not include realistic expectations of sex, even if these expectations are set aside only by a fantasy setting’ and here sex is made particularly unrealistic, performed by jumping on the bed, with fake orgasm achieved when Olive knees Brandon in the crotch. Rather than focusing on identity in teen film, Driscoll notes ‘heterosexual sex is a statement about identity in process where no sexual statement or position is the last word’ in contrast to the coming-out film where ‘sex is identity’. Driscoll suggests ‘[t]o also work as queer, a teen film … must allow queer sexuality to be incomplete and thus available to teen film stories about (im)maturity.’ While Brandon is identified as gay, his ending in *Easy A* remains inconclusive. At the end of the film rumours once again “out” Brandon; Olive’s school peer informs her that Brandon ‘skipped town with some big hulking black guy’ and left a note stating ‘I’m gay, bitches’. While this reinstates Brandon’s identity as gay, his capacity to pass remains, and the accuracy of Brandon’s ending may itself be questioned; rather than

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70 Ibid, 117.
71 Hillier and Harrison, “Building Realities Less Limited Than Their Own: Young People Practicing Same Sex Attraction on the Internet”, *Sexualities* 10, no. 1 (2007): 89. They note that the internet allows youth to ‘practice’ with their ‘experiences in each space impacting on their use of the other’: 87. In contrast to considering the internet as a potential space of safety, see Cover, *Queer Youth Suicide*, 61.
72 In “*Easy A*”, Zwarg has attempted to relate the contradictions among characters to the source story *The Scarlet Letter*, however, I believe the inconsistencies and contradictions among characters merely demonstrate the pointlessness of attempting to identify these characters, and the mistakes that can be made relying on stereotypes.
73 Driscoll, “She’s All That”, 100.
74 Ibid, 97 (italics in the original).
75 Ibid, 98.
speaking to Brandon, Olive relies on rumour, ensuring that the authenticity of this ending remains uncertain. Indeed, given that Brandon is shown watching the 1939 film *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the ending of *Easy A*, one of many versions and endings Mark Twain’s story of Huckleberry Finn has had, the possibility of multiple and potentially fake endings appears to be highlighted for Brandon, just as it will be for Olive.76

While Brandon passes as straight after their sexual performance, with his achievement of a heterosexual masculinity leading to his acceptance by his tormentors, as a young woman Olive is critiqued by her peers for her behaviour. Following Olive’s performed sex with Brandon, Rhiannon calls to tell Olive that ‘everyone is calling her a dirty skank’. Initially, Olive’s lie constitutes a moment of intimacy with Rhiannon, sharing the private story of Olive’s virginity loss. However, as a lie, this also demonstrates Rhiannon’s failure to listen and her refusal to believe that Olive didn’t have sex, and Rhiannon’s assumptions enable Olive to feel ‘superior’ as she realises her own capacity to pass as sexual. Their friendship remains in the background throughout the film, literally in scenes shot in Olive’s bedroom where changing photographs on Olive’s computer feature the girls, acting as a constant reminder of their friendship even as it falls apart. Deleyto suggests that feminism’s impact upon film is to ‘foreground female friendships’ with ‘heterosexual love and desire’ playing ‘second fiddle’.77 In this moment of the phone call, the potential contamination indicated in the adjective ‘dirty’ suggests the need to disassociate from Olive, but Rhiannon’s phone call signals both anger at her exclusion, having to find this news out from someone else, and jealousy; Ringrose suggests ‘slut-shaming appears to express a dynamic where jealousy gets sublimated into a socially acceptable form of social critique of girls’ sexual expression’.78 Historically, the term slut ‘props up a sexual double standard, marks female sexuality as deviant, and works to control girls’ behaviour’, enforcing ‘sexual norms’.79 Olive’s costume is described by her father as like that of a ‘high-end stripper’ and may be seen as an attempt

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76 The 1939 film *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has a different ending to that in the book by Mark Twain. Endings of texts change in accordance with public conventions and contexts and this representation may highlight the inauthenticity of endings. In addition, the story of Huckleberry Finn is known for having homosexual overtones, discussed in Leslie Fiedler’s 1948 paper “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in Huck Honey!” *Partisan Review*, 25 (1948): 664–671: Zwarg, “Easy A”, 219-25. While in running away from home Brandon may be viewed akin to Huckleberry Finn, this flippant scene may fail to acknowledge the potential for ‘isolation, hopelessness or harassment or subsidiary risks such as family rejection and homelessness’ in coming out in this way: Cover, “Identity”, 116.


to ‘re-appropriate’ slut ‘by upsetting categories, boundaries and hierarchies.’
However, there is danger in this representation; as Rosalind Gill notes, ‘respectable sexiness is always … “at risk”’. Indeed, Ringrose and Renold note that

the re-signifying potential of slut has specific age-bound dynamics. … While some girls may ‘try on’ slut as part of the pleasures and pain of participating in their peer sexual cultures, it remains a tricky, slippery site of potential injury and sexual regulation.\(^82\)

Initially, Olive capitalises on her new notoriety, with ambiguous tight black clothes perpetuating the suggestion of Olive’s sexuality and enabling Olive to negotiate her place.\(^83\) However, this is shown to be a risky line to take. In placing Olive beside young men who are rewarded for becoming sexual while she is derided, the complexity of being a ‘phallic girl’ is highlighted. Although women may perform elements of masculinity such as sexual promiscuity, there are, Angela McRobbie notes, ‘strict conditions which ultimately ensure gender re-stabilisation.’\(^84\) Here, Olive confronts these expectations. After hanging up on Rhiannon, Olive throws the phone on the bed. She runs to her wardrobe and pulls out all her clothes. In voiceover she explains ‘people thought I was a dirty skank, fine, I’d be the dirtiest skank they’d ever seen.’ In the next shot, Olive is shown entering her bedroom door with multiple shopping bags and then tearing and cutting fabric, sewing a red letter “A” onto a range of corsets. Olive’s rejection of her whole wardrobe in favour of these purchases acknowledges commodified sexuality; in buying a ‘sexy’ product, Olive can be seen to produce herself ‘as confident and sexy’.\(^85\) Non-diagetically, the song “Bad Reputation” by Joan Jett plays.\(^86\) Lyrical the choice of “Bad Reputation” is obvious, ‘I don’t give a damn ‘bout my bad reputation’. However, it also has an association with angry, alternative and potentially feminist characters.\(^87\) Originally part of The Runaways, Joan Jett has been described as ‘the original riot grrrl’ and is regarded as a key influence on the

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\(^80\) Attwood, “Sluts and Riot Grrrls”, 240.


\(^82\) Ringrose and Renold, “Slut-Shaming”, 342.

\(^83\) Attwood, “Sluts and Riot Grrrls”, 242-43.


\(^85\) Jackson and Vares, “Media Sluts”, 135.


\(^87\) For example, Bad Reputation is also used in the films *10 Things I Hate about You* (1999) and *Kick Ass* (2010).
movement. “Bad Reputation” highlights the injustice of Olive’s situation and her anger, anger that her father notes sounds like the taboo sex she is not having.

The next day at school, Olive walks down a corridor, in a scene which may be contrasted to the opening scene in which Olive feels invisible and consequently is knocked over by a girl who is oblivious to her presence. Such scenes are often used in teen films to demonstrate a transition and change in perception. In the scene following her transformation, Olive becomes visible. Peggy Phelan has commented that ‘[i]f representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture. The ubiquity of their image, however, has hardly brought them political or economic power.’ While Olive may initially feel invisible, as the film progresses, her visibility increases exponentially. Walking in slow motion, a close-up is shown of her left breast and she wears a black corset over which is sewn a red “A”, explicitly critiquing her classmates’ judgement and highlighting her performance and reappropriation of this sign. When the shot pans up to her face Olive wears the Ray Bans worn by Tom Cruise in 1980s teen film Risky Business (1984). Close-ups of her face are interspersed with midshots of people staring, some with shock, some with interest, and she smiles smugly as she walks. In this way, Olive uses femininity and sexualisation to empower herself. Rather than yelling angrily at Rhiannon for her betrayal, Olive flirts with Ansen, the guy Rhiannon likes, and Rhiannon’s reaction emulates a relationship break up stating ‘we’re officially over’ and requesting the return of clothing. Olive performs a burlesque style in her dress, supported by the song “Sexy Silk” as she walks down the corridor. As Attwood writes, burlesque ‘combin[es] “satire and sexiness”’ and ‘the “tease” of burlesque allows performers to take control of the performance environment’, viewed as a space ‘for playing with the norms and ideals of sexy femininity.’ In keeping with such ideas, Olive’s performance as explicitly sexual is highlighted as a construction, with this moment enabling a critique of her peers. While Olive is punished by the religious Marianne and the sex-positive Rhiannon for her presumed behaviour, Olive deliberately speaks back,

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90 In Risky Business, Tom Cruise’s character has sex with a prostitute and then in order to pay for the chaos that results, becomes a pimp, getting into college in the process.
91 This song contains a series of cat and pussy metaphors (a euphemism for vagina) in response to Rhiannon’s accusing comment ‘you don’t have to go throwing your cat at everyone’. See Jessica Cornish, “Sexy Silk,” written by Jack Hammer, Jessica Cornish, Justin Broad, Ashton Millard, and Paul Herman, recorded 2010, Ash, Paul, and Justin Productions.
92 Attwood, “Through the Looking Glass”, 206.
ironically adopting ‘the garb of femininity’ to demonstrate the continued ‘existence of patriarchal law and masculine hegemony’.

In contrast to a transformation in which young women become conventionally feminine, Olive literalises the abusive comments of her peers and demonstrates the hypocrisy of desire for such sexuality and its simultaneous denigration. Thus, in her transformation, Olive becomes feminist, a feminism which can be seen in her adoption of these signs which signify slut and her ability to pass.

In performing in this way, Olive draws from a number of elements of a postfeminist media culture. In defining this concept, Gill argues, '[t]oday’s media culture has a distinctive postfeminist sensibility organized around notions of choice, empowerment, self-surveillance, and sexual difference, and articulated in an ironic and knowing register in which feminism is simultaneously taken for granted and repudiated.' Within *Easy A* Olive is shown to make the choice to perform as sexual. She is shown to experience empowerment in her ability to blog and confront others’ perceptions of her and ironically dresses in a slutty way when comment is made about her reputation. *Easy A* thus conforms to the expectations of a postfeminist sensibility, and yet in making Olive’s performance explicit and demonstrating the constraints that influence her decisions, the role of context is acknowledged. Contrary to analyses of postfeminism in which choice is illusory, Olive is neither completely free or without freedom. Indeed, while Gill suggests ‘irony has become a way of “having it both ways”, of expressing sexist, homophobic or otherwise unpalatable sentiments in an ironized form’, Olive identifies sexism and its constant presence.

Released a year before the SlutWalks I described in the introduction, *Easy A* identifies the ways in which women continue to be objectified, with restrictions placed upon sexual behaviour, blaming the ‘victim’, and subjection ‘to deeply sexist social and cultural values, or what some activist groups are defining as “rape culture”’. As the film draws to a climax, Olive is subjected to assumptions that she is easy and available when Ansen kisses her against her will in a car park, touching on the potential for sexual

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93 McRobbie, *Aftermath*, 64.
95 Ibid, 271.
97 Attwood, “Through the Looking Glass”, 206; See also Ringrose, *Postfeminist Education*, 67.
98 Gill, “Postfeminist Media Culture”, 159.
violence. In this way, the film recognises the potential for ‘victim blaming’ based on the rumours surrounding Olive and her attire, while simultaneously identifying Ansen’s behaviour as inappropriate, as he fails to listen to Olive’s rejection of his advances.

This scene, in which Olive fends off Ansen, is significant both for Ansen’s behaviour, but also for the emphasis Olive places on her friendship with Rhiannon. While Olive initially flirts with Ansen merely to highlight Rhiannon’s betrayal, calling Olive a dirty skank, when Rhiannon rejects Olive, standing with those holding signs stating “slut” and calling for Olive’s expulsion, Olive accepts a date with Ansen. Upon realising Rhiannon is also in the restaurant and might see them, Olive notes that her behaviour is wrong and tells Ansen that despite the fact she isn’t speaking to Rhiannon, she is still her best friend and must call off the date, prioritising friendship. Although Olive later finds out that Rhiannon had kissed Todd, violating such a code of friendship, Olive nevertheless appears to attempt to regain Rhiannon’s friendship, singing “Knock on Wood” at the pep rally. Olive sings ‘I don’t want to lose you, this good thing that I got … ‘cause your love is better than any love I know.’ As she sings the chorus for a second time, ‘[i]t’s like thunder, lightning’ she points at Rhiannon, singing “[t]he way you love me is frightening’ as she body rolls before kissing Rhiannon on the cheek and placing her feather boa around her neck. While this performance may reference Olive’s wish that her life be like an eighties movie such as Ferris Bueller's Day Off (Ferris Bueller) (1986), it also acts as an attempt to win Rhiannon back, overcoming the sexual politics at play that pit her against her friend, the ‘battles over control, power, and boys’ that risk destroying their supportive relationship. Significant obstacles are placed between Olive and Rhiannon throughout the film and as I have noted, Olive’s quest to regain their friendship is left open at the end of the film. While the film may end with Olive and Todd’s embrace, it seems that, just as in other romantic comedies, the union with the male love interest ‘never actually makes us forget that the true narrative interest of the films lies in the relations between the women’. In this way, Olive’s text message, apologising to Rhiannon as Olive concludes the webcast, reminds viewers of their friendship and suggests the webcast itself is an extended public and yet somewhat intimate apology for her lie. While this ending may allow the film to pass as a romance, it exists

102 In the film 10 Things I Hate about You, Patrick (Heath Ledger) sings with the school band in attempt to win back the affection of Kat Stratford (Julia Stiles).
104 Deleyto, “Between Friends”, 175.
beside a friendship which is unresolved, questioning the exclusivity of heteronormative relationships.

**Repeating Endings: Intertexuality ‘with a Vengeance’**

Not only does *Easy A* draw on the convention of the embrace in its ending; as a particularly intertextual film, it specifically repeats the endings of other texts, producing the possibility of multiple meanings. But in this repetition of a happy ending, *Easy A* may also be perceived as unrealistic. Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake suggest in ending with a happy ending and ‘the terminal kiss, the spectator is screened from the real impossibility of what is proposed.’ Moreover, Stevi Jackson suggests that the endings of romance narratives indicate that ‘the excitement lies in the chase, not in the “happily ever after”’. She argues that happy endings ‘enable… readers to relive that excitement over and over again, without having to confront the failing and routinization of romantic passion.’

Thus, there is pleasure to be found in the repeated ending. Indeed, while recognising the critiques of romance, Pearce and Stacey suggest ‘[w]e may (as individuals, as communities, as nations) no longer believe in love, but we still fall for it’ with the survival of romance resting in its *narrativity*. In the same way that romantic love may be thought of as the phenomenon which … is ‘always already written’, so it is liable to perpetual *re-writing* and it is its capacity for ‘re-scripting’ that has enabled it to flourish at the same time that it has been transformed.

That is, while genres such as romance repeat, as Steve Neale notes, genre is also ‘marked fundamentally by difference, variation, and change’ with genre continually developing. Similarly, Gledhill suggests that ‘genres are fictional worlds, but they do not stay within fictional boundaries: their conventions cross into cultural and critical discourse, where we –

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105 In considering a multitude of remakes in her chapter “Desire and Narrative”, de Lauretis argues ‘[t]he most exciting work in cinema and in feminism today is not anti-narrative or anti-Oedipal; quite the opposite. It is narrative and Oedipal with a vengeance, for it seeks to stress the duplicity of that scenario and the specific contradiction of the female subject in it, the contradiction by which historical women must work with and against Oedipus’: *Alice Doesn’t*, 157. This comment highlights the intentionality entailed in the excess of postmodern narrative.


111 Ibid, 190.
as audiences, scholars, students, and critics – make and remake them." The ending of *Easy A* retells stories and appears to be hyper-conscious of the manipulation of narrative and conventions, and it is this repetition which I reflect upon in this section.

Repetition is not only endemic within romance; as a particularly intertextual film, *Easy A* draws from and explicitly repeats nineteenth-century novels and eighties teen films. Noting the importance of repetition to the teen film genre, Driscoll suggests that ‘teen film works largely by telling us things we already know about characters and situations that we are presumed to instantly recognize.’ Further, Driscoll writes, ‘[t]he genre’s unfolding history has been closely tied to the repetition, monitoring, and entertaining disruption of gendered sex roles presumed to be integral to the production of viable social identity.’ Indeed, Driscoll notes that while it is suggested progress has been made, reflection upon the history of teen film ‘encourages us … to reframe the history of teen film and its classification as uses of girl sexuality. … Teen film is clearly both on the side of articulating girl sexuality and makes its ongoing restraint visible.’ These gendered issues can be seen throughout *Easy A* and the texts it draws upon.

Indeed, as a teen film and a modern day adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), a text often studied in the United States school curriculum, *Easy A* may be considered in a similar manner to the adaptation of Shakespearean texts. Driscoll notes similarities between Shakespeare and teen film, suggesting that ‘Shakespeare is a known reference not only for people educated in English literature but people trained in Western history by its embedding in popular culture’. Considering the adaptations of Shakespeare made for teens, Driscoll notes ‘the “classic teen” adaptation subgenre … uses the canon to represent adolescence as a field of transcultural and transcultural truth in which the audience needs to be educated’, suggesting teen film adaptations ‘both embed… the story in contemporary youth culture and draw… from comparison between past and present a story about how adolescence works.’ In *Easy A* Olive explicitly notes the link between themes in texts taught in school and adolescent experience, stating ‘the books you read in class always seem to have some strong connection with whatever angsty adolescent drama

113 Driscoll, *Teen Film*, 83.
114 Driscoll, “She’s All That”, 94.
115 Ibid, 104 (italics in the original).
116 For a detailed consideration of the adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter* and *Easy A*, see Zwarg, “*Easy A*”.
117 Zwarg, “*Easy A*”, 220.
118 Driscoll, *Teen Film*, 140.
119 Ibid, 144.
is going on. *The Scarlet Letter* follows Hester Prynne, a woman who bears a child in the absence of her husband leading to the presumption of adultery. Hester is punished and excluded by the community in which she lives and forced to wear a red letter “A” on her dress. The themes listed on the blackboard in Mr Griffiths’ English class—‘public humiliation’, ‘shameful exposure’, ‘ostracized’—match Olive’s experience and highlight Olive’s empathy with Hester. In this way, this adaptation explores the similarities between puritanical America and the Christian students at Olive’s school. But in identifying the classroom teaching of the text, the film also highlights an awareness that *The Scarlet Letter* is a text taught in high school and, by reproducing a familiar school text, *Easy A* guarantees itself an audience.

Early in the film, Olive draws attention to the multiple adaptations that have been made of *The Scarlet Letter*, summarising the text for viewers in her webcast and explicitly drawing attention to the film’s intertextual nature. In her summary of the novel, Olive draws from a 1934 film version, concluding that Hester dies a saint. The clips from the 1934 version which accompany her narration show a man sitting at the bedside of a sick woman; however, this clip is taken from the middle of the film and the dying woman is not Hester but merely a sick townsperson. In this way, Olive’s summation reorders the images of the film to support her version of the story. Indeed, while the 1934 film ends with the death of Hester’s lover, the Reverend Dimmesdale, in the novel Hester wears the “A” for the rest of her long life, the symbol’s meaning said to change from ignominy to become ‘something to be sorrowed over, and looked upon with awe, yet with reverence too.’ Moreover, the narration in the novel of *The Scarlet Letter* explicitly questions the authenticity of events, acknowledging the range of sources from which the events of the novel are drawn and noting the diversity of accounts, placing the moments prior to Dimmesdale’s death in question. In this way, although the narrator states that the moral of the story is ‘be true’, this is undermined by the multiple interpretations that may be made of the events of the novel, with no “truth” available. That is, *The Scarlet Letter’s* ending pivots on the possibility of multiple interpretations, with people believing what they wish to believe, an understanding which is multiplied by the three versions of the text acknowledged in the film. Indeed, while Olive states that the 1934 version is the ‘original’, at least seven films of *The Scarlet Letter* were made before 1934, and yet, in identifying that multiple adaptations of the text exist, Olive acknowledges the questionable authenticity of all endings.

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121 Ibid, 201.
In identifying and retrieving adaptations of *The Scarlet Letter*, Olive also acknowledges its most commercialised adaptation, the 1995 “freely adapted” version of *The Scarlet Letter* starring Demi Moore. Universally panned, the 1995 version is known, primarily, for Demi Moore’s nudity, but it is also significant in that it concludes with a happier ending; Dimmesdale and Hester leave the town with their daughter, riding off in a cart. In this version, the lovers are described by the narrator, Hester’s daughter, as spending a period of their lives together before Dimmesdale’s death at a point not shown in the film. While Olive derides the 1995 version, as her experience continues she finds that the novel of *The Scarlet Letter* does not hold a solution to her current predicament, stating ‘I actually re-read *The Scarlet Letter* to see how Hester dealt with it, it turns out she bore her punishment in humble silence, which are two concepts I am not comfortable with.’ In this way, Olive may be viewed in line with many women in contemporary romance discourses, who refuse to ‘accept their place within classic narrative trajectories’. In speaking back, Olive accords with Demi Moore’s Hester and may repeat the ending of the 1995 film, like Hester riding away, in this case, on a lawnmower.

But in this lawnmower ending, *Easy A* also explicitly repeats the conclusion of 1987 film *Can’t Buy Me Love*, alongside moments from a series of eighties teen films Olive catalogued in her webcast. As rumours circulate throughout the school detailing her imagined indiscretions, Olive laments her real life lack of a boyfriend, asking

> Whatever happened to chivalry, does it only exist in eighties movies? I want John Cusack holding a boom box outside my window, I want to ride off on a lawnmower with Patrick Dempsey, I want Jake from *Sixteen Candles* waiting outside the church for me. I want Judd Nelson thrusting his fist into the air because he knows he got me, just once. I want my life to be like an eighties movie. Preferably one with a really awesome musical number, for no apparent reason. But no, no, John Hughes did not direct my life.

While teen films of the 1980s are irrevocably connected to John Hughes, only three of these references are his films, demonstrating the way in which Hughes’s films with their ‘focus on adolescent alienation and its redemption have come to represent not only teen film of this period but in general.’ While Olive desires chivalry, few of the young men in the films she describes may be viewed as chivalrous: for example, after paying a popular

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girl to pretend to be his girlfriend, Patrick Dempsey in *Can’t Buy Me Love* himself becomes popular but fails to realise the girl likes him, and having dumped her, has sex with her best friends, behaviour which is forgiven in the final scene of the film. 124 These are a series of recognisable teen movie moments, which present a potentially vulnerable masculinity. In the Cusack boom-box scene in *Say Anything* (1989), the object of his affection does not reply, leaving him standing outside her house; Jake waits outside the church, asking permission to call Sam (Molly Ringwald) before driving her away from her family; Nelson’s Bender only ‘got’ Molly Ringwald’s Claire once in detention in *The Breakfast Club* (1985), highlighting the joy of a moment rather than a future (although they kiss outside the school this was potentially only intended to invoke the ire of her parents). These moments may be considered in relation to the romance narrative, whereby male characters become ‘the “ideal” romance hero’, which Sue Thornham describes as requiring the ‘discovery of the nurturant, essentially “feminine” qualities which will complete him’. 125 Thornham notes that while the hero may ‘experience emotional “neediness,” passivity and powerlessness’, in endings ‘the hero [is] restored to the position of rescuer and protector’ and in this way, in contrast to the power she may experience in courtship, the female protagonist is returned to passive femininity. 126 Rachel DuPlessis notes that in romance novels of the nineteenth century, female characters have little choice other than marriage or death 127 and yet ‘the clear moment of desire and the female outspokenness that provokes the endgame incorporate back into romance some of the boldness and aggression of quest, making romance temporarily the repository of female will’. 128 However, Olive is not a traditional romance protagonist, and it must be questioned whether rescue or protection are possible given that the entire film is composed as a public speech. More importantly, Olive both wants to be desired by the male lead and to be the male lead. She states that she wants ‘a really awesome musical number’ in her life as a teen film, referring to Ferris Bueller’s unexplained performance in a Chicago parade in *Ferris Bueller*. When Olive avoids camping with Rhiannon at the start of the film, she is portrayed spending her weekend in her bedroom singing, dancing, and painting her nails, listening to a pop song in a birthday

124 Jake in *Sixteen Candles* dumps his girlfriend for Sam after he finds out that Sam wants to have sex with him, sending his now ex-girlfriend home with The Geek and suggesting she is so drunk she will likely mistakenly have sex with the virginal Geek.
126 Ibid, 36 (italics in the original).
128 Ibid, 14.
card, a sequence which directly references *Ferris Bueller*, with Olive fashioning her hair into a mohawk and singing into a shower head. Like Ferris, Olive ‘addresses the camera, and audience expectations’ and this association links her to a witty character who anticipates the unpredictable events of the film, entirely controlling the narrative.

As Olive catalogues her fantasy of life as an eighties teen film, a cover of “If You Were Here”, the song used in the final scene of *Sixteen Candles* (1984), plays. As Driscoll notes, intertextuality in teen film, ‘openly tak[es] meaning from peripheral connections like the image of a band whose track plays for just a few seconds in one scene.’ “If You Were Here” is a song about deceit:

If you were here
I could deceive you
And if you were here
You would believe

This song diagnostically questions Olive’s desire for these filmic narratives. Considering the use of old songs in *My Best Friend’s Wedding* (1997), Deleyto writes,

the presence of these songs … suggests nostalgia for a period in which the emotions and feelings alluded to in the lyrics were still credible. At the same time, these songs acknowledge that, even if we do no longer believe in the values they represent, they can still provide entertainment and emotion.

In drawing from the music of the eighties, *Easy A* highlights nostalgia, but potentially recognises the deceptive nature of this dream. Jackson notes that ‘[r]eaders of romance are of course perfectly aware that it is not a realistic representation of the social world … . They know what they’re reading and they know they can’t hope to achieve this fantasy in reality.’ Writing about fake orgasm, Jagose similarly recognises the awareness inherent in the performance of fake orgasm, suggesting that given

what we want from sex is never, it seems, fake orgasm, and because fake orgasm has many practitioners but few champions, it has the potential to estrange us

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129 While Olive describes Natasha Bedingfield’s “Pocketful of Sunshine” as ‘the worst song ever’ in this sequence she sings along to this song which foreshadows the events of the film, with lyrics about escapism ‘take me away’ and resilience ‘do what you want but you’re never going to shake me, sticks and stones are never going to break me’: Natasha Bedingfield, “Pocketful of Sunshine,” written by Natasha Bedingfield, Danielle Brisebois, and John Shanks, recorded 2006, Epic Records.

130 Driscoll, *Teen Film*, 53.


133 Deleyto, “Between Friends”, 170.

productively from our more familiar knowledges about the relations between erotic practice and the desire for social transformation.135

To suggest that the ending of Easy A is akin to a fake orgasm is to recognise the performative repetition inherent within the film and particularly its ending.

“If You Were Here” repeats as Todd drops Olive at her house after her disastrous date with Ansen. The music undercuts the sincerity of the scene, highlighting that it is a fantasy, a performance and, most significantly, a teen film, bringing attention to the repetition of conventions. While Ansen believed Olive was actually prostituting herself, trying to kiss her against her will, Todd says all the “right” things, asking to kiss her if he doesn’t tell anyone and accepting Olive’s refusal as she wants it ‘to be perfect’. The song’s emphasis on deception, however, encourages me to question both Todd’s and Olive’s sincerity, potentially reminding me that such moments between people are often performed in teen film. Indeed, as a song used in Sixteen Candles, the context of this moment is significant. Driscoll suggests that Sixteen Candles is ‘an optimistic portrait of suburban adolescence in which there is no obstacle of any significance that being true to yourself and empathetic with others will not counter’.136 In contrast, it is Olive’s empathy and her willingness to deride herself for the success of others that gives rise to the events of the film; as she notes, ‘maybe it was becoming a habit of mine to help the downtrodden’. In this way, Olive’s attempts to help may be perceived as caring too much. But while Todd may comment that notoriety only benefits the ‘notees’, here it leads to the culmination of a high school fantasy. Olive describes Todd as the ‘guy I’d always had a crush on’ and while watching a pep rally tells Rhiannon, ‘even dressed as a woodchuck I still fantasise about him’. The film’s culmination, with Todd waiting outside Olive’s window, may reflect Ferris Bueller, with Olive having manipulated conventions to develop her desired outcome, stating her preferred ending in her webcast in order to produce it.

But just as Easy A draws from and repeats conventions of teen films, it may also be read as having repeated the conventions of the pastiche film Not Another Teen Movie (2001) which is set at the aptly named John Hughes High. Driscoll notes that ‘[e]en pastiche films deride teen film for not representing anything of substance and yet without imagining the genre to be dead’.137 In such films, Driscoll notes, ‘the stories are never meant to be believed’ and yet a film such as Not Another Teen Movie critiques the gender stereotypes teen films

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135 Jagose, Orgasmology, 178.
136 Driscoll, Teen Film, 48.
137 Ibid, 92.
perpetuate. In the conclusion of Not Another Teen Movie Jake (Chris Evans) begs Janey (Chyler Leigh) to stay, repeating lines from teen films which she fails to recognise even though these lines are from films she is reported to masturbate to. When Jake finally gives a “truthful” account of their future prospects, identifying that their relationship will not last, Janey merely states, erroneously, that he stole that line from a movie. Driscoll suggests that this ‘prioritizes teen film’s use of stereotypes and repetition and suggests this is the value of the genre. But that might not be a value any different from pornography – a stimulating self-representation’. However, the ending of Easy A also identifies the way in which film endings repeat romance in order to comply with expectations. While its ending may be false and unrealistic, it is nevertheless enjoyable; in drawing from multiple films, Easy A fakes a happy ending and performs excess.

Explicitly highlighting the narrativity and repetition of texts, in this ending of Easy A, Olive draws attention to films’ form with the ending explicitly constructed out of elements of eighties teen films. Considering the ending of romantic comedy Pretty Woman (1990) Deleyto suggests that, rather than believing in the love story between its two protagonists, the spectator should let herself be carried away by the brilliance of its representations, by the allure of the ironic repetition of a set of social rituals that, in the real world, have lost part of their validity. In this way, Deleyto suggests the film ‘invited us to recognize, in an age of lost innocence, the cultural and filmic mechanisms that made it possible, not in reality but in the cinema. Similarly, in its repetition of previous films, the ending of Easy A is explicitly performed and decidedly fake, and is made complex by its intertextuality. As Driscoll notes, ‘[t]he Hughes teen film is spectacularly coherent, but not simple. There is a moral tenor to his films that sets definite limits, but within that range no one way of moving through adolescence is the singularly right one’. In a similar spirit, and in drawing from multiple films, Easy A defies any “true” sense of an ending. The Breakfast Club begins with stereotyped characters sharing detention, and ends having complicated those stereotypes. In the ending of the film a character reads, in voiceover, a letter he wrote to the teacher, critiquing the teacher’s requirement that each student write a letter ‘telling you who we

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138 Ibid, 94.
139 Ibid.
142 Driscoll, Teen Film, 51.
think we are’. He reads ‘you see us as you want to see us, in the simplest terms by the most convenient definitions. But what we found out is that each one of us is a brain, and an athlete and a basket case, a princess and a criminal.’ At this point, “Don’t You (Forget about Me)”\(^{143}\) plays as Bender is shown walking across a sports field, the film ending as Bender raises his fist in the air, an action repeated by Olive and Todd riding on the lawnmower. Just as *The Scarlet Letter* complicates what constitutes truth, *Easy A*’s ending draws on this complication of cultural stereotype. Returning to the cover of “Don’t You (Forget about Me)” played as Olive and Todd ride up the hill, viewers may be ‘suckers’ sucked into these films, but embracing the repetition of these characters and films highlights the resonances beyond these endings.

*Easy A* ends with driving momentum, moving forward, and yet this hope seems misplaced. Indeed, *Easy A* may be seen to repeat generational process. As explained by Judith Halberstam:

> Generational logic underpins our investments in the dialectic of memory and forgetting; we tend to organize the chaotic process of historical change by anchoring it to an idea of generational shifts (from father to son), and we obscure questions about the arbitrariness of memory and the necessity of forgetting by falling back on some notion of the inevitable force of progression and succession.\(^{144}\)

And yet, in drawing from these past texts, and highlighting their repetition, the lack of forward momentum and change is explicitly portrayed. What is often perceived as private and intimate is made public in this film, drawing attention to the need to publicly discuss and consider these matters, and demonstrating that the boundaries between public and private are difficult to maintain. Indeed, in portraying Olive reporting the events after the fact, the whole form of the film looks backward. Drawing from the writing of Heather Love, Jagose writes ‘Love speaks up for the importance of queer politics of an optimism that is not hygienically quarantined from the despondency it is more usually understood to counter and correct’ addressing both hope and despair.\(^{145}\) In this way, Jagose suggests

fake orgasm affords the valuable recognition that action might be ineffectually repetitive, that agency might be, as Kathleen Stewart writes, ‘strange, twisted, caught up in things, passive, or exhausted. Not the way we like to think about it. Not usually

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\(^{143}\) Simple Minds, “Don’t You (Forget about Me),” written by Keith Forsey and Steve Schiff, recorded 1984, A&M Records.


\(^{145}\) Jagose, *Orgasmology*, 203.
a simple projection toward a future ... agency is frustrated and unstable and attracted to the potential in things.\textsuperscript{146}

Olive’s story is twisted, caught up in the past, in texts which expand and misdirect meaning. In concluding with an embrace, \textit{Easy A} ends in an expected fashion, and it is particularly in this respect that it acts as fake orgasm. And yet, Jagose argues that ‘thinking differently’ about fake orgasm, a practice ‘customarily associated with conservative rather than radical ends, suburban rather than subcultural scenarios’ may enable ‘different possibilities for thinking sex and politics together.’\textsuperscript{147} Rather than directed to the future, Jagose argues that ‘fake orgasm can be thought political to the degree that it indexes a future lived strenuously as a disappointing repetition in the present.’\textsuperscript{148} The postmodern engagement with repetition, deconstructing through reproducing and reflecting, produces \textit{Easy A} as ‘narrative ... with a vengeance’\textsuperscript{149}. While driving away suggests forward momentum, the excess represented in this pedagogical moment highlights that such movement is merely a distraction from this ending’s repetition.

\begin{footnotesize}
\bibitem{146} Ibid, 204 quoting Kathleen Stewart, \textit{Ordinary Affects} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 86.
\bibitem{147} Ibid, 205.
\bibitem{148} Ibid, 202.
\bibitem{149} de Lauretis, \textit{Alice Doesn’t}, 157.
\end{footnotesize}
conclusion

SURRENDERING

Figure 11: Lucy (Emily Browning) awaits a client in the first chamber scene. Still from *Sleeping Beauty* (2011) Screen Australia.
I first saw Julia Leigh’s *Sleeping Beauty* at the 2011 Sydney Film Festival, a screening which was followed by a question and answer session (Q and A) featuring film critic and former board member of Spectrum Films¹ Margaret Pomeranz, the film’s writer and director Julia Leigh and her mentor, film director Jane Campion. The experience of watching the film was uncomfortable, disconcerting, and beautiful, but I was most affected by the antagonism in questioners’ responses to the protagonist Lucy (Emily Browning) at the Q and A. Documenting the Q and A, Christine Westwood notes the audience’s reaction to Lucy’s perceived detachment, relating one audience member’s comment that “I don’t know if I like Lucy or not, I felt disconnected from the character”.² In response Campion asked “[d]o you have to like everybody?” … “It’s interesting to be disconnected or dislike a character and yet find the story compelling.”³ While Leigh refused to provide more information about Lucy, Pomeranz commented that “[i]t’s challenging to enter her world and follow her in it. You either like the mystery or feel frustrated that it doesn’t give an answer.”⁴ For me, this Q and A was a pedagogical moment in which the aversion and discomfort expressed by viewers drew attention to the desire for coherence and consistency around the representation of girls. Lucy is a young university student with many part-time jobs who accepts employment as a sleeping beauty partway through the film. As a sleeping beauty, Lucy is voluntarily drugged so as to sleep naked and peacefully in bed with older men who may do with her as they wish so long as they don’t penetrate her. In the final scene Lucy wakes to find one such man has chosen to die beside her, and Lucy screams at this realisation, the sound a stark contrast with the previously subdued soundtrack. Indeed, this moment of sound is itself followed by silence: the film concludes with surveillance footage of the sleeping girl and the dead man. Lucy is a complex young female character in an ambiguous text which provides little resolution and while Lucy left me curious, I was surprised by the depth of feeling against her exhibited in questions which seemed to merely reify the concept of the girl within expectations of “appropriate” feminine behaviour.

After beginning the thesis with *Never Been Kissed*, it seems appropriate to end with a riff on the quintessential romance narrative, “Sleeping Beauty”, the 1959 Disney version of which

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¹ One of the film’s production companies.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid, under “Title”.

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represents a princess waiting for the prince to wake her from her cursed sleep with a kiss.\(^5\) Karen Rowe notes that ‘[t]raditional fairy tales fuse morality with romantic fantasy in order to portray cultural ideals for human relationships’\(^6\) and suggests that the tales implicitly yoke sexual awakening and surrender to the prince with social elevation and materialistic gain. … Because the heroine adopts conventional female virtues, that is patience, sacrifice, and dependency, and because she submits to patriarchal needs, she consequently receives both the prince and a guarantee of social and financial security through marriage.\(^7\)

However, unlike in conventional fairy tales, viewers of Leigh’s film are not intended to ‘identify with the prettily passive heroine whose submission to commendable roles insures her triumphant happiness.’\(^8\) Not only are viewers distanced from Lucy, the film ends ambiguously: there is no happy ending.

As an independent film, Julia Leigh’s *Sleeping Beauty* is arguably in a position to disrupt expectations of the ending, but also to disrupt expectations of the girl. Visually Lucy is feminine, a term defined by adjectives such as pretty and delicate,\(^9\) and she is potentially assumed to ‘yearn… for love, relationships, and romance’.\(^10\) However, Lucy’s performance of gender is fluid. Although she appears passive, she rebels against societal expectations of normative, responsible behaviour: she pays her rent late, doesn’t clean the grout of her share house bathroom until asked, doesn’t buy train tickets, and sets a hundred-dollar note alight. She has casual sex with guys she meets in bars and is a responsible sexual subject, choosing contraception.\(^11\) She has a moment with another woman in a toilet stall, sharing a line of cocaine, and after a flirtatious look pockets the hundred-dollar note with which it was inhaled. She is shown to lie and it is questionable whether her mother really is ‘an alcoholic with a violent temper who runs an astrology hotline’. Lucy’s lies make her other statements seem insincere and highlight her trivialisation of otherwise serious situations. As Judith Halberstam suggests, ‘[b]eing taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant. The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what

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\(^5\) The kiss of Sleeping Beauty has been significant in film versions and the popular culture that surrounds it: see for example, Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, “But Marriage Itself is No Party’: Angela Carter’s Translation of Charles Perrault’s ‘La Belle au bois dormant’; or, Pitting the Politics of Experience against the Sleeping Beauty Myth”, *Marvels and Tales* 24, no. 1 (2010): 131, 137.

\(^6\) Rowe, “Feminism and Fairy Tales”, *Women’s Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal* 6, no. 3 (1979): 237.

\(^7\) Ibid, 246 (italics in the original).

\(^8\) Ibid, 248.

\(^9\) Macquarie Dictionary (Concise), 3rd ed., s.v. “feminine”.


compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production’. Here Lucy performs something else, with her life seemingly composed of a series of calculated risks. She is penetrated and impenetrable, virgin and slut, in control and powerless: she confounds the concept of expected behaviour. Indeed, Sara Ahmed’s consideration of wilful may be applied to Lucy: ‘A subject would be described as wilful at the point that her will does not coincide with that of others, those whose will is reified as the general or social will.” This ambiguity is intended by Leigh who states she is interested in Wonder Cinema: ‘I wanted to make a film where the audience responds with “Did I really see that?” and “Did I really hear that?” and “Can such a thing really exist?” In this way the film challenges viewers to surrender the idea that Lucy is knowable.

Indeed, this film touches viewers: it both draws viewers in and distances them. In the first scene of the film, Lucy is the subject of an experiment in which she has a tube with a balloon tied to the end of it inserted down her throat, foregrounding penetration and producing unease; in one analysis of the film, Sarinah Masukor notes this discomfort is ‘powerfully affective’, stating that the woman sitting beside her ‘put her hand to her throat’. While viewers may not know what Lucy is thinking and are not encouraged to connect often or easily with her, the moments in which she is touched and touches allow for short instances of connection. Such moments occur as preparing for her first night working as a lingerie clad silver-service waitress for the madam Clara (Rachel Blake), Lucy is cleaned up; a pedicurist is shown scrubbing her left foot as Lucy sits appearing to pay little attention, hands soaking in preparation for a manicure. A moment later Lucy is shown lying on a raised towel-covered table, screaming as a beauty therapist rips the hair from her bikini line, with Lucy eventually subsiding into uncontrollable laughter as she suffers this painful touch. Considering the Australian film Somersault (2004), Grady Hancock notes “[t]he literal closeness to Heidi works toward an intimacy that transcends … actions that are, in no uncertain terms, alienating and confronting”. Similarly, moments of close-up in Sleeping Beauty provide space for connection; for example, Lucy grabs berries from a tree she passes each time she walks to the chauffeur-driven car in which she is transported to this

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16 Hancock, “Visceral Shock in Cate Shortland’s Somersault”, Scan: Journal of Media Arts Culture 10, no. 1 (2013), under “Sensate identification”. 
high paid work. One day, the berries are shown red in her hand and left on the floor of the car, leaving her mark, a mark which is futile, impermanent, and easily erased.

The film also creates connection with viewers through Lucy’s relationship with Birdmann (Ewan Leslie), who is introduced as Lucy visits his drab apartment one afternoon. The pale Birdmann wears a grey suit and Lucy arrives with plastic shopping bags full of ‘gifts’, vodka and muesli. Birdmann leans against the sink and Lucy opens the muesli and pours it into a bowl as they have a banal, oddly polite, imitative conversation: ‘So how are you?’ — ‘I’m very well thank you, and you?’ — ‘Oh yes, very well, thank you, and um how’s the family?’ — ‘Oh, very well thank you, and yours?’ — ‘Oh yes, very well.’ — ‘And how are the kids?’ — ‘Yes, they’re fantastic.’ — ‘That’s great.’ Lucy smiles and removes the lid from the vodka, pouring it liberally over the cereal. ‘It’s good to see you, you look beautiful’. Lucy smiles ‘thank you’ as she hands Birdmann the bowl and a spoon before pouring herself a glass of vodka. They sit beside each other on the couch. ‘I’ve something important to tell you.’ As Birdmann speaks, the camera inches closer, slowly zooming in to the couch. ‘Do you remember that time, on the beach after we’d been to Andy’s place that morning? I wanted to kiss you. You must have wanted me to kiss you.’ Lucy smiles and looks down and then back at him. They sit close on the couch, their faces inches apart. It is intimate. ‘I couldn’t because of my tongue. My tongue was furred. Furred and thick. Putrid. The arsehole, of the arsehole, of the arsehole.’ Looking down and away Lucy laughs. She looks back at him, and he looks down, playing with his muesli with the spoon. Quieter, he states ‘I couldn’t kiss you.’ — ‘That’s ok.’ — ‘I wanted you to know.’ The camera captures them in a mid-shot showing their upper bodies, eyes directly gazing at one another. ‘I just want to love my friends.’ Lucy reaches and holds his arm ‘I know, that’s not an unreasonable request.’ She takes another sip of her vodka and Birdmann whispers ‘I am so fucking tired, of watching Oprah.’

In the opening of this scene the characters perform heteronormativity, inquiring about imaginary lives. The scene presents a sense of waiting and thwarted anticipation and yet I am left with the sense that this will be left unfulfilled. Waiting pervades this film in the slow pace, little movement, and passive framing. Westwood writes, ‘Sleeping Beauty never attempts to elicit audience sympathy through conventional narrative. Rather, its style is detached, almost voyeuristic, or as Leigh describes it, “a tender, steady witness.”’ Birdmann’s comment about Oprah both highlights the manner in which the film is shot—

17 Westwood, “Sleeping Beauty”, under “She’s not a traditional heroine”.

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often directly looking at characters seated on couches—and the societal desire for confession, explanation, and justification, a desire which is thwarted throughout. Indeed this film thwarts viewers’ desire for confession and connection. Viewers can only get so close to Lucy, both visually and metaphorically, and the removal of narrative conventions and expectation means that viewers are unable to anticipate the direction of the narrative; it becomes unpredictable. Just as the fairy tale “Sleeping Beauty” represents ‘the magical possibility of suspended time’, here time’s suspension is represented in repetition. Indeed, in the first eleven minutes of this film, Lucy is shown performing a sequence of jobs requiring little skill: wiping tables in a cafe and mindless photocopying, interspersed with a disconcerting night out, and the need to clean her share house bathroom, scenes filmed in drab colours which appear almost dirty. In this banal opening, Leigh, like the fairies in “Sleeping Beauty”, ‘master[s] time’ and plays with pace. As Masukor notes, these employment scenes ‘establish Lucy’s character and give the audience a sense of her experience of time as a series of discrete, repeated episodes. Each event in Lucy’s mundane life seems to take roughly the same amount of time.’ The repetition of work throughout the film increases the perception that time has not passed and confuses the linearity of the narrative, disorienting viewers.

Lucy returns to visit Birdmann three more times in the film. In the first she pours vodka and refuses to watch porn. In the second she asks Birdmann to marry her in a performance of normativity. He accepts and they exchange incongruous courteous replies: ‘Thank you.’ — ‘Not at all.’ — ‘It’s very kind of you.’ — ‘It’s a pleasure.’ These replies disrupt the importance placed on marriage, identifying it as a game rather than something to be taken seriously. Lucy’s proposal, however, is followed by Birdmann intimating he is ready to die and refusing her offer to pay for detox. Whispering ‘I don’t know’ when Birdmann asks if she believes he would make it through detox, he gently pulls her to lie on his chest as she tearfully contemplates his loss and he narrates over images of a Sandhill Dunnart on the television, a marsupial which when scared ‘will make a loud noise as it moves into an offensive position’, seemingly prophetic given the screams with which Lucy ends the film. In Birdmann’s final scene, Lucy lets herself into his apartment, finding a number of empty blister packs that indicate his overdose. He is semi-conscious and she agrees to his request that she remove her shirt, lying half naked beside him, her face almost in line with the camera, allowing viewers to watch her tears as she cries in his arms. Masukor suggests this

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20 Masukor, “Sleep like Death”, 27.
represents an ‘unsettling respect for another person’s most destructive desire’. Lucy is clearly emotional, and as Genevieve Yue writes ‘[p]sychologically impenetrable … is not the same thing as unfeeling.’ Viewers are privileged in this moment, privy to rare emotion. Emotion is not shown to other characters in the film: at Birdmann’s wake Lucy asks an ex to marry her in an attempt to change the topic from how long it was before someone found Birdmann’s body. Unlike Birdmann, her ex doesn’t play the game, instead angrily telling her ‘fuck you, fuck you to death’ and suggesting she should be ‘courteous’ like his current girlfriend; that is, abide by a conventional idea of femininity.

This emphasis on conformity with expectations of femininity can be found in Lucy’s part-time jobs. It seems that in spite of feminism’s impact, Lucy must ‘again adopt the mask of submission and servitude and … invest time and effort in the crafting of a self which ensures desirability’. In her job as a silver-service waitress, Lucy’s lips are painted the exact same shade as her labia and she is dressed in lingerie, and yet in this job she is nevertheless seemingly ignored: positioned as an object, in the words of Laura Mulvey, she ‘can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.’ After work, Lucy goes to a bar where, rather than just being looked at and objectified, Lucy looks back. Performing male fantasy, she shows a man who tells her he is faking his life the top of her stocking, and states that she ‘would really love to suck … [his] cock’. Lucy is direct, taking control of the scene, but these acts may also be perceived as performing submission. While the idea of choosing to be powerless or vulnerable may be critiqued, such a critique leaves no space for Lucy’s choices and behaviour to be affirmed or developed.

The film takes this question of whether agency may be found in the choice to be powerless to an extreme when Lucy is promoted from silver-service waitress to sleeping beauty, and the film features four chamber scenes in which Lucy is voluntarily drugged and lies naked and asleep with older men. While the first old man (Peter Carroll) merely runs his hands over her, in the second chamber scene a different man (Chris Haywood) pulls all the sheets off the bed and looks at Lucy before undressing to his boxers. The camera creeps around the bed. He pulls her flat and looks at her vulva, muttering menacingly ‘spread your cunt you little bitch’. He sucks on his cigarette before pressing it behind her ear. He removes his boxers and sits astride her, commenting on the size of his penis, although viewers have

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21 Ibid, 26.
22 Yue, “Two Sleeping Beauties”, Film Quarterly 65, no. 3 (2012): 34.
been informed that he is impotent. The camera inches closer as he speaks obscenities. He puts his fingers in her mouth and pulls it open, licking up the side of her face, an intimate penetration of her body which identifies the potential for bodily violations beyond the act of penile-vaginal rape. Although not a close-up, this scene is uncomfortably close and without music there is little distraction; viewers are not permitted to escape, becoming complicit in the violence of this act. As the man licks her face, the camera pans to her motionless hand lying off the bed. Lucy doesn’t feel any of this, although it is the marks left upon her body that appear to encourage Lucy to later hide a camera in the room. This chamber represents a safe space: Clara tells her clients, ‘you’re safe, there’s no shame here, no one can see you’, but viewers are left wondering whether Lucy is safe. In prioritising the security of these men, Clara is complicit in maintaining patriarchy: she cannot protect both Lucy and her clients. In the third chamber scene a man (Hugh Keays-Byrne) lifts her in his arms and drops her, struggling to replace her on the bed. In this way, impotence becomes a symbol of patriarchy; its weakness is that it is only able to act on the vulnerable and requires complicity to maintain its power and hide its inadequacies. In an analysis of Australian masculinity, Murray Drummond notes many men’s perceived failure to ‘live up to an expected archetypal ideal of what a heterosexual man’s body should be able to do’ and this scene provides such an example; the aging third man is unable to lift Lucy and thus to rescue her as a prince might in a fairy tale.

Despite the discomfort produced by these scenes, I am reluctant to condemn Lucy’s acceptance of this job and her continued participation in it. I do not want to be like these men who make assumptions about Lucy, that she will redeem a hopeless life, that she is a slut, that she must be rescued. And yet drugged and asleep, it is difficult to conceptualize Lucy in any manner beyond ‘powerlessness’. As Yue notes, ‘[w]e are given no access to the possibility of her pleasure, or whether she experiences boredom, depression, anger. There is no conventional feminist rewriting of the fairy tale in Leigh’s film, no moral to learn, no wisdom to be gained’. Sleeping Beauty thus recognises the problematic impact of an emphasis on women’s pleasure: appearing, as Louisa Allen writes, to lead to ‘a “pleasure imperative” where pleasure twists from “a legitimate possibility” to an expected component of sexual activity’ with its absence suggesting ‘something is wrong and/or

27 Yue, “Two Sleeping Beauties”, 35.
28 Ibid, 36.
missing. In contrast, Allen identifies the multiple reasons other than pleasure for sexual activity, writing,

[it can serve as a means of attaining something else we want, like money, a child, some sleep, peer status, emotional security, to feel desired, to be ‘normal’, to pleasure someone else (rather than ourselves), to heal (ourselves or someone else) or to hurt (ourselves or others). Privileging the attainment of personal pleasure as a reason to engage in sexual activity not only eclipses other reasons for this practice, but invalidates them. … What moral judgements are cast on other motivations for sexual practice when this one is promoted?]

Indeed, Lucy is shown making the choice to do this work; on the phone, she hesitates, asking ‘how much?’ She raises her eyebrows. A moment passes. ‘OK, yes’; her decision is considered, even if briefly. In this way, Lucy may be viewed in line with representations of performers, such as Ke$ha, who step outside expected ideas of behaviour. As Micha Cárdenas notes, Ke$ha ‘may be seen as simply reproducing the structure of racialized, gendered power that increasingly sexualizes younger women through commodities’ and ‘reinforce male conceptions of entitlement to the female body’. However Cárdenas suggests there is further potential in Ke$ha’s music and performance, writing

one can read Ke$ha’s performances of sexual embodiment and urgings to ‘go insane’ not merely as the privileged claims of a ‘white-girl rap’ singer, but instead as bodily practices that reinforce her solidarity with collectivities often presented as outside of the bounds of the rational. … Perhaps we can perceive Ke$ha’s repeated irrationalities, from jumping off a building, to making out with a unicorn, to unzipping her skin and blowing away into a cloud of glitter, as a rejection of the rationality that would deny her the ability to say both yes and no to sexual acts. … Thus, her embrace of an excess of embodied pleasure is not in contradiction to her ability to deny sexual advances, but is a rejection of the system of male entitlement that rationalizes sexual violence as an unfortunate, but acceptable, norm.

That is, Cárdenas suggests Ke$ha may represent ‘a means of resisting oppression through irrationality’. In her positioning as ‘the sleazy, cheap slut’ Cárdenas suggests Ke$ha enacts ‘a failure to accept the moral duties of heterosexuality’ and Cárdenas ‘urge[s] the reader to

32 Ibid, 186.
33 Ibid, 189.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
consider embodied modes of learning that exceed the ability of rational language to name and categorize, and invite us to participate in our own embodied experimentation.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, the difficulty in \textit{Sleeping Beauty} is that in behaving in excess of heteronormativity in her drug taking, casual sex, and more importantly in her “irrational” employment, Lucy arrests us in the discomforting space of this narrative.

In contrast to the fairy tale, at the end of this film Lucy is not awoken by a romantic kiss, but by Clara’s mouth-to-mouth resuscitation as Lucy lies alongside the dead old man, an ending which seems to repeat the earlier death of Birdmann. When Lucy doesn’t wake as Clara plays piggies with her toes, Clara climbs across the bed and desperately blows air into her mouth. Masukor claims this scene as a form of redemption, as Lucy awakens with ‘a birth-like howl’ describing the ending as ‘strangely hopeful’ with Lucy ‘ready to cherish life.’\textsuperscript{37} Indeed, Lucy is told the first time she sleeps professionally that she will feel ‘refreshed’ when she wakes, suggesting this is a form of re-birth. However, Masukor’s interpretation seems to impose a fairy tale expectation that one will live happily ever after, and ignores both Clara’s act of resuscitation and the persistent ambiguity and unpredictability of the film. Clara’s resuscitation, literally the kiss of life, awakens Lucy with Clara taking the place of the ‘traditional hero’.\textsuperscript{38} Clara is both the enchanter, the fairy who puts Lucy to sleep by administering the drug and the prince, waking her with a kiss. But Clara also insists that this is not forever: early in the film Clara advises Lucy to view her earnings as a ‘windfall’ and definitely not a career; this is not a future Lucy should become dependent on.

This film represents a series of moments, unjustified, unexplained, and uncertain. Prior to the final scene, Lucy hides a surveillance camera, which she smuggled into the room in her mouth, on a bookcase. In surveilling the room as she sleeps, Lucy acts in direct contravention of her job description, which requires absolute discretion. Following Lucy’s screams the film ends with the silent, almost still surveillance footage which reveals little;\textsuperscript{39} symbolising Lucy’s curiosity but also highlighting that this will, even to her, be unsatisfied. The film fails to orgasm, it ends unresolved, unsatisfied, and without justification. As Barbara Klinger notes, ambiguous endings are generally the province of art films which

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{36} Ibid, 191-92.
\bibitem{37} Masukor, “Sleep like Death”, 28.
\bibitem{38} Fernández Rodríguez, “Male-Rescuer Archetype”, 52.
\bibitem{39} Yue, “Two Sleeping Beauties”, 36.
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offer ‘open endings’ where ‘some events or effects’ are left ‘deliberately … unresolved,’ but this ending may also be seen in line with the films of Jane Campion, for whom ambiguity is viewed as a central component of her work. Indeed, these chamber scenes may be analytically compared with the bargaining sex scenes in *The Piano* (1993), as difficult representations which identify the patriarchal context and the restrictions upon choice this creates. As Sue Gillett notes, “[t]he bargaining scenes are genuinely tense. They are not titillating. They are not easy. But this doesn’t translate into rape or harassment.” The fact that the films of Campion and Leigh confuse these issues enables their complication to be seen more clearly. While Yue notes the possible presence of masochism in this text, writing Lucy ‘may only appear submissive; its seeming stillness may conceal subversion’ she notes that this reading is undermined by Lucy’s drugged sleep. Power may be found in this passivity: Yue suggests

> [i]f the passive look of the observer can be considered active in the sense of mastering the cinematic image, Lucy’s passivity might inversely be understood as resistance, reflecting back others’ desires instead of revealing her own. Her submission is a means of concealing herself: by agreeing to become a Sleeping Beauty, Lucy becomes unwatchable and unknowable, even to herself.

Considering a series of performance art pieces, including Yoko Ono’s “Cut Piece”, Halberstam suggests ‘[o]bviously none of these performances immediately suggests a “feminist” act, but they instead make feminism into an ongoing commentary on fragmentariness, submission, and sacrifice.’ Similarly, Lucy may be viewed in line with such performance art, as fragmentary, illusive. Halberstam proposes that

> [i]n a liberal realm where the pursuit of happiness, … is both desirable and mandatory and where certain forms of self (as active, voluntaristic, choosing, propulsive) dominate the political sphere, radical passivity may signal another kind of refusal: the refusal quite simply to be.

Indeed, like Lucy occupying this in-between space, Halberstam notes that ‘the masochistic … refuses to cohere, refuses to fortify herself against the knowledge of death and dying and seeks instead to be out of time altogether, a body suspended in time, space, and

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43 Ibid, 283.
44 Yue, “Two Sleeping Beauties”, 34 (italics in the original).
46 Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 139.
47 Ibid, 140.
48 Lucy takes this to an extreme level, her passivity constituting a refusal to abide by expectations. With the exception of her screams and her action of surveilling the room, arguably an active resistance, Lucy does not speak up and back. She may therefore be read in terms of ‘a shadow feminism’, that is ‘a feminism grounded in negation, refusal, passivity, absence, and silence’ rather than ‘action and momentum’.49 Indeed, her silence may be seen in line with Ada in The Piano, which Feona Attwood suggests ‘may also be mutinous - a refusal to speak’.50 Attwood notes the ambiguity in Ada’s silence, identifying her speech in ‘play, touch, dance, song and storytelling’.51 While such sensual speech is rare in Sleeping Beauty, its occasional presence, the moments of touch and tears, gain importance; like Ada, Lucy ‘will not give a coherent or credible account of herself within the terms of narrative. She will not be interrogated, explain herself or “attest in a familiar language to dominant values”’.52 Even with the power of speech, Lucy enacts silence, a refusal to be known. In a time where it is argued that young women reveal too much of their lives through social media, Lucy’s ‘inscrutability’53 is a stark contrast. Just as Lucy doesn’t impose a desire for Birdmann to live, the challenge of this film appears to be to accept her behaviour without judgement: to find intimacy, recognise, perhaps empathise and yet not “know” her.

The intimate pedagogical moments I have explored throughout this thesis provoke surrender. Rather than viewing surrender as submitting to the authority of another, usually a man, I consider surrender in line with acceptance of change, absent answers and irrationality. If I want to “give up” anything here, it is expectations of appropriate girlhood, instead appreciating confused, conflicted, and imperfect representations. In contrast to Masukor’s reading of Sleeping Beauty, I am not sure Lucy is ‘ready to cherish life’ but I do want to think a little bit about hope. Rather than perceiving hope as ‘naïve optimism’,54 I am interested in hope’s connection with queer theory. As Annamarie Jagose writes, queer theory’s ‘most enabling characteristic may well be its potential for looking forward without anticipating the future.’55 That is, rather than wishing for an imagined past of virile masculinity or a utopic feminist future, I am interested in the here and now, the presence of this moment. Regardless of the shape of intimacy Lucy shares with Birdmann, her

48 Ibid, 144-45.
49 Ibid, 124.
51 Ibid, 89.
52 Ibid.
53 Yue, “Two Sleeping Beauties”, 36.
54 Halberstam, Queer Art of Failure, 1.
screams as she wakes to find the old man dead beside her echo Birdmann’s death, forcing viewers to feel backwards to that moment as tears drip down her face lying on the fold-out bed, the bed on which she left his body to decay, not informing anyone of his death. In this way, hope for Lucy is not for the future but is located in the emotion of the past. Here, Heather Love’s analysis of *Summer Will Show* is pertinent, where she ‘waits for the revolution as one waits for the beloved: with hope and with despair, but without certainty’. That is, to return to chapter three, a ‘hope without reason, without expectation of success’. Indeed, perhaps Lucy’s screams indicate a ‘struggle for a bearable life’: literally in this life giving moment Lucy’s screams may recognise simultaneous despair and the ‘aspiration’ to be able to ‘breathe freely’. In this moment, waiting is rethought and passivity becomes something not to be derided, but seriously regarded. As Halberstam suggests ‘to feel backward is to be able to recognize something in these darker depictions of queer life without needing to redeem them’. I want to stay with the stasis indicated in these moments which do not point to the future, in which pleasure is a possibility, but only one presence among many.

In contrast to a perception of love ‘as a dramatic, deeply felt inner transformation, as something that lifts us above the mundane everyday world’, in this thesis I have contemplated the mundane; the love, intimacy, joy, pain, and pleasure which plays out in mundane ways, in conversation, movement, gesture. In analysing pregnancy and virginity I critiqued discourses of sex education which produce youth in defined and particularly gendered ways and offered alternative methods to consider the pedagogical moments in the films I discussed. In part two I opened out ideas of public intimacy; the touching, flirting, and endings that we come to expect in film, but which offer points of divergence, rethinking, a recognition of the aesthetic elements of a text which engage the senses and move beyond the rational. In focussing on these moments of presence, the fragmentary dimensions of experience can be viewed, not as representative but as empathetic, existing beside a character for a moment, momentary or momentous. These moments offer possibilities, not for the future, but for recognition of confusion and complexity, for hope without certainty, perhaps, for something messy.

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57 Ibid, 143.
58 Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 120.
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