NEVER GROW UP: THE QUEERNESS OF IMMATURITY IN AMERICAN FILM

by

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Author's Declaration

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the contradictory status of immaturity in our culture. While immaturity's otherness to heteronormative adulthood is a source of fear and anxiety, this otherness is also what makes it desirable—that is, immaturity represents an escape from the pressures and standards of adulthood, signifying an oppositional subjectivity reminiscent of youthful rebellion. Indeed, the oppositional nature of immaturity is ultimately what gives it power as a source of political agency. Rather than seeing immaturity as something to be ashamed of, or as something to be avoided or defeated, this dissertation, following Judith/Jack Halberstam, views immaturity as a powerful form of resistance as well as a queer “way of being.” In fact, these two latter elements—resistance and queerness—go hand-in-hand; queerness within this project is primarily understood as an uncompromising “resistance to regimes of the normal,” specifically those pertaining to maturity and success. Beginning with a focus on male immaturity, I establish the fear/desire dynamic characterizing the immature male through close readings of the 1950s male-centered melodrama, combined with an historically-oriented analysis of postwar American culture. Next, I examine how comedy and dramedy films about childish men from the 1980s to the present day are also structured by this contradictory dynamic, as they both resist and reinforce heteronormative adulthood. My textual analysis of these films are grounded in theories of queer temporality. Finally, I focus on the female counterpart to the immature male, examining various constructions of female immaturity in recent cinema. Here, I

utilize a broader range of queer temporal theories to demonstrate the political potential of immature womanhood, where “immature” gains agency through its queer and feminist resistance to the tyranny of heteronormative adulthood. While this dissertation ultimately seeks to demonstrate how immaturity functions as a site of resistance to (hetero)normativity, it also acknowledges how it can (specifically in the context of male homosociality), reinforce and reproduce oppressive structures, further underlining immaturity’s incongruous status.

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Dedication

For my parents, who have always believed in me.

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Introduction

In the current North American cultural climate, adulthood is becoming increasingly obsolete. More and more twenty- and thirty-something individuals are living with their parents, postponing (or outright rejecting) marriage and children, choosing public transit over buying cars, and displaying little interest in improving their credit scores (Henderson). Indeed, approximately a third of 18-to-34-year olds in the United States were living with their parents in 2014 (Rampell), and about 60 percent of individuals within this demographic were relying on them for financial support (Davidson). This phenomenon is primarily economic: Adam Davidson of *The New York Times* writes that “[t]hose who graduated college as the housing market and financial system were imploding faced the highest debt burden of any graduating class in history” and are equally suffering in terms of high unemployment and underemployment rates (Davidson). However, while it is certainly true that non-adult-like lifestyles are largely a result of financial circumstances, there is a broader cultural shift at work here (Henderson; Scott, “Death of Adulthood”), one in which eschewing adulthood and embracing immaturity is virtually ubiquitous.

What Gary Cross calls “the culture of immaturity” (2008), and Diana West, “the death of the grown-up” (2007),¹ points to this “structure of feeling” (Williams 128), as does the coining of terms such as “kidult,” “rejuvenile,” and “adultescent” (Shaw 82). As West argues, we are living

¹ In his 2014 article, “The Death of Adulthood in American Culture,” *New York Times* critic A.O. Scott explores (and, at times, laments) adulthood’s increasing obsolescence. Here, Scott traces the current “culture of immaturity” to the death of “patriarchal authority,” illustrating the latter through the “allegorical” antiheroes of subscription cable. Scott argues that the deaths of Tony Soprano, Walter White, and Don Draper (and, by extension, the ending of their respective series) marks the death of hegemonic male privilege. While Scott acknowledges that this is obviously progressive, he also argues that the absence of patriarchal authority in our culture has resulted in a world in which the juvenile and puerile reign supreme.

“[in] a world where distinctions between child and adult have eroded, giving rise to a universal mode of behavior more infantile than mature...” (3). This dissolution of boundaries between childhood and adulthood is largely influenced by technology and popular culture (Henderson). For example, as J. Maureen Henderson (2014) writes, “[w]e devour [Young Adult] novels and superhero movies. We have an entire subculture of grown men who are ardent fans of cartoon ponies meant for little girls. We eagerly buy tickets to see boy band reunion tours where the ‘boys’ are now mostly married dads pushing 40...” (Henderson). Thus, the “juvenilization” of American culture is closely connected to its progressively consumerist character, where “the century-old opposition between the adolescent/youth stage and adulthood is being challenged by a late-modern capitalist culture now functioning artificially to extend the former” (Hayward qtd. in Shaw 83).

According to West, American culture’s embrace of an extended adolescence is rooted in 1950s popular culture, when “the new medium of television” began framing “age as ‘square’ and youth as ‘hip’” (6). For over half a century, West contends, “media culture, from Hollywood to journalism to music to Madison Avenue, has increasingly idealized youth even as it has increasingly lampooned adulthood...” (6). Indeed, for West, the “countercultural youth movement” which has become synonymous with the 1960s and 1970s, actually has its origins in the 1950s; this contention is also echoed by Cross, who argues that the contemporary “culture of immaturity” has its roots in the bohemian and rebel ideologies of earlier generations (Cross 15), as well as in the emergence of a widespread youth consumer culture in the postwar era (Cross 97). The contradictory discourses pertaining to immaturity in the postwar era is explored at

length in the first chapter, where I demonstrate the simultaneous romanticization and pathologization of immaturity in the 1950s.

While the postwar era saw the birth of adolescent culture, it also set the standard for adulthood. As Kate Crawford (2009) argues,

In the West, our received ideas of adulthood were powerfully shaped by the postwar years, when jobs were plentiful, marriage was the norm, and home values moved inexorably upward—a time before the rise of feminism, mass celebrity culture and contemporary consumerism. In this worldview, only conventional commitments—the most normative forms of social and cultural practice—can be truly adult. This reifies a particular experience of adulthood as the model of maturity—an idealised vision of what adulthood could offer the privileged during the mid twentieth century. (48)

Even in contemporary culture, however, conceptions of adulthood are still firmly linked to traditional markers of maturity—that is, “permanent work, home-ownership and family formation”—despite the fact that these markers are generally far removed from the realities of “contemporary adult life” (Crawford 49). The “discursive power” of adulthood, according to Crawford, lies in its status as a “natural” and uncontested category. Much like the hegemony of whiteness and heterosexuality, the dominance of adulthood is derived from its invisibility, and thus its automatic acceptance as the norm (Crawford 48-49). “Hidden in plain sight,” normative adulthood becomes the unnamed marker against which children, teenagers, seniors, and non-normative adults compare themselves, leading to the sense that they never quite measure up (Crawford 49).

If maturity and adulthood are constituted upon “institutional markers of responsibility,” such as marriage, child rearing, and home ownership, then immaturity is associated with lacking or rejecting these markers (Crawford 53, 46). Curiously, immaturity occupies a contradictory status in our culture: while its otherness to heteronormative adulthood is a source of fear and anxiety, it is also what makes it desirable—that is, immaturity represents an escape from the pressures and standards of adulthood that are exerted on us, and that we are expected to live up to.² Moreover, immaturity is also desirable because of its connection to youth and youthfulness, whether it is the thrill of adolescent rebellion or the allure that girlishness and boyishness holds in our culture (both of which are further explored in this project). While immaturity and its vicissitudes (arrested development, regression) occupy the contradictory sites of fear/desire, this dissertation demonstrates that they are also, more importantly, sources of political agency. Rather than seeing immaturity as something to be ashamed of, or as something to be avoided or defeated (in the form of “rehabilitating” oneself onto the “righteous” path of normative adulthood), this project, following Judith (Jack) Halberstam, views immaturity as a powerful form of resistance as well as a queer “way of being” (Halberstam 2005, 2011). In fact, these two latter elements—resistance and queerness—go hand-in-hand; queerness within this project is primarily understood as an uncompromising “resistance to regimes of the normal” (Warner, “Introduction” xxvi), specifically those pertaining to maturity and success. Indeed, as Halberstam elucidates, success within heteronormative culture is synonymous with “reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation” (*Failure* 2), markers of adulthood whose ordinariness (that is, invisibility)

² The dualism of fear/desire that constructs immaturity was inspired by Aaron Taylor’s observation about cultural attitudes towards children. Taylor argues that we both “year[n] for and fear” the “irresponsibility” and “effortless freedom” of children (32).

points to the dominance of adulthood as a cultural category. This dissertation seeks to challenge the hegemony of maturity and adulthood by demonstrating how immaturity, through its queer sensibility, resists heteronormativity and “reproductive futurism” (Edelman 2004), the ultimate bastion of heteronormativity in our culture, and thus the one that keeps it alive.

One might wonder how immaturity can be at once ubiquitous and politically queer—that is, a pervasive phenomenon of our current mainstream culture while also challenging and resisting this very culture. Indeed, it would seem inevitable to arrive at this kind of pitfall when examining something that occupies such a contradictory position.³ As Foucault reminds us, discourses are never totalizing entities which simply reinforce or resist power “once and for all” (*Sexuality* 100-1); rather, they are part of a “complex and unstable process” in which they can function as “both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (*Sexuality* 101). For example, while immaturity was pathologized as a sign of effeminacy and homosexuality (then regarded as a psychiatric disorder) in the postwar era, it was also romanticized and eroticized through the adolescent, rebel masculinities of James Dean, Marlon Brando, and Montgomery Clift; the boyish appeal of these stars—that is, their “disruptive status” as erotic objects who solicited the gaze rather than harnessing it, effectively troubled the hegemonic “conflation of gender and sexuality” in the period (Cohan 203). In other words, as “boys who [were] not men” (the “trope of boyishness” was repeatedly invoked in the era to represent “deviations from

³ The contradictory character of immaturity is alluded to in the word “Queerness” in this dissertation’s title. The “queer” in queerness here has a double meaning: it connotes the incongruity and thus peculiarity of immaturity (as simultaneously feared and desired, as something that both resists and reproduces heteronormativity), as well as immaturity’s defiance against “regimes of the normal.”

hegemonic masculinity”) their eroticized ““new look”” called into question the idea of masculinity as unequivocally heterosexual (Cohan 203). Thus, while the pathologization of immaturity as connected to the perceived “sickness” of homosexuality in the postwar era could be viewed as an effect of hegemonic power, this very connection between immaturity and queerness also functioned as a point of resistance against heteronormative ideologies of masculinity.

Within our current culture, immaturity has “become the norm rather than the exception” (Cross 2), especially amongst young males engaging in an extended adolescence. We see the ubiquity of this culture of immaturity in the countless man-child comedies that have been released by major studios for more than a decade, from *Knocked Up* (2007) to *Mike and Dave Need Wedding Dates* (2016). While the immaturity represented in some of these films seems to initially challenge heteronormative ideologies pertaining to gender and adulthood, the films are ultimately conservative in nature, reinforcing the hegemony of normative adulthood by the end. The conservatism of these films is not surprising, given that they are produced and distributed by major studios, most of which are helmed by men. Moreover, the man-child comedies are also written and directed by men, each one of them engaging in the same stock, crude frat-boy humour. Indeed, as Judith (Jack) Halberstam reminds us, we must not confuse the immaturity of puerile white men with the idea of an extended adolescence as a queer way of being; while the latter points to the political potential of immaturity in challenging heteronormativity, the former only reinforces it, and often with both homophobic and misogynistic undertones (*In A Queer Time* 175). In this way, then, immaturity represented in these films is no better than the heteronormative adulthood it is presumably pitting itself against. At the same time, however,

there is always the possibility for counter-hegemonic readings (Hall 1980), and some of these man-child comedies do lend themselves to such interpretation. An example is *Stepbrothers* (2008), which I think successfully satirizes the soul-sucking ennui of bourgeois adulthood; in this film, embracing one's inner child is akin to being alive (a full discussion of *Stepbrothers* can be found in the second chapter).

Structure of Dissertation and Chapter Overview

A review of literature begins this project, and is divided into texts related to male immaturity and female immaturity. I start with an overview of the male coming-of-age narrative, in both English literature and film, contending that this genre is both a precursor as well as a counterpoint to the contemporary man-child comedy. After over a century of narratives focusing on males coming-of-age, I argue, popular culture is now (more than ever) fixated on the idea of men never growing up. I then provide an overview of this current phenomenon, what Gary Cross calls "the culture of immaturity." The review then proceeds into the territory of film, where I trace the concept of immaturity from the emergence of the youth/adolescent audience in the 1950s, to how immaturity and masculinity were linked in the same era, evoking both desire (the young "rebel" stars of the period) and fear (the connections that were drawn between the mama's boy, homosexuality, and communism). After an overview of the connections between male immaturity and class, I then move into a review of male homosociality in the cinema, from the buddy film to the contemporary bromance. Male homosociality in these genres demonstrate a "nostalgia for adolescence" (San Filippo 183), in which male bonding functions as a utopic time-space where men can be free from both women and the heteronormative standards of adulthood. As a segue into literature related to female immaturity, I examine how the screwball comedy,

particularly its central structuring metaphor of “play,” is an important progenitor to contemporary cinematic incarnations of male and female childishness.

The literature review pertaining to women begins with a focus on how childish femininity has been constructed in cinema since its earliest days, from the films of D.W. Griffith, to Marilyn Monroe, to the “Manic Pixie Dream Girl.” I then move into an overview of postfeminist culture’s “distinct preoccupation with the temporal” (Negra 48), where female life stages and schedules must conform to a pre-constituted narrative of normative femininity. The postfeminist female subject in this culture of “time panic” is caught in an oppressive bind: she will be deemed abject and immature if she does not conform to the standards of female adulthood (marriage and motherhood), but she must also be careful not to be *too* mature, as her visibility in this culture depends on her ability to remain youthful and girl-like.

While my literature review chapter focuses on literature related to my objects of study (films), the next foundational chapter is focused primarily on theory, and is divided into three main sections: operationalization of terms, theoretical context, and theoretical orientation. I begin with theories of development within the psychoanalytic tradition (Freud and Erikson), as these are foundational in terms of establishing how maturity has been conceptualized and constructed within heteronormative culture. I then review psychological definitions of the terms that form the basis of this project: immaturity, maturity, arrested development, and regression. Following this operationalization of terms, I return to the theoretical context of this project, namely psychoanalytic theory, focusing on feminist approaches within this tradition. I then move into the realm of queer theory, where I review theories of gender and sexuality before honing in on the theoretical orientation of this project, theories of queer temporality. As a whole, these theories

challenge heteronormative conceptions and constructions of temporality, ones that structure heteronormative ideas of maturity and development.

Methodology is the focus of my next chapter, where I examine in more detail theories of queer temporality as my main interpretive method. I discuss what is at stake in defining queerness as a “way of being in the world” (my project’s stance) rather than firmly attached to sexual identity, which forms an ongoing source of debate within the field of queer theory. I explain that while my second and third chapters are largely comprised of textual analysis, they are anchored in theories of queer temporality, such as Halberstam’s theories of queer time and failure, Lee Edelman’s theory of “reproductive futurism,” Kathryn Bond Stockton’s theory of “growing sideways,” and José Esteban Muñoz’s theory of queer horizontality. I assert that my rationale for choosing this methodological approach is connected to my research outcome—that is, to demonstrate how immaturity and its vicissitudes, while occupying a contradictory status in our culture, is also a source of political agency. I also focus on the corpus of films that comprise my project, where I explain and rationalize my selection of films (defining my sample). My discussion of my first chapter’s methodological approach is saved until the end. While it is not directly related to theories of queer temporality, queerness as a “ghostly trace” haunts its pages; thus, through historical analysis, it focuses on postwar constructions of immature masculinity, when being immature was often understood as being homosexual.

Chapter 1, “Motherly Love: Maternal Lovers and Childish Men in Postwar Male-Centered Melodrama,” examines the contradictory status of both the immature male and the mother figure, both of whom were simultaneously idealized and vilified in the postwar era. While the relationship between the mama’s boy and his overbearing mother is pathologized in

several films of the period—where the immature male’s deviant behaviour is understood to be a product of his abnormally close relationship to his mother—I argue that this mother-child dynamic is treated much more ambivalently in the male-centered melodrama, when it is transposed onto the central romantic relationship. In this latter case, the brooding, childish male is taken care of by his maternal female love interest, so that the mother-child dynamic, while still a source of anxiety, is also romanticized and even eroticized. The contradictory character of the maternal lover, childish male relationship is examined through close readings of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *A Place in the Sun* (1951) and *The Country Girl* (1954). My close readings of these films are anchored in historical analysis, where I link male immaturity and the mother figure to the larger postwar discourses of homophobia, communism, and momism (I will elaborate further upon the concept of momism on pages 121-30).

Chapter 2, “‘F**k Mature!’: The Boy-Man and His Vicissitudes in Comedy and Dramedy Films,” examines the various incarnations of the contemporary cinematic man-child, from the 1990s (one film, *Diner* [1982], is released in the 1980s) to the present day. Overall, I demonstrate that the immature male characters in this chapter engage in queer temporalities through their rejection of normative regimes of time—what Edelman refers to as “reproductive futurism” and Elizabeth Freeman, “chrononormativity.” At the same time, however, many of these films ultimately support these very structures through their acquiescence to heteronormative adulthood, a testament to the contradictory fear/desire dynamic structuring immaturity in our culture. The chapter begins with an examination of Berry Levinson’s *Diner* (1982), one of the primary progenitors of what I call the contemporary *bro-ensemble film*. Invoking Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope, I designate the homosocial time-space structuring the film

as *bro-time*, a chronotope that reflects the “temporalization” of male friends conversing and bonding with each other in homosocial spaces. The idea of bro-time is then explored in other bro-ensemble films: *Kicking and Screaming* (1995), *Knocked Up* (2007) and *The Hangover* (2009), all of which feature groups of male friends who hang out together in a state of extended adolescence.

In the next section, “Boy-Men in Bromance,” I examine the contradictory character of the bromance film; hence, while the films indulge in male friendship as an escape from the strictures of heteronormative adulthood, they ultimately endorse heteronormativity when the male characters “grow up” and enter into romantic partnerships with the opposite sex. Through close readings of *Wedding Crashers* (2005) and *I Love You, Man* (2009), I demonstrate that both of these films are in the end conservative and even reactionary, primarily because of the homophobia at their core.

The subsequent segment of the chapter focuses on the cinematic “basement boy,” boy-men who still live with their parents or other family members well beyond their teenage years. While the majority of films in this section reinforce heteronormative ideologies pertaining to maturity and success, *Stepbrothers* (2008) and *Jeff, Who Lives at Home* (2011) are ultimately suspicious of adulthood, or, rather, the socially sanctioned expectations that come with being an adult in a heteronormative society. Both films assert in different ways that adulthood is empty and soul-crushing, and that living in an extended adolescence is to feel alive as one’s authentic self.

In the next section, “Obsessive Boy-Men in Breakups/Divorce,” I examine *High Fidelity* (2000) and *Sideways* (2005), both of which feature men with neurotic fixations (music and wine,

respectively) who are dealing with the end of a significant romantic relationship. I argue that both protagonists in these films are stunted in their fan-boy-like obsessions, their snobbery functioning as a compensatory mechanism for the impotence that they feel in their lives. Moreover, they are stuck in their own self-pitying narratives of rejection. While both films end with the “maturation” of the protagonist, I argue that they are not unequivocally heteronormative, as each film ultimately supports a queer rendering of normative temporality and its trajectory.

The last two sections of the chapter examine the boy-man as a surrogate father. Through close readings of *About A Boy* (2002), *School of Rock* (2004) and *The Way, Way Back* (2013), I demonstrate how the immature males in these films essentially “grow up” through their surrogate fatherhood, albeit in ways that do not move into the conservatism of heteronormativity. Indeed, instead of reinforcing the tired predictability of “reproductive futurism” (Edelman), *About A Boy* leaves us with the possibility of another kind of future, one that goes beyond the reductive paradigm of the nuclear family. Similarly, while the man-child protagonist of *School of Rock* is shown to mature through his mentorship and surrogate fatherhood, the film ultimately asserts that adulthood is not necessarily synonymous with the formulaic fulfillment of heteronormative markers of maturity. Finally, in *A Way, Way Back*, the surrogate father is shown to be both nurturing and empathetic because of, and not despite of, his childish spirit.

Chapter 3, “Queering Female Adulthood: The Woman-Child in Contemporary American Film” focuses on varying constructions of female immaturity in recent cinema. While I do acknowledge that there are definite double standards at play when comparing the cinematic treatment of the woman-child versus her male counterpart, the primary aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the ways in which the immature female has agency and power within her so-called

arrested development or protracted adolescence. In other words, this chapter sets out to examine how this figure challenges the tyranny of heteronormativity, and thus how her immature subjectivity is ultimately empowering in its refusal of normative adulthood.

In the first section of this chapter, I focus on the woman-child in comedy, beginning with the film *Bridesmaids*; this film set the blueprint for the genre, functioning as the “female equivalent” to the Apatowian bromance comedies. Using Halberstam’s theory of queer failure, I argue that the main character’s failure (that is, her stuntedness) is in fact productive, because it works to challenge bourgeois, heteronormative ideals of female maturity and success.

The next section of the chapter moves from the comedy to the comedy-drama, where I examine the “direction-less female Brooklynite[s]” in *Frances Ha* (2012) and *Obvious Child* (2014). I contextualize both films within the indie genre of the “slacker” film, as they are indebted to this tradition in terms of both narrative and style. In my examination of *Frances Ha*, I demonstrate how the main character, Frances, is an anachronism within normative temporality, unable to move in tandem with a heteronormative trajectory of adulthood. I further argue that she is separated from heteronormative conceptions of maturity and success through her failure. Invoking Halberstam, I assert that it is through her failure, however, that she is able to find herself. The film ultimately shows us that failure can be powerful in defying hegemonic regimes of the normal. In my analysis of *Obvious Child*, I similarly argue that the female protagonist’s rejection of normative femininity and thus her failure to conform to traditional standards of adulthood becomes a source of radical subjectivity and a politics of refusal that is ultimately empowering.

In the following segment of the chapter, I use Stockton's concept of "growing sideways" in stuntedness in my examination of *The Lifeguard* (2013) and *Laggies* (2014). In both films, the female protagonist becomes parallel or "side by side" with an adolescent character, through a shared experience of delay. In *The Lifeguard*, the main character regresses to adolescence and derails her trajectory to adulthood by having an affair with a teenager, who is also "delayed" as a result of feeling stagnant as a minor in a small town. These characters engage in what Stockton calls "sideways relations," in that they become parallel with each other through their mutual experiences of delay (53). Moreover, although in a state of arrest, Leigh grows sideways in her suspension, a movement which challenges heteronormative conceptions of linear or vertical development. Similarly, in *Laggies*, I argue that the female protagonist's friendship with a teenager also engages in "sideways relations," as she becomes "side by side" or parallel with this adolescent through her reversion to a teenage life. Furthermore, akin to *The Lifeguard*, the protagonist grows through her delay, becoming a kind of parental figure to the adolescent girl and thus finding a sense of purpose.

In the last section of the chapter, I focus on the "Thirty-Something and Single Woman-Child" in an analysis of *Young Adult* (2011). Here, I examine the idea that the single woman is marked as abject and "desperate" in her failure of heteronormative maturity (Negra 61). In a similar vein to the other case studies in this chapter, however, I argue that it is through her failure as an abject single woman that the protagonist challenges the tyranny of heteronormativity. The film's assault on heteronormative adulthood, I contend, is not only evidenced by the protagonist's vocal contempt for marriage and babies, but also through her juvenile behaviour,

both of which demonstrate an adamant refusal to conform to acceptable standards of mature femininity.

Review of Literature

Although this project is predominantly situated within film studies, this field is rather interdisciplinary and thus intersects with various other disciplines, such as gender studies, cultural studies, history, and queer studies. All of these areas of study are integral to my research, and will be covered in the following literature review. This literature review will cover the issue of male immaturity and arrested development first, before moving on to literature related to female immaturity and arrested development.

To provide the appropriate context for male immaturity and arrested development, it is crucial to address the male coming-of-age narrative, which functions as both a precursor and counterpoint to the figure of the boy-man. In *Boy Culture: An Encyclopedia* (2010), Naomi Hamer defines coming-of-age “as the transition from childhood to adulthood and could imply a process or period of physical, social, emotional, legal, religious, and cultural transformation that may be involved in an individual’s maturation” (328). Hamer writes that coming-of-age narratives in literature and film are characteristic of the *Bildungsroman*, or “novel of formation,” which refers to a protagonist’s “maturation process that involves struggling against internal and external obstacles; and the protagonist’s rebellion against societal norms” (328). This maturation process may also involve various rites of passage, such as primary romantic and sexual experiences (Hamer 328).

Within Anglo-American literature, Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Great Expectations* (1861) are early examples of the novel of formation. Dickens’ coming-of-age narratives would be a major influence on later novels, such as Mark Twain’s classic, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884-1885) (Hamer 328). The coming-of-age novel also saw a

resurgence in the mid-twentieth century with J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* (1959), as well as *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) by William Golding (Hamer 329).

The genre also emerged in the realm of film, especially during the 1970s and early 80s, with titles such as *The Last Picture Show* (1971), *American Graffiti* (1973), and *Diner* (1982). These dramas focused on the struggles of young men in their transition from adolescence to adulthood (Hamer 331). In the 1980s, films such as *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) and other films written and directed by John Hughes featured coming-of-age narratives that dealt with themes of sexuality and romance (Hamer 331). One can see that the puerile humour of coming-of-age sex comedies such as *American Pie* (1999) and *Superbad* (2007) have greatly influenced the contemporary boy-man comedy (*Knocked Up*, for example); however, the obvious difference between the two genres is that while the former focuses on various rites of passage for groups of young men, the latter feature males who seem to be stuck in a perennial stage of adolescence. The popularity of boy-man comedies speaks to a profound cultural shift; after over a century of narratives that focused on male coming-of-age, popular culture is now (more than ever) fixated on the idea of men never growing up. But why? The popularity of the boy-man in American culture is a phenomenon that is thoroughly examined by Gary Cross in *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity* (2008).

Gary Cross is a scholar within the field of cultural studies whose work on the subject of male immaturity is integral to this project. Cross argues that there has been a decline in the standards of maturity that defined hegemonic masculinity in the postwar years, and that this decline has its roots in the bohemian and rebel ideologies of the WWII and boomer generations

(Cross 15), as well as in the emergence of a widespread youth consumer culture in the postwar era (Cross 97). Cross argues that the “boy-man has become a central character in our culture and, even if men do find ways of meeting their economic and even social obligations, the culture of immaturity had become the norm rather than the exception” (2). Moreover, Cross also points out that the appeal and popularity of male immaturity is evidenced by the media landscape of the past fifteen years, which has seen a proliferation of films and television shows which focus on the crude and the puerile and which feature immature male characters (173). Thus, Cross argues that boy-men are also the “tastemakers” of American culture and the target audience for entertainment media (6). Cross’s observation about the cultural appeal of boy-men is vital to this project, as I am arguing that male immaturity, while provoking anxiety about the stability of masculinity, is also highly desirable.

Anthony Balducci’s *I Won’t Grow Up! The Comic Man-Child in Film from 1901 to the Present* (2016) traces the evolution of the comic man-child across film history, from the comedians of the silent era, to Jerry Lewis, to the contemporary man-child, Seth Rogen. Central to Balducci’s project is the idea that immaturity and comedy are inextricably linked, despite shifting conceptions of juvenility. Balducci argues that while naiveté and incompetence were cornerstones of immaturity in 1940s films (for example, Lou Costello), today childishness is constituted by “vulgar[ity]” and recklessness (for example, Adam Sandler or Seth Rogen) (1). Balducci explains that actors like Costello created comedy by appealing to the shared human experience of “failin[g]” and making “mistakes” (3). Unlike Costello, the modern man-child as exemplified by Rogen is “self-indulgent [and] narcissistic” (3). Balducci contends that Costello “represents who we are,” while “Rogen represents who we, at our core, wish we could be–

playful, free-floating, free of responsibility” (3). It is this latter idea that emphasizes how the man-child in popular culture speaks to the duality of fear/desire that is at the crux of my own project. Hence, while the man-child represents a desire to escape the norms and expectations of being a responsible adult, there is also a palpable cultural anxiety surrounding immaturity, which is why the man-child is almost always rehabilitated into mature adulthood by the film’s end.

It could be argued that the boy-men of contemporary media can be traced back to the emergence of the teen film. In *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (2002), Thomas Doherty argues that the teenage market in the 1950s created a profound shift within the film industry, forever changing the landscape of American cinema. In the 1930s and 40s, films were targeted towards a general public, encompassing a “vast, multigenerational audience” (Doherty 1). With the disintegration of the studio system and the introduction of television (Doherty 2), however, this pluralistic ideal was no longer realistic nor sustainable. The “juvenilization” of the film industry in the mid 1950s meant that American movies were no longer a mass medium; films were both produced and marketed to cater to a burgeoning teenage audience--an audience with more disposable income and leisure time than their parents and grandparents (Doherty 2). Moreover, the youth audience that these movies were aimed at set the standard for what is now the “operative reality” of the U.S. film industry as we know it today (2).

Doherty’s discussion of the way in which *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) is evidential of the growing gap between parents and teenagers in the mid-1950s is especially of interest to this study, as one could argue that the proliferation of immature culture today has nearly closed this divide. Doherty also points out the way in which the teenage subculture of the 1950s was

extended into the 1960s counterculture, when “youth” was more loosely defined as a concept rather than a specific age group. In other words, Doherty explains, “teenage-like life in America was no longer the exclusive province of teenagers” (190). This is evidenced in a film like *Easy Rider*, where the film’s thirty-something protagonists are caught in an extended adolescence (Doherty 192-93). The idea of youth as a culture and not a chronology is an important point to keep in mind when tracing the beginnings of the “culture of immaturity” (Cross) that is so ubiquitous in popular culture of the first two decades of the 21st century. Moreover, Doherty explains how the youth-cult films of the late 1960s and early 70s, although aimed at a youth audience, also had crossover appeal into the mainstream (191). Thus, what had been a “great divide” between youth and parent cultures in the 1950s now had a middle ground with films such as *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) (191). This “cross-over appeal” also continues with youth-oriented films today, and especially films which feature boy-men. Although the boy-man films are seemingly targeted towards a male, 21 and under audience, the content of the films, which focus on grown men who are arrested in their development, suggest that the films also appeal to men in their thirties and older, attesting to the popularity of immaturity within mainstream culture.

Doherty also points out that while teenpics in the 1950s and 60s “catered to rebellion against Mom and Dad and liberation from the confines of the home,” contemporary youth-oriented films “obey their elders” and yearn for parental authority (209). However, contemporary teen films like *Superbad* (2007) challenge this claim, as the adults in the films are anything but authoritative, acting like immature adolescents themselves. Thus, Doherty’s claim that “the lightning bolts of 9-11 seem likely to cement the trend toward stern discipline and father-son

bonding in the teenpic” (209) is rather problematic, as I would argue that youth films post-9-11 have seen a loosening or an all-together absence of parental authority (Jason Bateman’s character in *Juno* (2007) comes to mind, as his nostalgia for his 90s alternative rock band days has turned him into a delusional boy-man).

Within the area of masculinity in film, Steven Cohan’s *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (1997) provides a comprehensive study on the performance of masculinity in film and within the public sphere. In this book, Cohan examines how the American films of the fifties “contributed to but also resisted and problematized the postwar articulation of masculinity as a universal condition” (Cohan xv). Cohan examines the way in which the performances of masculinity enacted on screen reflected and perpetuated various discourses about masculinity in the 1950s era. For example, Cohan argues that the “normative masculinity” embodied by the figure of ‘The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit’ served to conceal the “social differences that stratified US society” in the era (Cohan quoted in Peberdy 31). Cohan also demonstrates, however, how this hegemonic masculinity is contested in films which foreground different masquerades of masculinity, effectively challenging masculinity’s perceived homogeneity (Cohan qtd. in Peberdy 31). Cohan’s chapter entitled “Why Boys are Not Men” is especially relevant to my research on male immaturity, as he discusses the way in which Hollywood studios strategically employed actors who were perceived as “boys” in opposition to the hegemonic, virile masculinity embodied by actors such as John Wayne and Gary Cooper (202). Cohan argues that although boyishness connoted the idea of an “incomplete man,” it also had an attractive quality. Thus, part of the attractive quality of stars such as Marlon Brando, James Dean and Montgomery Clift was the “bisexual effect” that they possessed, and their status

as erotic objects troubled a reading of their masculinity as unequivocally heterosexual (Cohan 244). However, because they were referred to as boys and not men, “the disruptive difference of their sexuality bec[ame] the proto-form of normative 50s masculinity” (59). This chapter is rather significant to my first chapter of this dissertation, which maps the dualism of anxiety and desire that permeated the notion of immature masculinity in the postwar era.

In her essay, “Movies and the New Faces of Masculinity” (2005), Kristen Hatch also observes the way in which the boyishness of Brando and Clift represented a transgression of normative middle-class masculinity in the 1950s. Hatch argues that Brando’s stardom “was the product of a destabilization of masculinity that had become markedly felt” (Hatch 46) in the postwar period, as “femininity and masculinity were in a state of intensive flux” (46). Within this atmosphere of change and uncertainty emerged a countercultural force which worked against the ideologies of middle-class consumerism and domesticity, and part of this force was Marlon Brando (Hatch 49). Hatch argues that although Brando’s non-conformity would spur a generation of young, rebellious men who would come after him, “[his] refusal to embrace middle-class masculinity was often interpreted as childish” (52). Brando’s immaturity is conveyed onscreen as well, especially in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), as his failure to embody a hegemonic masculinity as an adult man (Hatch 52). Hatch argues that Brando’s childishness, in combination with the eroticization of his body, weakens his perceived masculinity (57).

The link between immaturity and a weakened or feminized masculinity is also explored by Dennis Bingham (1994). Bingham discusses how initially James Stewart’s boyishness, “his lithe physique and emotional demeanor,” left the studio’s publicity department utterly dumbfounded as to how they would market such a unique brand of masculinity (25). However,

with time, “Stewart actually became a star in films that capitalized on his sexual ambivalence” (Bingham 25). Bingham demonstrates that the equivocality surrounding Stuart’s gender identity as a result of his boyishness became a part of his star persona and thus the bankability of his films. Bingham’s argument reinforces my own contention that immature masculinity, while anxiety-provoking, is also appealing and desirable. Moreover, Bingham’s assertion that “‘boyishness’ gives way to ‘femininity’ because both are ‘read’ as something other than masculine” (28) is explored further in my first chapter, where I trace the ways in which immature masculinity was constructed in postwar American culture.

The binary of a boyish masculinity versus a more “manly” masculinity can also be interpreted as “hard” versus “soft” masculinity. Robert Bly’s *Iron John* is one of these cultural texts to use this binary to great effect, as it became one of the major bestsellers of the 1990s (Greven 163). In this book, Bly laments the decline of traditional ‘manhood’ at the expense of feminism and a larger feminisation of American culture, urging men to reclaim their virile masculinities by going back to nature (Peberdy 99). According to Donna Peberdy (2011), Bly’s book and the culture that was engendered from it “appears to conform to a wider pattern in film and masculinity studies in seeing masculinity as either ‘hard’ or ‘soft’” (101). Peberdy argues that scholarship on masculinity in Hollywood film often focuses on the way in which certain tropes of masculinity are representative of a particular period or cultural era (101), conveying the idea that “masculinity operates in phases or cycles” (Peberdy 101). An example of this kind of scholarship is Susan Jeffords’ *Hard Bodies* (1994). Jeffords sees hegemonic conceptions of the male body as shifting during the Reagan and Bush presidencies. She argues that while the “hard bodies” that characterized the Reagan era spoke directly to the “softer” bodies of the previous

presidency under Carter, “the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a reevaluation of that hard body, not for a return to the Carter soft body but for a rearticulation of masculine strength and power through internal, personal, and family-oriented values” (13). Peberdy, however, takes issue with Jefferson’s binaristic characterization of masculinity as either “hard” or “soft.” She believes that reducing masculinity to one dominant form that typifies a certain historical period is both essentializing and reductive (Peberdy 102). Peberdy argues that this kind of scholarship ignores the possibility of masculinity being hard and soft simultaneously, asserting that “representations of masculinity are inherently bipolar, moving between hard and soft modes” (102). Thus, the boy-man figure is ostensibly a “soft” masculinity because of his immaturity and his close relationships to his male peers (bromance), but a character like Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire* evidences both modes, vascillating between child-like innocence and a more virile and violent masculinity.

Just as some films point more to the desirability of immature masculinity, other films are more indicative of the fear and anxiety it engenders. Peter Biskind discusses the latter in his book, *Seeing is Believing* (1984). Biskind examines how the figure of the “momma’s boy” is pathologized in several Hollywood films: “In *White Heat*, momma’s boy James Cagney was a psycho...Robert Walker was the nut who danced to his mother’s tune in Hitchcock’s *Strangers on a Train* (1951), and again the Commie/fag/egghead whose mind rotted on mommy’s breast in *My Son John*” (297). The pathologization of the momma’s boy is also examined by Lucy Fischer in her essay, “Mama’s Boy: Filial hysteria in *White Heat*” (1995). Fischer argues that the figure of Cody Jarrett (James Cagney) “registers myriad cultural fears about masculinity: suspicions of the discharged soldier, worries about the returning vet, anxieties about manhood within the American

nuclear family” (70). But what is most anxiety-provoking about Jarrett is that his deviant behaviour is understood to be an effect of his arrested development: “Cody’s infantile regression seems the cause of both his neurosis and his criminality, making him a middle-aged ‘juvenile’ delinquent” (72). Fischer connects the film’s preoccupation with the momma’s boy to the war-time and postwar cultural anxiety surrounding ‘Momism,’ i.e., the fear that men were forming unhealthy attachments to their mothers (81). My first chapter explores the parallels between the mama’s boy and the mother in the postwar era as contradictory figures who were both idealized and villified in popular and psychiatric discourse.

While Cross associates male immaturity with the indulgent consumer culture of the middle and upper-middle class, Derek Nystrom (2009) examines the way in which male immaturity is associated with a working class identity, where maturity is synonymous with the middle class. Discussing working-class masculinity in the film *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), Nystrom argues that Tony’s impulsive behaviour in the film is representative of a larger cultural narrative that sees the working class as child-like because of their inability to delay gratification (121). Moreover, Nystrom draws a parallel between working class masculinity’s deviation from the norm of middle-class “modes of development” and “homosexuality’s supposed divergence from paths to mature heterosexuality” (120). However, just as this parallel points to the cultural anxiety surrounding male immaturity (synonymous here with the working class), Nystrom also discusses the way in which this desire for regression in “working class embodiment” is manifest in the “spectacularization” of the working class male body in the film (128). In this way, Nystrom’s analysis can be connected to Cohan and Hatch’s discussion of the sexualization of Brando’s working class body in *Streetcar*.

David Greven (2009) also discusses the appeal of a rejection of middle-class masculinity in his analysis of *Fight Club*. Greven argues that “[i]t is precisely the Narrator’s submission to the effeminizing quality of corporate life that the film critiques” (*Manhood* 163). In this way, the man who rejects the corporate world and responsible manhood in favour of regressing back to a world of virility and basic needs is representative of an ideal masculinity in the film. As both Nystrom and Greven illustrate, class is a significant issue in cultural conceptions of male immaturity, one that points to its contradictory status as alluring and anxiety-provoking. Also related to the phenomena of male immaturity is male homosociality. Because male homosociality obviously excludes women, it allows men to escape to a world where they do not have to answer to heteronormative standards. The buddy film is an important progenitor of the contemporary bromance and has been “the most widely discussed example” of male homosociality in cinema (Greven, *Manhood* 135). Robin Wood’s essay, “From Buddies to Lovers” (1986) examines the buddy films of the 1970s and is a foundational work on this topic. In his essay, Wood argues that not only are these films misogynistic, but they are also homophobic, “in that the possibility that homosocial bonds might include homosexuality had to be rigorously and violently denied” (Greven 135). Wood argues that the mass appeal of the buddy film “testifies, no doubt, to the contemporary ‘heterosexual’ male audience’s need to denigrate and marginalize women, but also, positively, to its unconscious but immensely powerful need to validate love between men” (Wood quoted in Greven 136).

Also writing on this issue of male homosociality in the cinema is Robert Kolker, who argues that “[t]he ‘buddy’ is an extension of the cultural cliché of ‘male bonding,’ a situation in which men can fantasize about being released from the repressions imposed by the company of

women” (Kolker quoted in Greven 136). Furthermore, the way in which males see sexuality as a hindrance to their own virility is referred to by Kolker as “the ‘buddy’ complex”, where this “denial of sexuality carries a covert admission to the possibilities of homosexuality, which, of course, is inadmissible” (Kolker quoted in Greven 136). The simultaneous desire and anxiety surrounding the male buddy is vital to my own argument about male immaturity.

In her discussion of male homosociality in the cinema, Maria San Filippo (2013) argues that the convention of the homosocial utopia established in the classical western is carried on through male buddy films of the 1960s and 70s and then into the bromance cycles of the present day. She argues that “the buddy film remained a refuge from encroaching threats to white male privilege, heteromascularity, and the sanctity of the family associated with the social movements of the time. The bromance resuscitates those male buddy films that flourished amid the era of gay and women’s liberation” (182). San Filippo also observes that despite the buddy film’s evolution from its “tragic mode” of the 1970s, to the “comic mode” of the bromance, it still demonstrates a “sexual ambiguity and nostalgia for adolescence” (183). She also argues that despite the buddy film’s cross-over into comedy, a genre which allows more room for play and liminality, its anxiety surrounding the boundaries separating the acceptable homosocial from the unacceptable homosexual reinforces its conservatism (183).

In contrast to San Filippo’s reading, however, Tania Modleski views the bromance genre as creating a space for homosexual desire. In her article, “An Affair to Forget: Melancholia in Bromantic Comedy” (2014), Modleski examines theories of melancholia in her analysis of bromance comedy films. Modleski turns to Judith Butler, who argues that heterosexuality itself is melancholic because of the way in which it denies the possibility of same-sex desire, a

possibility that becomes a lost object that can never be acknowledged (within heteronormative culture) (Butler cited in Modleski 121). Extending Butler's theory to film, Modleski argues that the romantic comedy genre can be seen as melancholic because of the way in which the formation of the couple at the end of these films "forecloses" homosexual desire (122). This foreclosing of same-sex desire constitutes, then, "an affair to forget" (126). However, for Modleski, the bromance genre is unique because it does not deny the possibility of same-sex desire. For example, in *Superbad* (2007), same-sex desire is foregrounded, creating a shift from melancholia to mourning, "or the open acknowledgment of what one has lost" (127). What is particularly interesting about Modleski's essay is her argument about the ending of the film, which at first glance, she argues, seems to simply reinforce "heterosexual fantasies in which men evade adult responsibility, leaving women to fend for themselves" (128). However, Modleski queers this conventional reading of the film, arguing instead that the characters' reluctance to follow a heteronormative trajectory is actually motivated by homosexual desire (128). Modleski's argument sheds much light on cultural understandings of male arrested development, revealing that it is not always a result of a desire for escape, but could also in fact be motivated by deeper, unconscious desires.

Modleski also draws upon Juliana Schiesari's theory of melancholia, which contends that "the category of melancholia has been used to accredit and privilege men's losses, grief, and sorrows," while women's "losses and grief are frequently relegated to the decidedly unromantic category of depression" (120). Employing this theory, Modleski argues that while men in bromances do not appear to be emotionally affected by their arrested development, "matter-of-factly" practicing self-deprecation, the female protagonist in *Bridesmaids* (which presents a

female equivalent to the bromance comedy) is deeply affected by her arrested development, believing that she is a failure. Modleski argues that “her sadness and self-esteem mark her as a depressive rather than a melancholic” (140). This kind of double standard evidences the way in which our culture is quite uncomfortable with the notion of a woman being socially or emotionally stunted (for example, being unemployed and/or unsuccessful in love). My third chapter challenges this double standard through the lens of queer theory, where I demonstrate how failure and immaturity can be harnessed as politically-charged subjectivities against the oppressiveness of heteronormativity.

As a segue into more of the literature on women and immaturity, I will now review the literature on screwball comedy. As mentioned earlier, the notion of play is a central structuring metaphor in the screwball comedy, one that allows both the male and female leads freedom from the constraints of marriage and romance (56). For example, in her discussion of the Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant screwball comedy, *Holiday* (1938), Kathrina Glitre (2006) argues that the film “rejects patriarchal sexuality and romance, offering the companionate fun and friendship of [play] in its place” (57). Glitre argues that “gestures of love and romance are conspicuously absent from screwball comedy, and those films which do include conventional signifiers of romance usually treat them ironically” (57).

In keeping with the subject of regression, Andrew Britton argues that the 1930s screwball comedies starring Cary Grant focus on the journey of the Grant character “from patriarchal masculinity into a polymorphous presocial sexuality” (qtd. in Glitre 9). Britton also touches upon the notion of regression when he argues that “the narrative action of these films is the hero’s ‘unlearning’ of patriarchal conditioning and his acceptance of his ‘feminine’ traits” (qtd. in Glitre

9). Also discussing the immaturity of the male in screwball comedy, Aaron Taylor (2013) argues that the classical screwball heroine “is drawn to a male partner because of, not in spite of, his boyishness” (42).

Taylor’s observation should also be connected to the historical context of the 1930s and thus the fact that these films were produced in a period that “follow[ed] the suffragettes’ movement that won women the vote in 1920” (Filippo 190). Thus, perhaps women desired a more boyish man because this figure deviated from the more patriarchal models of manhood that oppressed women. Touching upon the feminist impulse of these films, Stanley Cavell argues that the classic screwball comedy of remarriage “offer ‘parables of a phase in the development of consciousness at which the struggle is for the reciprocity or equality of consciousness between a man and a woman” (qtd. in San Filippo 190).

Cavell also argues that the goal of the screwball comedy is to steer clear of the monotony and tameness of domesticity and “to discover ‘the comic itself as the redemption of dailiness” (qtd. in Taylor 40). Cavell’s quote brings to mind what was discussed earlier about the genre of comedy: it creates an acceptable space in which characters can break free from the performativity of gender and sexuality. The freedom that the comic mode provides may be a contributing factor as to why the boy-man—a figure who challenges traditional conceptions of adult masculinity—is often found in the comedy genre (see Balducci, above).

In contrast to the notion of the screwball comedy offering a space for equality between the sexes, David R. Shumway (2012) argues that although these films feature “spunky, strong women,” they must be tamed and domesticated by the film’s end in order “for the romance to be consummated and for marriage to take place” (474). In his discussion of *It Happened One Night*

and *The Philadelphia Story*, Shumway argues that both films demonstrate “that married women must become little girls,” while men function as parental figures (473). In this way, the films are conveying the notion that women are helpless and in need of a protector in the form of masculine authority (Shumway 473). Shumway’s observations point to the way in which romance and domesticity can infantilize women—an ironic thought given the fact that these elements are often measured as criteria for female maturity.

In her essay, “Melodrama and Men in Post-Classical Romantic Comedy” (1995), Kathleen Rowe takes a different view from that of Shumway’s. She argues that male authority in the screwball comedy “is something to be mocked, and masculinity the subject of laughter rather than pathos” (185). However, Rowe argues, this poking fun at masculinity is no longer acceptable in the post-classical romantic comedy, which frames its male heroes as victims in the tradition of the “feminised genre of melodrama” (185). Rowe believes that this shift is a result of the pervasive attack on masculine authority in the 1960s and the ensuing ideology of the 80s and 90s that no longer saw masculinity “as a safe subject for comedy” (185). Interestingly, the contemporary boy-man comedy (which almost always has a romantic subplot) of the 2000s and 2010s resurrects the screwball comedy convention of the male protagonist as the subject of ridicule, albeit in a way that presents his immaturity as a point of audience identification, so that the boy-man target audience is laughing with, and not at, the foibles of their cinematic counterparts.

The presence of immature women in cinema goes back further than the screwball comedy of the 1930s, however. According to Graham Vickers (2008), childish femininity “ha[s] been a staple of Hollywood films [since] the earliest days of the medium” (55). Vickers points to how

the cinema of the silent era often invoked the Dickensian adjective “little” in both the “promotional screen names” of the period’s young actresses and in the titles of their films. For example, Mary Pickford was often referred to as “Little Mary Pickford,” and starred in “*The Little Princess*, *Little Annie Rooney* and *The Poor Little Rich Girl*” (56). Moreover, D.W. Griffith introduced to American cinema the “first recognizable prototype nymphet...portrayed by Lillian Gish and later played by actresses like Carol Dempster, Colleen Moore, and Mae Marsh” (Vickers 57). Indeed, the narratives of Griffith’s films often revolved around an innocent young girl being “threatened by sex or violence,” a standard convention of the Victorian melodrama (Vickers 56).

By the 1930s, however, the popularity of the cinematic “Dickensian waif” was on the wane, as grown women posing as children was no longer de rigueur (Vickers 61). Interestingly, though, “children impersonating adults were becoming very popular indeed,” with Shirley Temple as the “queen” of this particular Hollywood trend (Vickers 62, 63). In the 1940s, “Elizabeth Taylor, Judy Garland, and Deanna Durbin personified the older girl-child stereotype,” portraying “adolescent girls who were sweet but not provocative, resourceful but not rebellious” (Vickers 65). The end of the decade, however, saw a shift to darker, “grittier fare,” reflecting the prevailing mood of instability and paranoia enveloping the nation in the aftermath of the Second World War (Vickers 68). While actresses such as Lauren Bacall and Gloria Grahame were only in their early twenties, “the shadowy, crime-ridden milieus they inhabited onscreen represented adult entertainment that seemed more in keeping with the times” (Vickers 68).

The 1950s marked a return to child-like women on screen: “pneumatic Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield, ambivalent Carroll Baker and Judy Holliday, waiflike Audrey Hepburn and Leslie Caron” (Vickers 69). Monroe was especially representative of this “new breed” of female stars, as her caricature-like aesthetic of a “fully formed woman” was combined “with a wide-eyed expression and a mannered breathy little voice that signaled childish ingenuousness” (Vickers 72). The contradictory (and controversial) combination of “childlike innocence and adult sexuality” would in fact emerge as a major preoccupation of mid-century popular culture, with the publication of Vladimir Nabokov’s novel, *Lolita* (1955) (Vickers 69). Indeed, Vickers views Monroe and the other woman-child figures described above as cinematic incarnations and variations of Nabokov’s eponymous character (55).

It is interesting to think about the childish woman figure that Monroe represents in relation to the childish men that also populated the screen in the 1950s, such as Montgomery Clift, James Dean, and Marlon Brando. While these “new faces of masculinity” signified a resistance against traditional gender roles, however, Monroe’s childlike demeanor reinforced patriarchal constructions of women as vulnerable and immature, and thus in need of a man “to look after her” (Vickers 73). Indeed, the infantilization of the postwar housewife would be the subject of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), published roughly a decade after Monroe’s rise to stardom. Although women were infantilized, however, they were also expected to be mothers and caregivers. The first chapter of this project explores the way in which romantic relationships in 1950s male melodramas are characterized by a mother-child-like dynamic, where the female characters in these films function as maternal figures to their child-like husbands and boyfriends. The manichean construction of women as either child-like sex kittens (Monroe) or

devoted mothers in 1950s films can be seen as a variation of the age-old mother-whore dichotomy, bespeaking the reductivism of female representation in this era.

The “girling of femininity” (discussed further in the next section on postfeminism) certainly persists in contemporary cinematic representations, a notable one being the figure of the “manic pixie dream girl.” Coined by Nathan Rabin in 2007 to describe the quirky character of Kirsten Dunst in Cameron Crowe’s *Elizabethtown* (2005), the “manic pixie dream girl” is a “fantasy figure” (Rabin, “Manic Pixie Dream Girl”) who “exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures” (Rabin, “Elizabethtown”). Rabin further describes this character type as a “carefree nymphet” whose whimsical quirkiness essentially “save[s]” the male protagonist “from depression and ennui,” before “disappear[ing] once her work is done” (“Manic Pixie Dream Girl”). Indeed, Rabin explains that the zany woman-child played by Natalie Portman in *Garden State* (2004) is another example of this archetype, functioning as “the accessory to Zach Braff’s character development” (“Manic Pixie Dream Girl”). Moreover, Zooey Deschanel’s brand of “adorkable,” “twee” femininity has made her the Manic Pixie Dream Girl *par excellence*, immortalized in 2009’s *500 Days of Summer* and, more recently, in her television series, *New Girl* (2011-), which actually subverts this figure (Stillwell).

Since the publication of Rabin’s article a decade ago, “the Manic Pixie Dream Girl” has entered into the popular vernacular, and the “trope” has become rather ubiquitous within the media landscape. We must not confuse pervasiveness with progress, however; after all, the Manic Pixie Dream Girl is a two-dimensional figure whose only purpose is to be the quirky and fun emotional pillar for a listless male protagonist. In an article for *Salon* magazine in 2014,

Rabin publicly apologized for coining the phrase, acknowledging its misogynistic undertones: “The trope of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl is a fundamentally sexist one,” he writes. “...it makes women seem less like autonomous, independent entities than appealing props to help mopey, sad white men self-actualize” (Rabin, “Manic Pixie Dream Girl”). Rabin writes further that “[t]he archetype of the free-spirited life-lover who cheers up a male sad-sack has existed in the culture for ages. But by giving an idea a name and a fuzzy definition, you apparently also give it power. And in my case, that power spun out of control” (“Manic Pixie Dream Girl”). Indeed, earlier incarnations of the MPDG are the “madcap” heroines of the screwball comedies, or even the eponymous character of Woody Allen’s *Annie Hall* (1977) (Bowman et al.).

A somewhat inverted incarnation of the archetype can be found in Joe Swanberg’s *Happy Christmas* (2014), where the Anna Kendrick character, Jenny, is more depressive and self-destructive than she is manic and pixie; she self-medicates through alcohol after a harsh breakup, crashing in the basement of her brother and sister-in-law’s place to sort out her life. While Jenny’s childish free-spiritedness gives her uninspired relatives hope and exuberance, however, the film invokes a revisionist version of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl narrative. This is demonstrated primarily by Jenny’s encouragement of and inspiration to her sister-in-law; hence, instead of reviving the spirits of a male love interest (as is usually the case with the MPDG trope), Jenny helps another woman resuscitate an important part of her identity (that is, her identity as a writer). It is in this way that *Happy Christmas* provides a feminist-revisionist take on the Manic Pixie Dream Girl trope.

Finally, another issue that is relevant to this project’s analysis of the cinematic woman-child is examining media texts in a postfeminist age. The concept of postfeminism is one that is

difficult to pin down. As Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (2007) argue, “definitive conceptualizations of postfeminism are as elusive as references to postfeminism are pervasive” (19). However, what is clear about postfeminism is its inherently contradictory nature; Tasker and Negra argue that postfeminism functions through a paradoxical discourse in which feminism is simultaneously viewed as outdated and passé, while its residual effects “can be found (and sometimes even valued) in the present” (8). Thus, postfeminism conveys the idea that it is the ostensible success of feminism which renders it irrelevant within contemporary culture (Tasker and Negra 8). Also commenting on the contradictory character of postfeminism is Sarah Projansky (2007), who argues that postfeminism is “simultaneously feminist and antifeminist, liberating and repressive, productive and obstructive of progressive social change” (68).

Examining the way in which postfeminist culture speaks to female arrested development and regression is Diane Negra. In her book, *What A Girl Wants: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (2009), Negra argues that within postfeminist culture, feminism is perceived as having “disturbed contemporary female subjectivity” (5); thus, the postfeminist subject is repeatedly shown as finding herself “through romance, de-aging, a makeover, by giving up paid work, or by ‘coming home’” (5). Within this context, Negra contends that in many ways, postfeminism “stifles mobility, favoring constraint and the acquiescence to normative models of identity even while hyping aspirational consumerism” (6). One of the ways that the mobility of women is stifled within postfeminist culture is through what Negra refers to as the master narrative of “retreatism,” where women give up their successful careers (often in urban areas) to assume traditional domestic roles (17). This idea of retreatism, Negra argues, is often manifested

in popular culture as the professional woman returning to her hometown, so as to reinforce women's symbolic function as safeguards of "local, communal, regional, and...national meanings through their rejection of global cosmopolitanism" (16). Negra argues that this ideology is evidenced in female-centered genres of film and television, in which the professional woman in the narrative undergoes a "retreatist epiphany," realizing that the identity she has achieved through career success and education is inadequate without a domestic foundation (21). On the other side of the debate, however, Negra points out that some critics argue that retreatism is in fact a feminist posture, because of the way in which it opposes patriarchal definitions of work and success (24). Still, as Negra aptly argues, to view this kind of "downshifting" as a form of personal empowerment only serves to reinforce our culture's tendency "to represent feminism in terms antithetical to its actual political agenda" (25). Within the narrative of retreatism, therefore, "professionalization and maturation" represent losses and not gains in the female subject's path to self discovery and actualization (Negra 17). Indeed, we could view retreatism as a form of female social and emotional stuntedness; however, in this case, the issue is not so much arrested development as it is *regression*, as professional females forgo their status and success to secure their "true" calling in the domestic sphere. As I argue in the third chapter, however, immaturity and its related states of arrested development, regression, and failure can be politically empowering modes of being for women who feel confined by the strictures of heteronormative adulthood.

Keeping in mind that notions of arrested development and regression are temporal in nature, Negra's argument that "postfeminism evidences a distinct preoccupation with the temporal" (48) is also rather relevant to this project. Part of postfeminism's "preoccupation with

the temporal” is its dismissal of feminism as aging or even obsolete. As Tasker and Negra argue, “postfeminism in all its guises posits the contemporary as surpassing feminism, leaving it behind. In doing so, it implicitly draws strength from the anxiety of aging at work in so many of its texts” (11). Negra argues that this anxiety manifests itself in the way that female stages of life are defined “within the parameters of ‘time panic’” (47). Within this postfeminist framework, these life stages focus on “the discovery of personal destiny, the securing of a romantic partner and motherhood, and the negotiation of the problem of paid work (seldom its rewards)” (47). Moreover, as Negra argues, women who do not fit into these pre-constituted life stages and thus do not meet these markers of development lose visibility and credibility in popular culture. One of such figures is the single woman, who, according to Negra, is viewed as abject because of her failure to conform to “the normative stages of the female life cycle” (61). This “temporal failure” (Negra 61) that constitutes female singlehood can also be construed as a form of arrested development. I discuss the cultural construction of the thirty-something single woman as abject in my analysis of *Young Adult* in the third chapter, where I demonstrate how the perceived immaturity of the single woman can be a counter-hegemonic form of resistance against adulthood and its heteronormative tenets.

Discussing cultural conceptions of female maturity, Negra points to several television programs and films that feature a female protagonist who essentially “grows up” when she takes on a mothering role. For example, discussing the film *Raising Helen* (2004), Negra argues that “Helen has finally achieved a meaningful state of female maturity because of her acceptance of her maternal destiny” (66). Interestingly, however, while popular culture wants women to achieve a self-actualizing sense of maturity through their roles as wives and mothers, they

paradoxically also want them to remain youthful and girl-like. Examining the television program *Desperate Housewives*, Negra argues that the series' "celebration of the sexuality of the 30/40-something woman...is consistent with the new availability postfeminism extends to women of various ages to be youthful and girly at midlife" (73). Thus, the postfeminist female subject is caught in a tyrannical catch-22—she will be deemed abject and immature if she does not conform to the expectations of marriage and motherhood, but she must also be careful not to be *too* mature, as her visibility and meaning in contemporary culture depend on her ability to retain her youth.

The "acutely age conscious" character of postfeminist texts, as evidenced by films such as *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001) and television programs like *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) (Tasker and Negra 11) also functions in tandem with postfeminist culture's preoccupation with girls and girlhood. Tasker and Negra argue that within this postfeminist culture emerges "the girling of femininity itself...evident in both the celebration of the young woman as a marker of postfeminist liberation and the continuing tendency to either explicitly term or simply treat women of a variety of ages as girls" (18). In fact, Tasker and Negra add, within postfeminist culture, "girlhood is imagined...as being for everyone" (18). It could be argued that postfeminism depends on female arrested development, as it is predicated on "girliness and youth" as well as a renunciation of feminism (and therefore all of the progressive steps that have been made in the name of women's rights) (Projansky 43). Furthermore, commenting on how the postfeminist subject is only made visible through her own oppression, Angela McRobbie argues that "the new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold [a potential feminist] critique, [in order] to count as a modern sophisticated girl'" (quoted in Projansky 43).

Moreover, Tasker and Negra argue that the “girling of femininity” that is central to postfeminist representational culture is also a way of rendering mature and successful women “safe” and innocuous within the public sphere (Projansky 43). Thus, as Projansky contends, “adolescent girlness epitomizes postfeminism. If the postfeminist woman is always in process, always using the freedom and equality handed to her by feminism in pursuit of having it all...but never quite managing to reach full adulthood, to fully have it all, one could say that the postfeminist woman is quintessentially adolescent” (45).⁴

Examining the notion of “feminine adolescence” is Catherine Driscoll (2002), whose usage of the term also transcends the age confines of teenagers and young women to include female identities “in transition or in process relative to dominant ideas of Womanhood” (6). In this way, Driscoll’s term may also be useful in describing female immaturity, which can be defined in relation to hegemonic conceptions of femininity. In relation to Negra’s identification of normative markers of maturity and achievement for women such as motherhood and marriage, Driscoll argues that “feminine adolescence is performed in transitional roles—including daughter, virgin, bride...girlfriend...that do not necessarily lead to the mature concretization of Woman” (57). Driscoll also argues that “[w]hile masculine adolescence is a progress to Subjectivity, feminine adolescence ideally awaits moments of transformation from girl to Woman” (57). This points to a double standard in which men, even in arrested development, are always in the process of achieving subjectivity, while women can only dream of achieving visibility through heteronormative markers of womanhood (57).

⁴ In regards to this dissertation, I think that a distinction must be drawn between the “girling” of adult women and women who are arrested in their development: the former are women who are self-actualized but juvenilized; the latter are women who have not self-actualized and are, for lack of a better word, “stuck.”

While Driscoll, Tasker and Negra, and Projansky point to the oppressiveness of female immaturity, this project, through the lens of queer theory, demonstrates how immaturity and its related state of failure can be powerful forms of resistance against the oppressiveness of heteronormative female adulthood, and can thus be feminist in nature.

Moving into a discussion of postfeminist discourse within film, Hannah Hamad's chapter, "Postfeminist Fatherhood and Immature Masculinity" (in her book, *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary U.S. Film* [2013]) is especially relevant to my research, as she examines the way in which the competing discourses of immature masculinity and mature fatherhood are reconciled in various popular and independent American films (91). Hamad argues that the "abjection" of male immaturity in these films is recuperated through postfeminist fatherhood, creating a new model of hegemonic masculinity (92). Moreover, Hamad also examines the way in which postfeminist discourse creates a dichotomy between the unambitious, immature male and the ambitious "alpha" female in popular culture. This dichotomy supports a narrative whereby the success of women in postfeminist culture is always to the detriment of men, whose arrested development is viewed as a product of being denied the "open door opportunities" given to women (105). Thus, given this dynamic, Hamad shows how films like *Knocked Up* (2007) possess a trajectory in which the success and ambition of the female character must be restrained, while the immature male's "underachievement" is overcome through fatherhood (105). This double-standard logic is further reinforced with Hamad's discussion of "melancholic" parenthood in Hollywood drama. Hamad contends that while mothers are criticized and demonized for their shortcomings in parenting, fathers are more readily forgiven for their failures, as the narrative trajectories of these films often romanticize the developing maturation

of these father figures through the trope of “epiphany” (Hamad 109). In my second chapter, I examine the way in which the male protagonists in both *About A Boy* (2002) and *School of Rock* (2003) essentially “mature” through their surrogate fatherhood.

Theoretical Framework

When beginning this project, I was using the terms immaturity and arrested development interchangeably; however, I have come to realize that these are two rather different concepts that need to be distinguished from each other. For example, a person can be emotionally immature but self-actualized in terms of their career; on the other hand, a person may be “arrested” in their development in terms of dominant cultural notions of success, but possess emotional maturity. Moreover, regression should also be distinguished from these terms; whereas arrested development implies that someone is stuck or stunted in their development, regression implies that they are reverting back to an earlier stage of development.

In the following section, I begin with psychoanalytic theories of development by Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson, both of whom rely on stage models (psychosexual and psychosocial, respectively) to demonstrate the sequential trajectory to becoming a well-adjusted adult. These theories are important in establishing the way in which the idea of maturity or adulthood has become synonymous with reproductive maturity. Next, I will review the psychological definitions of the terms that are central to this project: maturity and immaturity, arrested development, and finally, regression. Following Foucault, it is important to keep in mind that notions of immaturity, arrested development, and regression are products of dominant discourses that produce knowledges and truths about what is normal and abnormal; the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis form part of these dominant discourses and the theories and definitions that they provide should not be taken at face value. Thus, these definitions are not universal, but they are products of a hegemonic culture that makes them seem as if they are. After the operationalization of terms, I will establish the theoretical context

integral to this project, continuing with theories of development and definitions of maturity within Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, with an emphasis on feminist perspectives within these traditions. I will then move on to queer theory, where I will thoroughly review theories of gender and sexuality, and discuss the ways in which these theories can be applied to understandings of development and maturity. Finally, I will establish the main theoretical orientation of this project with an extensive overview of theories of queer temporality. These queer and feminist perspectives seek to deconstruct dominant discourses about development, gender, and sexuality, and they inform my own theoretical orientation, which I would define as queer deconstructionist.

Theories of Development

Freud's psychoanalytic model of development is composed of three major components: a dynamic component that views the psyche as "a fluid, energized system," a structural component that is made up of a tripartite system of psychological structures that influence our behaviour (the id, the ego, and the superego), and finally, a stage component which focuses on progressive stages of development, emphasizing "different sensitive bodily zones, developmental tasks, and psychological conflicts" (Salkind 114). For the purposes of this project, I will be focusing on the sequential or stage component of Freud's model, which makes up his theory of psychosexual development. Freud's conception of development began from a biological perspective (Salkind 123). He argued that development is composed of various stages and each stage is distinguished "by the focusing of psychic energy on a particular area of the body" (Salkind 123). He called these areas of the body "erogenous zones" (Salkind 123). Freud's stages of development correlate with "sequential changes in the dominance of biological and psychological

needs” (Salkind 123). For example, in the first stage of development, the oral stage, psychic energy is focused in the oral area, where hunger and eating are the primary needs (Salkind 123).

For Freud, the stages are not necessarily confined to a certain age, but “they occur in an invariant sequence and at approximately the same times for most children” (Salkind 124).

However, the progression from one stage to the next is not definite, and a person can become fixated at a particular stage, interrupting the normal course of development (Freud, *On Sexuality* 160). For Freud (1991), fixation arises as a result of both “constitutional” and “accidental” factors (*On Sexuality* 164). Constitutional factors are those that relate to one’s “innate constitution,” or their “character,” which Freud argues is “composed of instincts that have been fixed since childhood” (*On Sexuality* 164). Freud defines accidental factors as the “accidental events experienced in childhood and later” (164), or factors that are primarily environmental. Thus, Freud argues that fixations and the “permanent disorders” that can emerge from them are shaped by the interplay of both of the above factors in childhood (*On Sexuality* 168). For example, he writes that “[a] good proportion of the deviations from normal sexual life which are later observed both in neurotics and in perverts are thus established from the very first by the impressions of childhood,” impressions that are both “psychical” and a result of “extraneous influences” (168). Moreover, he contends that “all the factors that impair sexual development show their effects by bringing about a *regression*, a return to an earlier phase of development” (Freud, *On Sexuality* 165). Regression will be discussed in more detail below. In a sense, we can view Freud’s concept of fixation as another way of understanding arrested development, as it describes the way in which a person can become fixed at a certain stage, thus

stunting their developmental growth as adults (see “Arrested Development” subheading below for further discussion).

Freud argues that the path to adulthood begins at the genital stage, with the onset of puberty (Freud, *On Sexuality* 127). The genital stage marks the point at which autoerotic sexual activity “now finds a sexual object” (*On Sexuality* 127). Thus, while previously the sexual instinct was broken up into several different instincts and “erotogenic zones” (Freud, *On Sexuality* 127), these components are now “subordinated to the dominance of the genital zone, so that the whole sexual life enters the service of reproduction...” (Freud, “Five Lectures” 45). There is always the possibility, however, that some of the “component instincts” will fail to “submit to the dominance of the genital zone,” leading to what Freud (1957) terms “*perversion[s]*” (“Five Lectures” 45). For example, Freud argues that if the childhood tendency to assign “equal value to the two sexes as sexual objects” continues into adulthood, this can lead to homosexuality, which he considers a perversion (“Five Lectures” 46). Interestingly, Freud contends that the sexual behaviour that constitutes perversions in adulthood (for example, fetishism) are considered normal in childhood. It is only through the processes of maturation that people learn to restrict and inhibit these tendencies, leading to the development of “normal sexual behaviour” (*On Sexuality* 155). Freud concludes that if perversion “is an original and universal disposition of the human sexual instinct,” one that is present in childhood, then “any established aberration from normal sexuality” is therefore considered “an instance of developmental...infantilism” (*On Sexuality* 155).

The linkage between perversion, and specifically homosexuality, to arrested development or emotional and sexual immaturity would become one of the major preoccupations of social and

cultural discourse in the postwar era, with the “popularization of a pragmatic and moralizing version” of psychoanalysis (Van Den Oever 2). The pathologization of homosexuality as a form of arrested development and emasculation is explored further in my first chapter, where I examine the contradictory status of the immature male in the male-centered melodramas of the 1950s. While Freud did not see homosexuality as a “vice” or “illness,” his framing of homosexuality as an “arrest of sexual development” (Freud qtd. in Stockton 23) inevitably contributed to pathologizing discourses surrounding homosexuality. Indeed, Freud’s belief that maturity is synonymous with heterosexual reproduction set the groundwork for conceptions of heteronormativity and the “reproductive futurism” that Edelman and other queer theorists would rail against.

Another proponent of stage theory is Erik Erikson. A student of Freud’s, Erikson built on Freudian theory by focusing on the ego as a major part of a person’s functioning (Salkind 140). For Erikson, psychological development is the outcome of “the interaction between maturational processes or biological needs and the societal demands and social forces encountered in everyday life” (Salkind 140). In this way, Erikson’s theory pays more attention to socialization than Freud’s (Salkind 140). Moreover, Erikson’s theory also differs from Freud’s in that it covers development throughout life and not just from birth to adolescence (Salkind 140). Akin to Freud, Erikson’s theory of development follows a stage model, where each stage is controlled “by underlying maturational forces and characterized by the presence of conflict” (Salkind 140). In each of Erikson’s stages, the individual must overcome a specific crisis in order to move forward to the next stage (Salkind 140). Each stage approaches the crisis with two different options for the individual in terms of how they deal with it, one adaptive and one maladaptive

(Lemme 48). Overcoming the crisis or not is dependent on one's experiences in previous stages as well as one's current state of life (Lemme 49). For example in stage 5 of Erikson's theory, "Identity versus Role Confusion," success is measured by whether or not the individual develops a coherent and strong sense of who they are – an "ego identity," which allows them to be capable of intimacy in relationships (Erikson, *Childhood* 261). However, individuals who do not successfully complete this stage "sh[y] away from interpersonal intimacy, resulting in "a deep sense of isolation" (Erikson, *Identity* 135-36). This sense of isolation can result in "severe 'character-problems,' hindering their progression to the next stage (Erikson *Childhood* 266). The failure to overcome the crisis in each stage and the resulting consequence (as in the aforementioned "isolation" in the young adulthood stage) is similar to Freud's concept of fixation. In this way, although Erikson does not use the term, arrested development is a consequence of not meeting the desired psychosocial outcome, such as intimacy in young adulthood.

Another concept of Erikson's that can be connected to the notion of arrested development is what he calls a "psychosocial moratorium" (Erikson, *Identity* 156). Erikson (1968) argues that while psychoanalysis outlines a period of "latency" or delay before puberty, it does not recognize "a second period of delay, namely, prolonged adolescence" (*Identity* 156). Thus, Erikson postulates that the period between adolescence and the finding of one's identity in adulthood can be regarded as a "psychosocial moratorium," wherein the individual experiments with different roles and identities in order to find their place in society. (*Identity* 156). Erikson defines moratorium as "a period of delay granted to somebody who is not ready to meet an obligation or forced on somebody who should give himself time" (*Identity* 157). In other words, a

psychosocial moratorium refers to “a delay of adult commitments” (Erikson, *Identity* 157).

Erikson argues that the length of this period varies from individual to individual, and that it tends to be more prominent in “gifted people” (*Identity* 157). Moreover, he asserts that each “culture institutionalizes a certain moratorium for the majority of its young people” (*Identity* 157); some examples would be the period individuals spend in university or college, travel abroad, or even engage in delinquency (Erikson, *Identity* 157). Rather than seeing this space between childhood and identity formation as a period of stagnation or stuntedness, Erikson sees this period as both positive and productive, in that it allows an individual to experiment and try on different hats before they decide on who they are and what they want to do with their lives (Stevens 67). As the psychosocial moratorium can vary depending on the individual, some individuals are still engaged in this period well into adulthood. However, instead of viewing this period as one of arrested development, Erikson sees this period as a necessary and helpful phase for people to engage in self-discovery. Indeed, Erikson writes that the period of adolescence [or prolonged adolescence] allows one to develop “a sense of style and identity” (*Identity* 243). While Erikson saw the psychosocial moratorium as a stage, queer theorists such as Judith Halberstam (2005) argue that an extended adolescence can be a way of life for people who choose to live outside of heteronormative temporality indefinitely.

For Erikson (1963), once one reaches the seventh stage, Adulthood, the projected psychosocial outcome is either generativity or stagnation (Erikson, *Childhood* 266). For Erikson, generativity refers to “the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation” (*Childhood* 267). It is “the instinctual power behind various forms of ‘selfless caring,’ [and] extends to whatever [a person] generates and leaves behind, creates and

produces...” (Erikson, *Insight* 131). However, according to Erikson, if a person lacks fulfillment or is emotionally regressive, this can lead to the opposite outcome of this stage—stagnation (*Childhood* 267). Erikson argues that those who do not develop generativity regress to “an obsessive need for pseudo intimacy,” where they spoil themselves or their partner “as if they were their own—or one another’s— one and only child” (*Childhood* 267). The stagnation that Erikson describes can also be understood as a form of arrested development as well as regression. From the perspective of queer theory, generativity also implies futurity, in that the mature adult guides the next generation of youth, who will do the same when they reach maturity. Lee Edelman challenges the concept of generativity in his anti-futurity polemic, *No Future* (discussed below), where he argues against the exaltation of the figure of the child at the centre of heteronormative politics.

The final stage of Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development is maturity. In this stage, maturity is marked by ego integrity versus despair (Erikson, *Childhood* 268). Ego integrity is defined as one’s capacity to look back at one’s life with acceptance, despite not having achieved everything one wanted to achieve. As Erikson writes, “It is the acceptance of one’s one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions...” (Erikson, *Childhood* 268). On the other hand, if one does not arrive at this state of acceptance, they can fall into despair, which is characterized by a “fear of death” (Erikson, *Childhood* 269). For Erikson, “[d]espair expresses the feeling that the time is now too short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity” (*Childhood* 269). According to Erikson, the ideal outcome of this stage is wisdom, “that detached yet active

concern with life bounded by death” (Erikson, *Identity* 140). This stage is very similar to the stage of self-actualization that Maslow describes in his theory.⁵ (Engler 160).

Despite its strengths, Erikson saw that his theory was caught up in ““historical relativism”” and understood it should be revised in agreement with new historical contexts (Lemme 49). Other criticisms of Erikson’s theory include its generalist approach—its lack of specificity in terms of developmental differences between genders as well as its lack of diversity in terms of “being more variable across individuals, influenced by their life circumstances and social environment” (Lemme 50). While Erikson went beyond Freud in introducing socialization to the stages of development, both theorists are caught in heteronormative and heterosexist ideologies of maturity and success, viewing maturity as synonymous with “reproductive futurism” (Edelman), the performative politics of heteronormativity (where heteronormativity is not only a being, but a “doing”). As will be discussed further below, queer theorists such as

⁵ Abraham Maslow, who comes from the humanistic perspective of psychology, took issue with psychoanalysis and “radical behaviourism” for their narrow understandings of humanity. He asserts that “the study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can only lead to a crippled psychology” (Engler 345). Although he did not reject the psychoanalytic and behaviorist models, he “sought to emphasize the positive rather than the negative side of human nature” (Engler 345). Maslow’s model is a “hierarchy of needs.” In the order of their potency, these needs are: “physiological needs, safety needs, belonging and love needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs” (Engler 347). After one need is satisfied, the need above it becomes significant (Engler 347). Maslow recognized that some people are unable to satisfy the most basic needs because of their life situations (Engler 347). For Maslow, “the higher one is able to go, the greater physiological health and self-actualization one will demonstrate” (Engler 347).

Self-actualization can be defined as the “desire to fulfill one’s highest potential” (Engler 348). In this way, we can view self-actualization as Maslow’s conception of maturity. Maslow views self-actualized individuals as possessing characteristics such as “awareness, honesty, freedom, and trust” (Engler 350). Aside from the fact that Maslow’s study of self-actualized individuals did not meet the standards of real research, his definition of a self-actualized individual was highly subjective and thus only reflected his own personal view of self-actualization” (Engler 349). Thus, this reinforces the idea that these conceptions of maturity are not universal, and are rather the products of cultural discourse.

Halberstam, Edelman, and Stockton challenge these myopic conceptions of maturity and success by offering alternative “way[s] of being in the world” (Halberstam, *Failure* 2), whether it is through occupying queer temporalities and embracing failure (Halberstam), rejecting the future-oriented politics of heteronormativity (Edelman), or learning how to grow in one’s stuntedness or delay (Stockton).

Bernice Neugarten uses the term “social age clock” to refer to the “internalized calendar” that we have in our minds based on societal demands and expectations (Lemme 64). Neugarten argues that socioeconomic status and one’s career influence the social age clock. For example, “female Olympic gymnasts are considered old at 16, manual laborers reach middle age sooner than white-collar workers, whereas corporate executives and Supreme Court justices may seem youthful in their 50s and 60s” (Lemme 64). Interestingly, however, Neugarten does not explicitly state the way in which this social age clock is also gendered. Thus, the time pressures for women are very different from their male counterparts. In Diane Negra’s words, a lot of women in society today live in a state of “time panic” as they scramble to meet the demands of their biological clocks as well as other culturally-sanctioned markers of maturity associated with being a female adult, such as marriage (see Negra in literature review). Moreover, the social age clock for men and women reveals a significant double standard at play, in which women are considered less sexually desirable as they age, whereas men have the capacity to be desirable at any age (one only needs to look at the pairings of younger women with older men in Hollywood films and other forms of popular culture). Furthermore, as stated in my literature review, men are given more license to extend their adolescent periods in our culture, whereas women are not afforded this same consideration.

Definitions of Maturity and Immaturity

Ellen Greenberger and Aage B. Sorensen's (1974) model of psychosocial maturity provides three general features of maturity that they feel can be applicable to all societies: 1) the ability to function independently; 2) the ability to develop competent interpersonal skills; 3) the ability to become a contributing member of society (abstract). The sociological concept of maturity defines it as the outcome of "socialization" – that is, the way in which an individual is able to adapt their behavior to conform to the norms and expectations of a particular society (Greenberger and Sorensen 332). Within a psychological model, maturity is often synonymous with "mental health or social adjustment" (Greenberger and Sorensen 332). It can also be defined as the full development of individuals in both private and public contexts (Greenberger and Sorensen 339).

The first general feature of psychosocial maturity identified by Greenberger and Sorensen is the ability to function independently. All societies demand that adults have the ability to be self-sufficient to some extent (Greenberger and Sorensen 339). Within a psychological orientation, self-sufficiency becomes more complex. Greenberger and Sorensen argue that "nearly all of Erikson's stages of development touch in some way on the issue of increasing self-sufficiency – especially the stages culminating in autonomy, initiative, and industry" (339). The second characteristic of mature individuals identified by the authors is the ability to develop competent interpersonal skills. This ability to "interact adequately with others" was alluded to above in Erikson's theory of development, where the individual's capacity for trust, identity, and intimacy is directly connected to their interpersonal skills (Greenberger and Sorensen 340). The third general feature of maturity is the ability to "contribute to social cohesion." Although this

feature is not prominent within traditional psychological theories of development, Erikson does consider the ability of an individual to go beyond themselves and show care and concern for others (especially younger generations) in his concept of generativity (Greenberger and Sorensen 341). However, one's ability to contribute to society is a major feature of the existential-psychological tradition of personality development, such as in the theories of Maslow (Greenberger and Sorensen 341).

Greenberger and Sorensen also outline specific attributes which are symptomatic of these three general features of maturity, which they argue are based on criteria which integrate "goals of *socialization* (what an individual in the society must become) with the goals of *development* (what an individual in general should become)" (341). In terms of the first feature, the ability for one to function independently is indicated by the attributes of self-reliance, possessing a stable identity, and the presence of a "work orientation" ("standards of competence"; "pleasure in work"; "general work skills") (Greenberger and Sorensen 342). The second feature of maturity, "interpersonal adequacy" is indicated by effective communication skills, the ability to practice "enlightened trust," and awareness of major roles (342). "Social adequacy," the third feature of maturity is symptomatic of "social commitment," "openness to sociopolitical change" and "tolerance of individual and cultural differences" (Greenberger and Sorensen 342). Galambos, Barker, and Tilton-Weaver (2003) view the capacity to "self-regulate, cope with negative emotions, and understand the impact of one's behavior on others" as significant criteria for maturity across many samples in various cultures (86).

Loas, Seillier, and Fréville (2001) argue that although the term immature is used frequently in psychiatry, there is a paucity of research on the concept (111). The reasons for this,

they argue, is two-fold: first, immature personality was eventually phased out of the DSM, with a similar personality disorder, the “dependent personality,” becoming more prominent. Secondly, the “infantile personality,” a classical personality disorder, has become obsolete in the DSM because it can no longer be pathologized in a culture that has itself become infantile (Loas, et al. 112). This is an important point because it is directly related to my project, which seeks to understand cultural conceptions of immaturity distinguished between genders and in our contemporary culture of immaturity. The authors cite a 1985 study which examines 100 young men who display symptoms of psychoaffective immaturity. These symptoms are: 1. “affective dependency,” which can be characterized by a significant need for guidance as well as being “preoccupied with fears of being left to take care of oneself” (Loas, et al. 112); 2. “intolerance of frustrations”; and 3. “sexual immaturity,” which is marked by “a deficiency or absence of sexual fantasies and desire for sexual activity without marked distress” (112). Sexual immaturity is also characterized by the absence of an intimate relationship, even if the subject is engaged in a stable relationship (Loas, et al. 112). Moreover, the study suggests that these latter symptoms of immaturity are consistent across various psychiatric disorders (Loas, et al. 112).

Dmitrieva, Monahan, Cauffman, and Steinberg (2012) construct what they call “a global psychosocial maturity measure” which integrates “temperance, perspective, and responsibility”—the components of psychosocial maturity (1076). The authors evaluate temperance based on “impulse control and suppression of aggression”; perspective is assessed by “consideration of others and future orientation”; and responsibility is measured by “personal responsibility and resistance to peer influence” (Dmitrieva et al. 1076). What continues to be extremely apparent in all of these psychological definitions of maturity and immaturity is their refusal to acknowledge

gender differences and/or the specificity of gender in regards to these concepts. This is a product of the inherently patriarchal nature of dominant discourse, psychology being a part of this discourse.

Jeffrey Jansen Arnett and Nancy L. Galambos (2003) argue that while scholars like Freud and Erikson constructed theories of human development divided into particular stages, it was not until the 1990s that research began to focus on how people see themselves within these life stages (91). Thus, these studies asked participants to give their own criteria for adulthood and whether or not they saw themselves as meeting this criteria (91). Arnett and Galambos argue that scholars were surprised by their findings in these studies, as the criteria for adulthood articulated by the participants were not consistent with normative conceptions of adulthood, such as obtaining a post-secondary degree and holding a full-time job, getting married, or having a child (92). Rather, the criteria for adulthood expressed by the participants “represent processes rather than discrete events—character qualities monitored and measured by the individual rather than roles established and sanctioned by society” (Arnett and Galambos 92). The top three criteria consistent across these studies were “accepting responsibility for one’s self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent” (Arnett and Galambos 92). Arnett and Galambos argue that these three criteria collectively suggest a definition of adulthood which emphasizes independence and competency, consistent with American ideologies of individualism (92). In this way, it is ironic that while the participants reject so-called socially sanctioned norms of adulthood, they nevertheless reinforce a dominant mythology of American culture in their conceptions of maturity and adulthood—that is, individualism and self-sufficiency is endemic to age-old conceptions of the American dream. Arnett and Galambos’s article is one of several in

the summer 2003 volume of the journal *New Directions For Child and Adolescent Development*. They argue that one of the major areas for future research suggested by the articles in the volume is the need to account for gender differences within cultural conceptions of adulthood (95). Although they do cite two studies (one Israeli and one Argentinian) which conclude that women are more likely than their male counterparts to “support criteria for adulthood related to Norm Compliance” (95), the authors argue that there are negligible gender differences in conceptions of adulthood across the studies examined in the articles. They contend that one of the main reasons for this is due to the lack of stark divisions in terms of gender roles in Western or Westernized industrial cultures (the cultures in the studies), in contrast to more traditional cultures that would show a greater disparity in terms of gender roles and differences (Arnett and Galambos 95). Moreover, the authors argue that there may also be a more prominent distinction between genders in terms of becoming a man or a woman in more traditional cultures, a distinction they found to be negligible in studies with American subjects. Although there is merit to the authors’ findings that there are few gender differences in personal conceptions of adulthood in Western-centric, industrialized cultures, what cannot be measured in these studies are the ideological forces and power relations at play which construct a subject’s conception of maturity and adulthood, and these conceptions are inevitably gendered, whether one is aware of it or not. Thus, although there were few gender differences found in terms of the participants’ views of adulthood across the studies described in this volume, this does not mean that these differences are not present in terms of material and embodied experiences of gender as a result of ideological norms.

Definitions of Arrested Development

As discussed above, arrested development can be likened to Freud's concept of fixation, a defense mechanism used by individuals to deal with anxiety which fixes them at a certain stage of development, prohibiting further development. For example, an orally-fixated person is arrested in their development because they are also usually overly-dependent on others instead of becoming independent subjects (Salkind 134). Moreover, Erikson also touches upon the notion of arrested development in his stage theory, where the maladaptive way of dealing with a crisis in a given stage hinders an individual from moving on to the next stage.

It is important to keep in mind the various environmental factors and social contexts that can contribute to an individual's arrested development. For example, Dmitrieva et. al's (2012) study examines the way in which incarceration can affect the development of psychosocial maturity in adolescent males. Their findings suggest that because incarceration is so far removed from "the normative adolescent socialization experience," this does in fact result in arrested development in terms of psychosocial maturity in the short-term (1086). More specifically, they argue that the incarcerated environment both hinders the potential for youth to exercise responsible judgment and surrounds them with peers who are unlikely to set an example of maturity, thereby increasing their risk for arrested development (1086).

This project examines arrested development in a very different context—i.e., in terms of representations of white, middle-class men and women. The social contexts of the subjects in the film under study do not at first glance seem like environments for arrested development, as most of them live comfortable lives in industrialized societies. In a culture that has become increasingly infantilized and as adolescent periods are becoming longer and longer for

individuals in their twenties and even thirties, it would seem as if arrested development is the norm rather than the exception, as Gary Cross argues (see literature review). Given that self-sufficiency and independence are major components in psychosocial definitions of maturity and adulthood, a subject who is living in their parents' basement for example would not be considered a mature individual within psychosocial frameworks. However, this subject could still be emotionally mature and therefore able to create and sustain healthy interpersonal relationships despite their lack of financial independence. In this way, the subject could be considered arrested in their development in terms of financial independence or employment, but not in terms of their emotional development. Thus, it is important to distinguish between arrested development and immaturity. Moreover, arrested development, like maturity, is a highly subjective term and social or culturally sanctioned notions of arrested development may be very different from how individuals define arrested development for themselves and others.

Definitions of Regression

Within a Freudian framework, regression can be defined as when a subject reverts to an earlier phase of development (Sandler and Sandler 120). Citing Freud, Joseph Sandler and Anne-Marie Sandler (1994) argue that regression and fixation are, in fact, inextricably linked, functioning as “two sides of the same coin” (120). Freud argues that fixation and regression are “not independent of each other” and function symbiotically. He asserts that “the stronger the fixations on its path of development, the more readily will the function evade external difficulties by regressing to the fixations” (qtd. in Sandler and Sandler 120). Anna Freud also discusses the way in which regression and fixation interact with each other in what she calls “fixation points” (Sandler and Sandler 121). She argues that these fixation points in development can have

a “backward pull” effect on a subject “[w]henver difficulties, disappointments [and] frustrations occur” (Sandler and Sandler 121). In this way, subjects may regress back to earlier fixations after stressful or difficult events. However, Sandler and Sandler remind us that fixations can actually be highly sophisticated modes of ego functioning. More specifically, certain fixations are reinforced because they have served “as sources of feelings of safety and mastery, or – in particular – have served to reduce some heightened form of anxiety” (Sandler and Sandler 120). In this way, these modes of functioning also serve as forces pulling subjects backward into regressive states (Sandler and Sandler 121). Although regression and fixation are closely connected, regression can be distinguished from fixation or arrested development, as it emphasizes a movement backwards to an earlier mode of development or functioning, while arrested development delineates a state of stuntedness where movement is neither forwards nor backwards. Moreover, a person can be psychosocially mature but regress to an earlier mode of development due to traumatic life events (Knafo 2016). Furthermore, regression can manifest itself in other, culturally-sanctioned ways, such as in what Diane Negra refers to as “retreatist” narratives (see literature review for a larger discussion of this topic). In such narratives, successful, independent women “retreat” or revert back to traditional or domestic femininities, fulfilling roles as housewives or mothers. Within feminist contexts, then, retreatism can be viewed as a form of regression.

Theoretical Context of Project

While psychoanalysis does not serve as my main theoretical lens or interpretive method, it is certainly indispensable to a study that focuses on representations of immaturity in

contemporary culture; thus, it provides the necessary conceptual and cultural backdrop to this project. As the above review of Freud and Erikson's theories of development elucidate, the psychoanalytic tradition forms a long history that has established a language for both discussing and understanding concepts of immaturity, arrested development, and regression, a language that is therefore integral to establishing this project's theoretical context. Moreover, psychoanalysis here can be understood as a cultural sensibility, as demonstrated in my first chapter, which focuses on the mother-child dynamic structuring the romantic relationships in postwar male-centered melodramas.

The Oedipal trajectory from the imaginary to the symbolic realm—that is, where an individual enters into the realm of law and language and becomes a societal subject—is an important concept for this project. According to the Freudian and Lacanian oedipal scenario, “for growth to take place into a plurality of relations and into the order of civilization and culture the child must be removed or severed from its imaginary unity with the mother” (Hayward 290). In other words, in order to find one's identity as a subject in the social order, one must move beyond an imaginary identification with the mother and essentially ‘grow up.’ This is accomplished through an act of “splitting” as the child learns to recognize itself as separate from external objects, especially the mother (Chaudhuri 47). Moreover, this process “retrospectively acquires the significance of castration when the child enters the Oedipus Complex and acquires language” (Chaudhuri 47). For Lacan, the incest taboo becomes “a function of language” (Chaudhuri 47), as the Name-of-the-Father prohibits the child from desiring his mother, as well as “names” him as a subject in the symbolic order (Evans 119). The oedipal trajectory is thus a crucial concept in relation to the notion of arrested development and

immaturity, because one could argue that the male (or female) in arrested development has not successfully completed this developmental trajectory. Thus, Freud's argument that the incompleteness or malfunction of the oedipal trajectory is the basis for all psychopathology (Evans 127, 129), could perhaps be applied to the notion of arrested development, which could be construed as a type of "perversion" of this normal course of development. Arrested development is also connected to the notion of trauma, where "there is a certain blockage or fixation in the process of signification" (Homer 84), which results in the subject being stuck in a previous stage of development (Homer 84).

However, to discuss the concept of development within a Lacanian framework is itself a tricky endeavor, as Catherine Driscoll reminds us that "any subject's development is, for Lacan, a sequence of mis-representation and fantasy" (124). For Lacan, one's identity is constructed on "an illusory image of wholeness and mastery" (Homer 25), and the ego works to sustain this illusion, denying its "fragmentation and alienation" (25). This sequence of mis-recognition and mis-representation begins with the imaginary unity of the mother and child, and then continues with the entry into the Symbolic, where the "Name of the Father" is the primary signifier (Driscoll 124).

The Oedipal trajectory can also be applied to the conventions of classical narrative cinema, in which the protagonist (usually male) must find a solution to a triangular-like crisis in order to acquire "social stability" in the form of a heterosexual relationship (Hayward 291). For example, although the bromance comedy challenges this "normal" trajectory through homosocial relationships, the oedipal narrative is ultimately reinforced and completed by the end of the film, with the formation of the heterosexual couple. In terms of the female subject in the oedipal

scenario, she is positioned as “pre-linguistic” because she remains outside of language in the symbolic realm ruled by patriarchy (Hayward 300). In this way, she is the object, not the subject of the symbolic order, and only functions to reinforce the identity of the male subject through her “lack,” or her role as other (Hayward 300). The female subject’s exclusion from language and subjectivity points to how she is always already arrested in her development, which reinforces the difficulty of both identifying and discussing female immaturity.

Theresa de Lauretis contends that both anthropology and psychology have worked together to exclude female development from the oedipal narrative, “which describes women as space and yet refuses any place for women” (Driscoll 120). Laura Mulvey, in her classic essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) also describes the plight of women in a symbolic order ruled by patriarchy:

Either she must gracefully give way to the world, the Name of the Father and the Law, or else struggle to keep her child down with her in the half-light of the imaginary. Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (Mulvey qtd. in Williams 303)

Thus, both de Lauretis and Mulvey suggest that the Symbolic realm is a decidedly masculine space in which women are oppressed. As a result, several feminist theorists have turned away from the Symbolic realm to focus on the figure of the mother in the pre-Oedipal realm. They have focused specifically on the pre-Oedipal mother-(female) child relationship, which they

argue is responsible for “the specificity of the female voice and female sexuality” (Chaudhuri 55).

Julia Kristeva is one of such theorists, as her work focuses on the feminine and the maternal in the pre-Symbolic. Kristeva replaces Lacan’s opposition between the Imaginary and Symbolic with an opposition between the semiotic and the Symbolic (Thornham 58). The semiotic for Kristeva refers to the primary processes identified by Freud, “the pre-Oedipal drives which are felt as a ceaseless flow of rhythms or pulsations across the body of the subject” (Thornham 58). Out of these rhythms and pulsations forms the *chora*, a term Kristeva adopts from Plato, which can be defined as a womb-like enclosure which unifies the mother and child (Chaudhuri 54). Although the *chora* is pre-linguistic, its rhythms and flows emerge when discourse fails, displacing language and challenging “the Name-of-the-Father” (Chaudhuri 54).

In order for the child to become a subject and find his/her identity, its unity with the mother in the *chora* must be “ruptured” (Silverman 104). However, in order for the child to break out of this maternal receptacle, and to establish its identity, the mother herself must be placed inside the *chora*, which also means that she is “stripp[ed]” of her “linguistic capabilities” (Silverman 105). Similarly, in cinema, the female subject is often infantilized when she is reduced to “noise, babble, or the cry” (Chaudhuri 55), particularly in roles or scenes in which she lacks capability and control, such as in the horror genre (Chaudhuri 55). Kaja Silverman (1992) argues that the maternal voice functions as an “acoustic mirror,” one which initially allows the child to “discover its identity and voice” (81), but then functions later as a “mirror in which the male subject hears all the repudiated elements of his infantile babble” (81). Silverman argues that the maternal voice “oscillates between two poles” (86): on the one hand, it

functions as a “sonorous envelope” of “infantile plenitude,” (87), but it can also be seen as a reminder of castration, “threaten[ing] to expose discursive mastery as an impossible ideal” (86). Silverman discusses the way in which several films stage scenarios in which a male character longs to return to a stage of imaginary plenitude, becoming fixated on a female voice. *Citizen Kane* (1941) is one of such examples she discusses (Silverman 86). The notion of the maternal voice as both comforting and threatening will be discussed further in the first chapter, where I will explore the contradictory status of the mother in the postwar period as both idealized and demonized.

Kristeva’s (1986) concept of “women’s time” is especially interesting in relation to questions of development. For Kristeva, “it is the ‘role of the “mother”’ which is the ‘repressed element in our culture’” (Thornham 58). In contrast to “‘Father’s time’ which is the linear time of history,” (Thornham 58), Kristeva argues that “female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations” (Kristeva 191). This “women’s time” is made up of “cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature” (Kristeva 191). It also refers to a “monumental temporality” which is rather unrelated to the linear passage of time and which can be viewed as “all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space” (Kristeva 191). Kristeva argues that female subjectivity in “women’s time” is often at odds with dominant constructions of time—that is, “time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding: time as departure, progression and arrival— in other words, the time of history” (192). Kristeva also alludes to the way in which “women’s time” can be a powerful force against patriarchal linear time as it “renders explicit a rupture, an expectation

or an anguish which [linear time] works to conceal” (192). Moreover, if linear time is akin to language “and the enunciation of sentences,” cyclical female time functions as an obstacle to that enunciation, challenging its structural unity (Kristeva 192). In a sense, the force of women’s time against language can be related to the way in which the *chora* in the semiotic challenges language and the law in the Symbolic. If the *chora* emerges where language breaks, where signification fails, then female cyclical time is the “stumbling block” (Kristeva 192) of the language of linear time. Kristeva argues that “Women’s relation to the symbolic or social contract is consequently different from that of men, ‘a difference...in the relationship to power, language, meaning’” (Kristeva qtd. in Thornham 58). Kristeva thus encourages women to “explore the constitution and functioning of this contract, starting less from the knowledge accumulated about it (anthropology, psychoanalysis, linguistics) than from the very personal affect experienced when facing it as a subject and as a woman” (Kristeva 200).

The concept of “women’s time” and the specificity of female subjectivity in relation to “power, language, [and] meaning” means that we must also think differently about female development, and therefore notions of immaturity and arrested development. If, according to Kristeva, women follow a concept of time that is cyclical and recurring, then dominant understandings of development that follow the patrilineal time of history should be eschewed in favour of a concept of development that embodies female specificity. However, according to Kristeva, women’s time is not only the “stumbling block” of dominant linear time, it also “rests on its own stumbling block” (192). In this way, women’s time is already in and of itself an “obstacle” to the forward march of time, and perhaps, dominant notions of development. Is women’s time, in a sense, “arrested” development/time? Perhaps. But we have already discussed

above the transgressive nature of women's time, the way in which it impedes "Father's time," the forward march of history. In this sense, the "arrested development" of women's time is only so in relation to linear time. The way in which "women's time" is cyclical, and thus related to female biological rhythms is very much related to development and maturity. However, conceiving of women's time in this way creates an essentialist understanding of female temporality and female development. Thus, the notion of a female temporality ruled by biological imperatives, such as a woman's biological clock or pregnancy is both essentialist and prescriptive, as it assumes that all female subjectivities are ruled by these biological cycles, when in reality, many women choose not to have children or do not have a menstrual cycle, or are simply living their lives according to their own time. This concept of alternative temporalities will be discussed further below in the theories of queer temporalities section

In *This Sex Which is Not One* (1977), Irigaray critiques Freud's theory of sexuality, arguing that the woman is consistently referred to "in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex" (Irigaray, *Irigaray Reader* 119). In regards to penis envy, she argues: "How can we accept the idea that woman's entire sexual development is governed by her lack of, and thus her longing for, jealousy of, and demand of, the male organ? Does this mean that woman's sexual evolution can never be characterized with reference to the female sex itself?" (*Irigaray Reader* 119). Thus, she contends that Freud's theorizations of female sexuality ignore its unique "specificity" (*Irigaray Reader* 119). Thus, in Irigaray's "deconstruction" (Driscoll 122) of Freud's theory of female sexual development, she asserts that the "woman never truly escapes the Oedipus complex. She remains forever fixated on the desire for the father, remains subject to the father and his law, for fear of losing his love,

which is the only thing capable of giving her any value at all” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 122). Irigaray’s use of the term “fixated” reminds us of the way in which the female subject is stunted and “arrested” in her development in the patriarchal Symbolic order; she is a “subject” but only within a phallogentric system of representation that denies her any true specificity, where she exists only in relation to the male. Moreover, in terms of questions of development and maturity, Irigaray argues that within the psychoanalytic model, “it is necessary to *become* a woman,” and not only that, but a “normal” one as well. (Irigaray, *This Sex* 134). In contrast, argues Irigaray, “a man is a man from the outset. He has only to effect his being-a-man, whereas a woman has to become a normal woman, that is, has to enter into the *masquerade of femininity*. In the last analysis, the female Oedipus Complex is woman’s entry into a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can ‘appear’ and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 134). Irigaray’s description of the female’s lot to enter into a “masquerade of femininity” where she must become a “normal” woman is extremely similar to Judith Butler’s idea of gender performativity, where the female subject is only recognized as such through her “performance” of culturally sanctioned notions of femininity, which manifest themselves in everyday practice (Butler will be discussed further below). In this way, if a girl does not become this “normal” woman—that is, a woman who is deemed normal according to patriarchal standards—she is deemed “abnormal,” immature, or stunted.

When Freud eventually abandoned the idea of “parallel male and female development,” recognizing the significance of the female child’s pre-Oedipal bond to her mother, he viewed this kind of attachment “as a deviation from the path of ‘normal’ (e.g., male heterosexual) separation

and individuation” (Williams 305). Thus his theory was one that viewed women “in an apparent state of regressive connection to their mothers” (Williams 305).

Both Kristeva and Irigaray see the feminine as existing in the pre-symbolic, pre-Oedipal realm. Whereas Kristeva sees the pre-oedipal semiotic as a powerful force against the Name of the Father, Irigaray sees feminine language as connecting women to a “pre-Oedipal relation to the body and mother” (Homer 117). Kristeva and Irigaray’s emphasis on the Pre-oedipal as a feminine space allows us to re-think notions of “regression” as necessarily negative. Within a phallic economy of representation, the pre-Oedipal only serves as a starting point for the oedipal trajectory into the Symbolic. However, through their deconstruction of the male-centered logic of psychoanalysis, Irigaray and Kristeva demonstrate the importance of the pre-Oedipal and pre-Symbolic realms in understanding and creating a space for female specificity.

Freud believed that girls begin the Oedipal scenario later than boys, which results in a longer stage of “pre-Oedipal symbiotic connection” to their mothers (Williams 306). Thus, according to Freud, girls never completely detach from their pre-Symbolic connection to their mothers, whereas boys “must break with their primary identification with their mothers” so that they can become and be identified as male subjects (Williams 306). Boys, then, argues Freud, develop their identity as male subjects “in the *absence* of a continuous and ongoing relationship with his father,” while a girl develops her female subjectivity in the “*presence*” of a continuous relationship with her mother (Williams 306). Nancy Chodorow takes issue with Freud’s belief that a girl’s life-long attachment to their mothers is a deviation from the norm of male separation and identity formation. She argues, rather, that the (then) social norm of mothers as primary caregivers “has prepared men to participate in a world of often alienated work, with a limited

ability to achieve intimacy” (Williams 306). Moreover, other feminist critics see the connectedness between the female child and her mother as a model that can be applied to “all other relations” and relationships. Thus, what Freud saw as a regressive deviation, feminist theorists see as something positive and productive. The idea of male separation and female attachment is obviously rather essentialist, and does not encompass a universal understanding of gendered development. However, feminist interventions into Freud’s understanding of female development helps to shed light on the way in which notions of “regression” and “deviation” are often defined within patriarchal contexts.

According to Freud, sexual maturity for boys is constituted by a shift in their desire from the mother to another woman. For girls, however, sexual maturity involves a repression of this desire, which is marked by passivity, functioning to serve and “stimulate the activity of the male libido” (Thornham 50). However, the repression of desire is a difficult feat for women, so they are often inclined to “regress” to their “pre-Oedipal ‘masculine’ period” (Thornham 50). In her “Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1981), Laura Mulvey sees the female-centered melodrama as staging this female oedipal narrative, and she uses King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946) as an example (Thornham 51). Although *Duel* is seen as a Western, Mulvey argues that it becomes a melodrama when it re-focuses its narrative on the developmental trajectory of the female protagonist (Thornham 51). Within this Oedipal narrative, Pearl, the female protagonist, must choose between an “active and regressive ‘tomboy’ relationship” with the law-breaking Lewt, and a “passive femininity” as the wife of Lewt’s honorable brother, Jesse (Thornham 51). Mulvey argues that Pearl’s dilemma reflects the female spectator’s own difficult Oedipal trajectory (Thornham 51). When Pearl perishes in a shoot-out with her lover, Lewt, the

film is conveying to us the “impossibility” for a female subject to adopt a masculine posture of “active” desire (Thornham 51). Thus, Mulvey argues, “[r]ather than dramatising the success of masculine identification, Pearl brings out its sadness. Her ‘tomboy’ pleasures, her sexuality, are not fully accepted by Lewt, except in death” (Mulvey qtd. in Thornham 51). Within this Freudian scenario, an active posture cannot be assumed, but only “borrowed” by both the female protagonist and spectator. The “maturity” of the female subject is dependent upon the renouncement of her “‘tomboy’ pleasures” (Thornham 51). Mulvey’s analysis demonstrates the way in which female subjectivity is constructed within a patriarchal order, but more importantly, it also provides excellent insight into dominant definitions of female maturity; within a psychoanalytic framework, female maturity is defined by her passivity and her rejection of her pre-Oedipal “active” libido. The “passivity” of the female subject is also explored in Mulvey’s foundational essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975). It is in this essay that Mulvey asserts that the scopic economy of Hollywood cinema is inherently patriarchal, framing women as objects of spectacle for the male protagonist, and by extension, the male viewer. In this scenario, Mulvey asserts, the male protagonist is the “active” voyeur, the “bearer of the look,” and the female protagonist is perpetually the object “to be looked at.” The way in which the female subject enters into a symbolic order in which she has no real agency is mirrored by the female character in Hollywood cinema, who is reduced to merely “visual pleasure” for the male gaze.

If feminist psychoanalytic theory deconstructs psychoanalysis proper as patriarchal, Theresa de Lauretis (1987) deconstructs feminist (film) theory, asserting that sexual difference within these theories is consistently reduced to “binary, ahistorical, and heterosexist terms—as the

difference between ‘Man’ and ‘Woman’ (Chaudhuri 61). In contrast to this tradition, de Lauretis chooses to focus on “the social and sexual differences to be found among or within women” (Chaudhuri 61). De Lauretis’s Foucauldian theoretical framework allows her to acknowledge the discrepancy between women as individual subjects and “Woman”—“an imaginary cultural representation” (61). De Lauretis argues that the paradox of woman as one who is constantly talked about while she herself is silenced, one who is objectified while remaining unrepresented, is in fact “grounded” in the discrepancy outlined above. Thus, women as material social subjects are not synonymous with the construct “Woman,” but they are stuck between their own subjectivities and this imaginary construct (Chaudhuri 63). De Lauretis believes that it is the duty of film analysis to bring to light the way in which “women” and “Woman” are not one in the same thing (Chaudhuri 63). De Lauretis believes that feminist theories of sexual difference, in their “critique of representation,” in their “rereading of cultural images and narratives,” as well as in their “questioning of theories of subjectivity” ultimately reproduce patriarchal discourse through their binary logic (de Lauretis 1). “With its emphasis on the sexual,” de Lauretis argues, “‘sexual difference’ is in the first and last instance a difference of women from men, female from male; and even the more abstract notion of ‘sexual differences’ resulting not from biology or socialization but from signification and discursive effects...ends up being in the last instance a difference (of woman) from man—or better, the very instance of difference *in* man” (de Lauretis 1). Ultimately, de Lauretis argues that to continue to view gender in terms of sexual difference is to hinder both feminist thought and feminist gains (de Lauretis 1). She asserts that viewing gender as sexual difference binds “feminist critical thought” to universal notions of woman as the difference from man, or woman as difference in general—“Woman as

Other from Man” (Chaudhuri 64). De Lauretis argues that this kind of binary thinking “makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the differences of women from Woman” or the differences among or “*within women*” (de Lauretis 2). Instead of viewing gender solely in terms of sexual difference, then, de Lauretis conceives of gendered subjectivity as “engendered” across experiences of race, class, and sexuality (de Lauretis 2). She argues that “we need a notion of gender that is not so bound up with sexual difference as to be virtually coterminous with it...This bind, this mutual containment of gender and sexual difference(s), needs to be unraveled and deconstructed” (2). Thus, in order to carry out this process, de Lauretis addresses the way in which psychoanalysis perpetuates the binary logic of sexual difference, always defining “woman *in relation to man*” (de Lauretis 20). “That is why,” she asserts, “psychoanalysis does not address, cannot address, the complex and contradictory relation of women to Woman, which it instead defines as a simple equation women=Woman=Mother” (de Lauretis 20). She argues that this equation “is one of the most deeply rooted effects of the ideology of gender” (20). Thus, in revealing the limitations of psychoanalysis, she turns to Foucault to further deconstruct the ideology of gender.

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1978), Foucault argues against the repressive hypothesis, contending that power operates not through sexual repression but through the production of subjects within discourses about sexuality. Thus, for Foucault, power is not repressive and censoring; rather, power is productive. It produces knowledge and practices, which in turn produce subjectivities (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 194). Moreover, he argues, “power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (*Sexuality* 94). He argues that “where there is power, there is resistance,” but this

resistance is never outside of power; rather, resistance exists “everywhere in the power network” (*Sexuality* 95).

Although Foucault’s “critical understanding of the technology of sex did not take into account its differential solicitation of male and female subjects” (de Lauretis 3), de Lauretis employs his “theory of technologies and discourses of power to resituate gender within a wider network of power relations” (Chaudhuri 66). In order to deconstruct the notion of gender as sexual difference, de Lauretis argues that “A starting point may be to think of gender along the lines of Michel Foucault’s theory of sexuality as a ‘technology of sex’ and to propose that gender, too, both as representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life” (de Lauretis 2). Moreover, she argues that akin to sexuality, gender is not something that is biologically given, but is rather ““the sets of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations”” (Foucault qtd. in de Lauretis 3). According to de Lauretis, “gender is (a) representation” and “the representation of gender *is* its construction” (3). Gender is constructed in what Althusser calls the Ideological State Apparatuses, i.e, the media, school, the family, the courts, etc. However, de Lauretis argues, gender is also constructed in less obvious sites, such as in academia as well as in feminism (3). An example of the social construction of gender is when we mark the ‘F’ box on a form we are filling out. De Lauretis claims that in this instance, the female subject enters into the sex-gender system and is thus ‘engendered’ into her role as a woman (de Lauretis 12). De Lauretis argues, “isn’t that the same thing as saying that the F next to the little box, which we marked in filling out the form, has stuck to us like a wet silk dress? Or that while we thought that we were

marking the F on the form, in fact the F was marking itself on us?” (12). De Lauretis likens this process of gendering to Althusser’s concept of interpellation, whereby an individual recognizes herself as a subject, her own representation, when in fact it is an imaginary representation, one that is socially constructed through dominant discourses (12). Making a further connection to Althusser’s theory of subjectivity, de Lauretis quotes Althusser: ““All ideology has the function (which defines it) of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects”” (de Lauretis 6). She continues, “If I substitute *gender* for *ideology*, the statement still works, but with a slight shift of terms: Gender has the function (which defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as men and women. That shift is precisely where the reaction of gender to ideology can be seen, and seen to be an effect of the ideology of gender” (6). In this way, de Lauretis asserts that Althusser’s theory of subjectivity is crucial to the feminist project of conceptualizing gender “as a personal political force both negative and positive” (9). Moreover, she argues that while “the social representation of gender affects its subjective construction,” this “subjective construction” of gender by individuals in turn affects the social representation of gender (de Lauretis 9). This reciprocal relationship points to the potential for agency and self-determination for subjects within “micropolitical and everyday practices” (de Lauretis 9), a potential that Althusser would not see as possible (de Lauretis 9).

In conclusion, de Lauretis argues that ““the constant slippage between Woman as representation...and women as historical beings’ is driven by the contradictory logic of our culture in which women occupy a position that is both inside and outside of the ideology of gender” (Chaudhuri 67). For de Lauretis, gender is not only an ““effect of representation,”” it is also the real experience of women, which has the potential to challenge ideology “because it is

unacknowledged by its spaces of representation” (Chaudhuri 67). De Lauretis describes an oscillation between “the space represented by/in a representation, by/in a discourse, by/in a sex-gender system, to the space not represented yet implied (unseen) in them” (de Lauretis 26). She uses the term “space-off” to describe this space, a term used in film theory: “the space not visible in the frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible” (26). De Lauretis sees women as real subjects as occupying this “space-off,” whereas the hegemonic/patriarchal construction of Woman occupies the space of the frame (De Lauretis 26). De Lauretis argues that “it is the ongoing project of feminism to define a view from ‘elsewhere’”—that is, from the “space-off” of dominant cultural narratives (Chaudhuri 67). De Lauretis’s theory is extremely relevant to this project, as we can view films as “technologies of gender” that produce norms and ideologies about gender in society. More specifically, film and other media construct normative ideas about how immaturity, arrested development, and regression can be defined according to gender. As repeated throughout this project, these measures of maturity and immaturity are always gendered and thus reveal the double standards at play in representations of “immature” women.

The usefulness of Foucauldian theory in theorizing gender is also echoed by Judith Butler . Both de Lauretis’s and Butler’s turn to Foucault largely encompasses the tradition of queer theory, a theoretical orientation that is central to this project. Whereas for Althusser it is ideology within ideological state apparatuses, which interpellate the subject, Butler (1993) believes that the process of interpellation is much more penetrating, in that it is language itself and embodied practices that ‘call’ the subject into being (Butler, “Critically Queer” 22). For Butler (2011), interpellation begins at birth. Going against an essentialist understanding of gender, Butler argues that gender is not something that one is born with, but is rather something

that one is born *into* (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* xvii). As soon as a baby is born, Butler argues, and the doctor exclaims, “It’s a boy,” or “It’s a girl,” this initial interpellation is “reiterated by various authorities and throughout the various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized effect” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* xvii). Furthermore, argues Butler, these “[g]ender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity, ones which are almost always related to the idealization of the heterosexual bond. In this sense, the initiatory performative, ‘It’s A girl!’ anticipates the eventual arrival of the sanction, ‘I pronounce you man and wife.’” (Butler, “Critically Queer” 22). Furthermore, contrary to the idea that one can ‘choose’ what gender he or she will be, much like picking one’s gender costume, Butler reiterates that the subject is interpellated into his or her gender from the start (Butler, “Critically Queer” 22).

The performativity of gender is directly related to notions of maturity and immaturity because the embodiment of gender norms by a subject is inextricably linked to gendered standards or markers of maturity. Thus, when Butler asserts that “the initiatory performative, ‘It’s A girl!’ anticipates the eventual arrival of the sanction, ‘I pronounce you man and wife,’” we can also understand this to mean that the construction of the female subject in discourse is automatically tied to cultural markers of maturity, such as heterosexual marriage. Moreover, if the embodiment of gender norms (and thus gendered markers of maturity) are always related to the affirmation of “the heterosexual bond,” then maturity is defined by heterosexuality and heteronormativity. Butler argues, “If the performative [“I pronounce you man and wife”] operates as the sanction that performs the heterosexualization of the social bond, perhaps it also comes into play precisely as the shaming taboo which ‘queers’ those who resist or oppose that

social form as well as those who occupy it without hegemonic social sanction” (“Critically Queer” 18). Thus, those who do not uphold the sanction of heteronormativity, a marker of maturity, are interpellated as queer. This concept of queerness not only encompasses sexuality, it also encompasses alternative ways of being that are antithetical to heteronormative notions of maturity. We can see this alternative way of being as also embodying a queer temporality, a concept that is explored by the theorists discussed below.

Theoretical Orientation: Theories of Queer Temporality

This next section provides a review of the major works within the realm of queer theory that link queerness to temporality. These theories of queer temporality provide the methodological framework for the majority of this dissertation; my rationale for using these theories as my main interpretive method will be discussed further below in the methodology section. As a whole, these theories challenge heteronormative conceptions and constructions of temporality, ones that structure heteronormative ideas of maturity and development.

The “turn to time” within queer theory is discussed by Ben Davies and Jana Funke in the introduction to their anthology, *Sex, Gender, and Time in Fiction and Culture* (2011). “Turning to time,” they write, “we are implicitly investing in a time to come, in visions of change and ideas of reconceptualization” (2). They point to the way in which this idea of “turn[ing towards] the future” is a contentious issue for scholars like Lee Edelman, who view it as symptomatic of heteronormative constructions of temporality (Davies and Funke 3). Indeed, in a roundtable discussion on queer temporalities in a special issue of *GLQ*, Edelman argues:

What if framing this conversation in terms of a ‘turn towards time’ preemptively reinforces the consensus that bathes the petrified river of history in the illusion of constant fluency?

What if this very framing repeats the structuring of social reality that establishes heteronormativity as the guardian of temporal (re)production? (Dinshaw et al. 181)

In other words, Edelman is wary of how orienting the roundtable discussion around the turn towards the temporal reinforces the ideology of time as inherently or naturally “historical,” as the forward march of history that perpetuates the heteronormative logic of “reproductive futurism” (Dinshaw et al. 180). As Davies and Funke argue, “[u]nderstanding that the ‘turn to time’ already inscribes us in a certain relation to time encourages us to resist the hegemony of this too familiar kind of temporality, ‘the regular, linear, and unidirectional pattern,’ which has come to be known as straight time” (3). Thus, the theories of queer temporality discussed below deconstruct the universalism of straight time, imagining alternative “temporal practices” as well as “relation[s]” to time (Davies and Funke 3).

In examining queer relations to time, we must also acknowledge that “queerness [itself] is marked by a peculiar form of untimeliness” (McCallum and Tuhkanen 6). As E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (2011) elucidate, “[i]n Western discourses, queerness has been characterized by a lack of proper orientation in terms of time as much as of social norms” (7). For example, within Freudian psychoanalysis, homosexuals were considered “developmentally regressive or marked by a failure to harness their drives and to orient themselves properly with respect to the future” (McCallum and Tuhkanen 7). For Heather Love (2007), backwardness and queerness are inextricably linked: “Whether understood as throwbacks to an earlier stage of human development or as children who refuse to grow up,” she writes, “queers have been seen

across the twentieth century as a backward race” (*Feeling Backward* 6).⁶ Love also acknowledges, however, that this sense of backwardness has also been appropriated as a “key feature of queer culture,” one that has become an embodied practice in queer lives. For example, she argues that a “defiant refusal [l] to grow up” is one of the many ways in which “queers have embraced backwardness” (*Feeling Backward* 7). The notion of refusing heteronormative ideals of maturity and success is also taken up by Judith Halberstam in her theories of queer time and failure (both of which are covered below). For Halberstam, queerness “is a way of being in the world” (Dinshaw et al. 182), one that is not necessarily contingent on sexuality; in contrast, Love’s theorizing of backwardness is firmly attached to “gay and lesbian life” (7). In fact, Love (2011) has written that it is difficult for her “to imagine a form of queerness that does not maintain its ties to a specific experience of sexual identity” (“Queers” 180). What is at stake in examining queerness as removed from sexual identity is discussed in the methodology section below.

Judith Halberstam’s concept of “queer time” (2004) provides a significant and insightful angle on cultural concepts of maturity, immaturity and arrested development. Although Halberstam focuses on queer subjectivities in her book, her concept of queer temporality works

⁶ Valerie Rohy (2009) explores the analogical linkages between race and sexuality by focusing on the ways in which both are informed by “time and untimeliness,” and specifically by temporal tropes such as “backwardness, immaturity, regression, and arrested development” (xii). Similar to how nineteenth-century evolutionary science constructed the African American as “backward” and “primitive,” Rohy argues that sexologists adopted the lens of this scientific racism in their theorization of homosexuality as both developmentally and historically regressive (i.e., as going back to earlier stages of development as well as primitive and obsolete societies and cultures). Rohy contends that both of these views of regression “imagine arrested development as contagious: it is not just that time stops for the other but that the other—the ‘primitive,’ savage, or homosexual—wields the power to stop time for all the world” (x).

to “detach queerness from sexual identity” by conceptualizing “queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices” (Halberstam 1). In this way, “queer time” can encompass not only subjects of the LGBTQ community, but all subjects who do not subscribe to (hetero)normative understandings of life experience and the life cycle (Halberstam 6). Halberstam employs the idea of queer time to demonstrate “how respectability, and notions of the normal on which it depends, may be upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality” (4). Within this temporality, Halberstam argues, mature adulthood is the desired outcome of a messy and unpredictable adolescence; thus, ways of being that do not promote longevity and stability are pathologized “as immature and even dangerous” (Halberstam 5). Queer time is positioned in opposition to the “time of reproduction,” “family time” as well as “the time of inheritance,” where values, morals, and wealth are inherited from one generation to the next, in terms of family ties as well as maintaining “national stability” (Halberstam 5). Thus, Halberstam defines “queer time” as “those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (6). Moreover, as discussed above, “queer subjects” can extend beyond sexual identity to include those that choose to “live outside of reproductive and familial time as well as on the edges of logics of labor and production” (10).

While some would view an extended adolescence as a form of arrested development, Halberstam sees it as challenging “the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood,” as well as the markers of maturity of marriage and reproduction that are inherent to this heteronormative life trajectory (153). Instead of

stigmatizing the notion of an extended adolescence, we can learn from Halberstam that delaying adulthood or not subscribing to normative concepts of adulthood at all (or ever) is simply another way of life, such as adults in subcultural groups. Halberstam argues that queer subcultures in particular challenge not only the notion of subcultures as restricted to the domain of youth (and “youth in crisis”), but they also challenge heteronormative definitions of adulthood as tied to marriage and reproduction (Halberstam 162). Thus, we can view the concept of “arrested development” as a construct of the heteronormative culture on which it is based, as its criteria subscribes to normative definitions and markers of maturity and immaturity. Although Halberstam sees the notion of an extended adolescence as challenging dominant paradigms of maturity and adulthood, she also makes the important point that “the idea of an extended adolescence is not...always and everywhere a sign of resistant subcultures” (175). She reminds us that the young white “man-boys” of puerile television shows and films are actually products of a mainstream culture that promotes extending “adolescent fun and games” far beyond adolescence. Thus, she argues that we must differentiate between the extended adolescence of young white male culture—one that is often concomitant with misogyny and homophobia—and the extended adolescence of queer subcultures for example, which form communities and “alternative life narratives” (175).⁷

Elizabeth Freeman also examines temporality through the lens of queer theory in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010). One of her main arguments puts forward

⁷ The toxic potential of immaturity that Halberstam identifies is an issue that arises again and again in this dissertation. Indeed, immaturity in the context of male homosocial bonding and spaces can often reinforce and reproduce oppressive structures instead of working against them, which is something that I explore in my discussion of “bro”/homosocial male culture. See pages 153-54, 200, 250-51, 257-59.

the idea that time functions hegemonically, creating a “sense of being and belonging that feels natural,” albeit natural to those who benefit most from the dominant temporal order (that is, middle class, heterosexual people) (3,18). Freeman’s aim is to challenge the “dominant arrangement of time and history” by exploring the ways in which “non-sequential forms of time” can also contribute to subjectivity and a sense of belonging (xi). Freeman is interested in the “new encounters” that are created when normative temporality “gets interrupted” (xxii). Invoking Walter Benjamin’s concept of “homogenous empty time” – that is, the “spatialized, featureless calendrical time across which the history of nations supposedly marches forward” (Freeman xxii)– she argues that this concept can also be applied to other discourses such as “development,” “identity,” and “family” (xii), each of which reinforce a narrative of “time as seamless, unified, and forward moving” (xxii). Thus, she contends that the “interruptions” of queer temporalities work to challenge this dominant temporal regime, offering “other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others: that is, of living historically” (xxii).

Another central concept of Freeman’s is what she calls “chrononormativity,” which she defines as “the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” (Freeman 3). The concept of chrononormativity is at the crux of what Freeman means by “time binds.” Hence, the way in which subjects and bodies are bound to each other and are “made to feel coherently collective” through various temporal arrangements (3). Indeed, Freeman’s notion of chrononormativity, and thus the seemingly natural temporal regulation of bodies in society strongly resonates with Foucault’s concept of disciplinary bodies, or the way in which bodies are organized within disciplinary regimes. In a sense, Freeman’s chrononormativity

is the temporal corollary to Foucault's all-encompassing notion of discourse. Freeman extends her concept of chrononormativity to include Bourdieu's notion of habitus, arguing that "[f]or Bourdieu, cultural competence and thus belonging itself are forms of timing, of coming to inhabit a culture's expectations about the temporal lapses between getting and giving such that they seem inborn" (4). Moreover, she further applies the temporal manipulation of bodies to Butler's concept of gender performativity, specifically to the "melancholy" of repeated acts of gendered embodiment (4). Like Halberstam, Freeman's concept of queer temporality as a point of resistance to the dominant temporal order is useful to my examination of immaturity and arrested development as challenging heteronormative trajectories of development and maturity.

What Halberstam (2008) terms "the anti-social turn in queer studies" refers to a type of queer theory that emphasizes queerness as "anti-social, negative, and anti-relational," in contrast to theorizations of queerness as opportunities for "redemption, reconstruction, restoration and reclamation" (Halberstam, "Anti-Social Turn" 140). The anti-social turn is indebted to Leo Bersani's *Homos* (1995), in which he conceives of queer sexuality as "[a]n anticomunal mode of connectedness" (Bersani 10). For Bersani, this "anti-communal mode" manifests itself most strongly during penetrative sex (particularly gay male sex), which, he argues, elicits a "'self shattering' that 'disrupts the ego's coherence and dissolves its boundaries'" (101). Thus, as Halberstam writes, sex becomes a "death drive that undoes the self, releases the self from the drive for mastery and coherence and resolution" ("Anti-Social Turn" 140). Moreover, this "anti-relational theory of sexuality" radically challenges normative understandings of sex as "a life force connecting pleasure to life, survival and futurity" (Halberstam, "Anti-Social Turn" 140).

Halberstam argues that Lee Edelman “makes perhaps the most powerful and controversial recent contribution to anti-social queer theory” (“Anti-Social Turn” 141). In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Lee Edelman radically opposes the heteronormative logic of what he calls “reproductive futurism” (2), a logic which is hegemonically rooted in the figure of the Child. For Edelman, the Child is a “universalized subject” (11) that functions to both control and constitute political discourse in the name of futurity (11). In fact, he argues, both subjectivity and meaning itself hinge on this “logic of futurism,” which is transposed onto the figure of the Child (11). This Child, Edelman argues, “terroristically holds us all in check and determines that political discourse conform to the logic of a narrative wherein history unfolds as the future envisioned for a Child who must never grow up” (21). In this way, the Child works to reinforce the dominance of heteronormative culture, representing “the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism” (21).

In contrast to futurism, which always predicts “a realization of meaning” that constructs the “Imaginary wholeness” of the subject (Edelman 11, 24), Edelman argues that queerness disrupts this sense of a “suture[d]” identity, as it embodies “the remainder of the Real internal to the Symbolic order” – what Lacan refers to as *jouissance* (25). Thus, queerness “is never a matter of being or becoming,” but is rather about occupying this space of *jouissance*, “a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law” (25). In opposition to reproductive futurism and the Child which is at its crux, *jouissance* also comes to elicit the death drive “that always insists as the void in and of the subject, beyond its fantasy of self-realization, beyond the

pleasure principle” (25). Edelman therefore argues that it is only through inhabiting this “structural position of queerness” that one can truly challenge “the politics of signification (the politics aimed at closing the gap opened up by the signifier itself)” and thus “the politics of reproduction” —i.e., heteronormativity.

While Halberstam is “drawn to the politics of negativity” espoused by both Bersani and Edelman (“Anti-Social Turn” 147), she is deeply critical of Edelman’s apoliticism: “Edelman tends to cast material political concerns as crude and pedestrian, as already a part of the conjuring of futurity that his project must foreclose,” she argues (Halberstam, *Failure* 107). Indeed, pointing to the reductivism of Edelman’s polemic, she writes: “Edelman’s negative critique strands queerness between two equally unbearable options (futurity and positivity in opposition to nihilism and negation). Can we produce generative models of failure that do not posit two equally bleak alternatives?” (120). In asking this question, Halberstam “argue[s] for a more explicitly political framing of the antisocial project,” one that theorizes failure as a politically productive aesthetic and practice (*Failure* 106). Building on the ideas established in *In a Queer Time and Place*, Judith Halberstam continues with theorizing “ways of being and knowing that stand outside of conventional understandings of success” (that is, “reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation”) (*Failure* 2) in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011).

Halberstam’s aim is to “dismantl[e] the logics of success and failure in which we currently live” (2). She argues that failing and its vicissitudes, such as “losing, forgetting, [or] unbecoming” can be productive, in that they offer new “ways of being in the world” (3). Moreover, failure for Halberstam works to challenge the stronghold of hegemonic norms of success and maturity; it is residual of the “wondrous anarchy of childhood, and disturbs the

supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers” (3). Halberstam further contends that failure, from a feminist perspective, can be especially advantageous for women in a world where “feminine success” is consistently determined by patriarchal norms. Halberstam coins the term “shadow feminisms” to describe alternative feminist subjectivities and practices which are disposed towards “negativity, rejection, and transformation,” instead of the “positivity, reform, and accommodation” characteristic of “more acceptable forms of feminism” (4).

Halberstam draws from an eclectic corpus of objects for her study, ranging from children’s animation films to queer performance art. This “silly archive” (20) is part of her larger methodological framework of “low theory,” which, she argues, “tries to locate all the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony” (2). Halberstam’s method, then, is in keeping with her book’s focus on alternative or queer ontologies and epistemologies.

In comparison to Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) positions itself more squarely against Edelman’s polemic of anti-futurity and thus his antisocial and antirelational mode of queer theory. “To some extent *Cruising Utopia* is a polemic that argues against antirelationality by insisting on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity,” Muñoz argues (11). While Edelman views futurity as inextricably linked to the child as the promise of heteronormativity, and therefore inimical to queerness, Muñoz asserts that “queerness is primarily about futurity and hope” (11). Turning to German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch’s concept of the “not-quite-conscious”—that is, the idea that there is an anticipatory consciousness that lays dormant within us which is not yet intelligible—Muñoz theorizes queerness as a future horizon, as something that is “not quite

here” (21). Muñoz contends that the “ecstatic and horizontal temporality” of queerness works to challenge and disturb the “here and now” of hegemonic straight time, which, he argues, “naturalizes cultural logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity” (12). The neoliberal politics of straight time stipulates that “there is no future” apart from the present time in which we live; futurity only exists as “the province of normative reproduction” (28). Thus, Muñoz’s reclamation of futurity in the name of “a certain mode of queer utopianism” (13) dismantles futurity as a construct of heteronormativity.

Kathryn Bond Stockton’s *The Queer Child, Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009) also challenges Edelman’s *No Future*. While for Edelman the figure of the child is the emblem of “reproductive futurism,” the child in Stockton’s view challenges the tyranny of heteronormativity, imagining “alternative mappings” (Fisher 206) and trajectories of development (McBean 125). For Stockton, “delay” is a key defining component of childhood, and one that is both complex and troublesome when deconstructed from a queer perspective. Within a heteronormative paradigm, Stockton argues, delay is central to the regulation of children within dominant discourses of development, in that “they cannot, according to our concepts, advance to adulthood until we say it’s time” (6). Moreover, “their supposed gradual growth” is understood to be unequivocally vertical in nature, hence the phrase “growing up” (Stockton 4). Stockton challenges these normative views by asserting that children have the “propensity for growing astray inside the delay that defines who they ‘are’” (6). In other words, Stockton argues, children do not only grow up, they also grow “sideways,” moving laterally within the socially-sanctioned delay that wants them to stay still. Moreover, Stockton contends that sideways growth is not only limited to childhood, but is part of an ongoing process of

growing queerly: “‘growing sideways’ suggests that the width of a person’s experiences or ideas, their motives, may pertain at any age, bringing ‘adults’ and ‘children’ into lateral contact of surprising sorts,” she writes (11).

Stockton’s metaphor of sideways spatiality also connects her text to Muñoz’s concept of the queer horizon. Hence, as Anna Fisher points out, “[b]oth texts appear to propose the concept of a horizon line in order to render visible a state of becoming queer in crucial and radically different ways” (207). Indeed, in discussing queer culture’s deviation from normative modes of development, Halberstam groups both Stockton and Muñoz under the idea of “horizontality” (Failure 73). Halberstam emphasizes the way in which this horizontality encompasses Stockton’s concept of “‘sideways relations,’” that is, “relations that grow along parallel lines rather than upward and onward” (Failure 73). Hence, the “sideways relations” of horizontality can, perhaps, also be extended to Muñoz’s idea of “queerness as collectivity” (Muñoz 11).

Conceptions of maturity/immaturity, arrested development, and regression are culturally constructed through discourse. Psychological and psychoanalytic definitions of these concepts are often patriarchal and heterosexist, and therefore reductive. Feminist and queer interventions into the above concepts and theories of development work to disrupt and deconstruct these dominant discourses, laying bare their inner workings and the power relations that are inherent to them. I have adopted this queer deconstructionist stance as my own theoretical orientation, also working to lay bare the very concepts on which this dissertation is based.

Methodology

In this project, immaturity and its related states of arrested development and regression are inextricably linked to queerness. In the first chapter, queerness is a ghostly trace that entangles itself in the historical and cultural discourses of the postwar era, such as communism and momism. I say “ghostly trace” because queerness as we know it today did not yet exist. “Queer” in the 1950s was a pejorative term for homosexuals under the tyranny of McCarthyism; it would not be re-appropriated by the queer community as a political reclamation of identity until several decades later. As chapter one illustrates, immaturity and homosexuality became more or less synonymous in the postwar era, as anxieties pertaining to gender roles, and masculinity in particular, were on the rise. The introduction of queer theory within film studies in the 1990s, however, has allowed scholars to retrospectively analyze postwar films and extract political potential from their queer subtexts. Indeed, in *Masked Men*, Steven Cohan takes the postwar era’s pathologizing association of immaturity and homosexuality and turns it on its head: examining the star images of Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift, Cohan argues that the actors’ boyish allure—that is, their “disruptive status” as erotic objects—problematized the era’s “conflation of gender and sexuality” (the idea that masculinity was unambiguously heterosexual) (203). Thus, through the lens of queer theory, Cohan demonstrates how the relation between immaturity (read here as boyishness) and homosexuality gains political agency. While queerness in this first chapter is more straightforwardly attached to sexuality, it takes on more of a nebulous quality in the last two chapters. In fact, in the spirit of queerness as “improper, unfitting, [and] unsuitable” (McCallum and Tuhkanen 10), I am going to discuss the methodological approach of chapters two and three first, before returning to chapter one at the end of this section.

Chapters Two and Three

The connection between immaturity and queerness in the second and third chapters is encapsulated in Judith Halberstam's powerful reflection on what queer time means to her, where queerness is defined as a vehement refusal of heteronormative conceptions and constructions of maturity and the life cycle:

Queer time for me is the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence—early adulthood—marriage—reproduction—child rearing—retirement—death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility. It is a theory of queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity. (Dinshaw et al. 182)

Halberstam's linking of queer temporality with "an embrace of...immaturity in place of responsibility" and her positioning of this form of queerness as a "critique" of normative markers of maturity is at the heart of this project's methodological approach. Within this project, queerness is conceptualized as an adamant "resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner, "Introduction" xxvi), specifically normative ideas of maturity and success. In fact, as Halberstam reminds us, success and maturity go hand-in-hand within contemporary culture: "...success in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation," she writes (Halberstam, *Failure* 2). Thus, for Halberstam, "immaturity and a refusal of adulthood" is a central component of queer culture (Halberstam, *Failure* 73), something that primarily informs my own framing of immaturity here. While I do offer clinical definitions of maturity and immaturity above for contextual purposes, immaturity in

this dissertation is firmly bound up with a queer sensibility; that is, it is primarily about resisting heteronormativity and reproductive futurism. Whether it is the emotional stuntedness of John Cusack in *High Fidelity* (2000), the arrested development of Jason Segel as a “basement boy” in *Jeff Who Lives at Home* (2011), or Greta Gerwig’s performance of failure in *Frances Ha* (2012), what unites these characters is their challenging of heteronormative modes of maturity and adulthood. Instead of viewing immaturity as a state to be avoided, overcome, or ashamed of, this project, following Halberstam, views immaturity as a powerful form of resistance as well as a queer way of being.⁸

This project’s focus on queerness as a way of “being in the world” rather than firmly attached to sexual identity (or even sexuality) is certainly a contentious issue. Indeed, whether or not one can define something as queer “if it’s not explicitly ‘about’ sexuality” is an ongoing source of debate within the field of queer theory (Halley and Parker 2). Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (2011) point out that while the majority of people who study queer theory “would reject the idea that it has or should have a single ‘proper object’ called ‘sexuality,’” others in the discipline lament the way in which the broadness of the term “queer” has robbed it of this very specificity (6). For example, Love (2011) argues that while “the semantic flexibility of queer...is one of the most exciting things about it,” it is also one of its most problematic aspects, as “it loses the specific experiential and historical anchors that [originally] gave it meaning” (“Queers”

⁸ For E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, queerness is more than just a way of being, it is also “a way of becoming” (8). They view becoming as central to both queer theory and methodology, where queerness is characterized as an ever-dynamic mode of inquiry that “constant[ly] break[s] habits” (10). Moreover, they argue that defining queerness as a way of becoming means that “temporality is necessarily already bound up in the queer” (8). Indeed, the notion of queer becoming also resonates with Muñoz’s temporal trope of the queer horizon, as something that is “not yet here.”

182, 183). She points to the “early work” of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, especially *Epistemology of the Closet*, as one of such anchors, because of its “ground[ing] in a deep engagement with the history and experience of gay male identity” (“Queers” 181, 183). As Halley and Parker contend, however, “queer theory’s powers are practical and political, not epistemological—one puts tools to use rather than to explanation” (7). Their viewpoint is one that strongly informs my own adoption of queer theory in this project, where queer temporality is used as an interpretive method to demonstrate how the films in chapters two and three challenge (or, in some cases, reinforce) the tyranny of heteronormative adulthood.

It is also important to keep in mind, however, that while theories of queer temporality employ a broader understanding of queer, they are not wholly removed from questions of sexuality. As Carla Freccero (2011) argues, theorists such as Edelman and Freeman remind us that “queering temporality...is both related and not related to the specific thematics of sexuality” (21). Thus, Edelman’s polemic against reproductive futurism and Freeman’s invocation “for alternative chronotopes” bespeak a politics that “identif[ies] progressive, and thus future-oriented, teleologies as aligned with heteronormative reproduction” (Freccero 21). Indeed, although heterosexual subjects populate the films under study here, their immaturity works to challenge and even reject heteronormative futurity, which is inevitably entangled with questions of sexuality.

The idea that queer has “mov[ed] away from both evidentiary claims about same-sex desire and acts, and also from a specific focus on gay and lesbian people” (Love, “Queers” 182) is demonstrated in an essay that uses the lens of queer temporality in its analysis of the television series, *Girls* (2012-17). Kimberly Turner (2014) uses Edelman’s *No Future* as a methodological

“approach for re-scripting the twenty-something [single white female] as a queer figure” (158). She argues that the twenty-something females on *Girls* are queer by virtue of “their refusal to ground their subjectivity in futurity” (167). For example, the characters reject reproductive futurism through their disinterest in sustaining heterosexual relationships, as well as through their proclivity to “seek out men who [do not] inspire long-term commitment” (Turner 160). Moreover, Turner also elucidates that in repudiating futurity and the “figural child,” the characters are presented as “children themselves” (167). Turner’s linking of queer temporality to the representation of childishness resonates with my own project.

While chapters two and three of this project focus on textual analysis of the films under study, these close readings are firmly grounded in theories of queer temporality, such as Halberstam’s theories of queer time and failure, Edelman’s theory of reproductive futurism, Stockton’s theory of growing sideways, and Muñoz’s theory of queer horizontality. My rationale for choosing this methodological approach is connected to my research outcome—that is, to demonstrate how immaturity and its vicissitudes, while occupying a contradictory status in our culture, is also a source of political agency. As discussed above, immaturity gains its power through its queerness, through its ability to challenge heteronormative conceptions of adulthood and life trajectories. Queer theory, and specifically, theories that connect the temporal to queerness, provide the tools to illustrate how representations of immaturity, arrested development, and regression challenge the bastions of heteronormativity in our culture. Chapter two is grounded in Halberstam’s theory of queer time, Edelman’s theory of reproductive futurism, as well as Freeman’s concept of “chronormativity.” While the representations of male immaturity in the chapter’s films work to challenge normative temporality and adulthood, many

of the films ultimately support these very structures through their acquiescence to reproductive futurism. For example, although *Wedding Crashers* (2005) initially rejects normative adulthood through its portrayal of carefree homosocial bonding, the ending of the film reinforces the heteronormative ideologies of marriage and reproduction. Similarly, *I Love You, Man* (2009) also endorses a heteronormative temporal order in the end, despite its ostensible partiality to living in a time of bromance and homosociality. The conservatism of these films is primarily due to their status as products of Hollywood, where maintaining the status quo is crucial to mass appeal. Still, other films discussed in the chapter, such as *Stepbrothers* (2008) and *Jeff Who Lives at Home* (2011) repudiate heteronormative timelines of adulthood, proposing the idea that living queerly in a protracted state of adolescence is akin to being alive; both films present adulthood as an empty and soul-crushing endeavour. Indeed, the conflicting ideologies of the films in the chapter bespeak the contradictory fear/desire dynamic structuring immaturity in our culture.

The third chapter, which focuses on representations of immature women, also draws on theories of queer temporality, broadening its scope to include Halberstam's theory of queer failure, Stockton's theory of sideways growth, as well as (but to a lesser extent) Muñoz's concept of queer futurity. In my analysis of *Bridesmaids*, failure (following Halberstam) is positioned as a powerful form of subjectivity from which to resist heteronormative maturity and reproductive futurism. Similarly, in *Frances Ha*, Frances' practicing of failure not only challenges heteronormative ideas of maturity and success, it also allows her to carve out her own way of being. As Halberstam asserts, practicing failure lends itself to a powerful form of feminist resistance, especially in a world where female success is repeatedly defined by patriarchal norms (*Failure* 4). Stockton's theory of growing sideways in stuntedness informs my analyses of

Lifeguard and *Laggies*. In both films, the female protagonist becomes parallel or “side by side” with an adolescent character, through a shared experience of delay. For example, in *Lifeguard*, Leigh regresses to adolescence and purposefully stalls her adult life by having an affair with a teenager, Jason, who is also “delayed” as a result of feeling stagnant as a minor in a small town. Jason and Leigh engage in what Stockton calls “sideways relations,” in that they become parallel with each other through their mutual experiences of delay. Moreover, although in a state of arrest, Leigh grows sideways in her stuntedness, a movement which challenges heteronormative conceptions of linear or vertical development.

Thus, theories of queer temporality provide an ideal methodological framework from which to demonstrate the political potentialities of immaturity. This is primarily because these theories collectively emphasize a rejection of heteronormative temporalities (timelines, “life schedules,” futurity) and, by extension, a heteronormative way of life.

Corpus:

My second and third chapters are collectively comprised of a corpus of 20 films, which can be defined as a stratified purposeful sample. This sample of films is purposeful because the films were selected based on their thematic characteristics or subject matter (that is, films that focus on immature characters and whose narratives foreground the issue of immaturity, arrested development, or regression) (“Purposive Sampling”), as well as according to my outlined parameters (geographical location, historical time period, and genre), which are discussed further below. Moreover, this sample is also purposeful because the films were chosen based on my research objectives (“Purposive Sampling”)—that is, to foreground the contradictory status of immaturity in our culture, while also demonstrating its queer potential. In regards to

stratification, this sample is stratified in terms of gender and genre, and then further stratified into a particular category or incarnation of male or female immaturity (for example, the “bro-ensemble film” in the second chapter, and the “thirty-something-and-single woman-child” in the third).

With regard to gender, I divided my sample into films that focus on male immaturity and female immaturity, in accordance with the subject matter and research objectives of this dissertation, which aims to provide a thorough examination of immaturity in American culture. In each gender group, these films were stratified according to genre, specifically comedies and comedy-dramas (dramedies), as I wanted my sample to be thorough in scope in order to represent my population accurately. The dramedy genre is of particular importance to this study, because of its propensity to foreground “alternative” subjectivities and ideologies (Feasey 71). Indeed, it is not surprising that the dramedy films of this project are overall more resistant to heteronormativity than the comedy films, and, on this note, it is also not surprising that the majority of films that focus on female immaturity here are also dramedies, as the female-centered films in this project are stronger in their opposition to normative ideologies and ways of being than the male-centered ones. In relation to genre, these films were also stratified in terms of their status as either Hollywood or independent films. I chose to include both Hollywood and independent films in this project in order to provide a comprehensive view of immaturity in contemporary American film, one that focused on both commercially-centered and less commercially-motivated forms of cultural production. As I discuss further below, however, the distinctions between Hollywood and independent films are not so clear-cut, and thus these labels become increasingly nebulous when examined more closely.

The corpus of films in chapter two focus on immature men in both Hollywood and independent films, encompassing both comedies and dramedies. While immaturity, arrested development, and regression can be distinguished from each other, my chosen texts are not divided into these respective categories. Rather, because these concepts overlap with one another (sometimes all three of them can be found in the same text), the films were chosen according to the criteria of whether they featured characters with one or more of these issues or traits (immaturity, arrested development, or regression). Moreover, the films in the second chapter are representative of the various vicissitudes and incarnations of male immaturity, providing a comprehensive view of this phenomenon. Thus, the films were also selected according to their suitability to a particular category of male immaturity. For example, the first section of the chapter, which focuses on the emergence of the “bro-ensemble” film (a film which features the homosocial bonding of a group of male friends) uses *Diner* (1982), *Kicking and Screaming* (1995), *Knocked Up* (2007), and *The Hangover* (2009) as representative case studies for this aspect of male immaturity. *Diner* sets the blueprint for the genre, while the other films are representative of more contemporary examples. Similarly, in my section on “Boy-Men in Bromance,” *Wedding Crashers* functions as an example of a proto-bromance, with *I Love You, Man* reflecting the genre proper.

As the contemporary woman-child is a relatively new cultural figure, my third chapter does not provide a broad anthology of gendered representations of immaturity like the second chapter does. Rather, using *Bridesmaids* as a foundational film in the emergence of the female counterpart to the boy-man figure, the rest of the chapter focuses on independent films, which correspond to a particular theory of queer temporality. For example, my analysis of *Frances Ha*

is informed by Halberstam's theory of queer failure, while I examine *Lifeguard and Laggies* through the lens of Stockton's concept of "sideways" growth and relations. I chose to focus on independent films in this chapter because of their "progressive" and "even counter-hegemonic" potential (Newman), which make them ideal texts to demonstrate how female immaturity is a powerful form of subjectivity that challenges the oppressiveness of (hetero)normative adulthood. This is not to say that independent films are diametrically opposed to Hollywood films; indeed, as Michael Z. Newman (2011) asserts, "indie cinema parallels that of Hollywood and in some sense has been incorporated by it" (2). The contradictory character of the indie film will be discussed further below.

All of the films examined in this dissertation are American films (except for *About A Boy*, which is American, British, and French), the majority of them being from Hollywood. My rationale for choosing to focus on American films in this dissertation is two-fold: First, the "culture of immaturity" that Cross and others refer to is a decidedly American issue, from the emergence of an adolescent/youth culture in the postwar era, to contemporary American consumer and media culture, which have capitalized on the growing desire to reject old models of maturity and "return to or retain" one's youth or adolescence (Cross 18). Secondly, the figure of the boy-man is firmly embedded in American popular culture, thanks to the films of Judd Apatow and his various copycats which have created an entire genre surrounding this figure, a genre which is thus integral to a study on cinematic immaturity. With the contemporary American boy-man film as this project's starting-off point, the other two chapters correspond to it by providing an examination of the boy-man's cinematic origins in the postwar male

melodrama (chapter one), as well as the boy-man's female counterpart in the figure of the woman-child (chapter two).

As mentioned above, the body of films examined in the second and third chapters, are a mixture of Hollywood and American independent films. In chapter two, the majority of films are Hollywood, while chapter three focuses primarily on indie films featuring immature women. As stated previously, I chose to focus on both Hollywood and independent films in this project to provide a comprehensive view of immaturity in cinema, one that foregrounds both dominant and resistant voices, and thus reinforces the contradictory character of immaturity in contemporary culture. As a commercially-motivated enterprise whose primary aim is to turn as much of a profit as possible, Hollywood films generally create and maintain dominant ideologies pertaining to gender, sexuality, race, class, and other markers of identity; thus, one might be tempted to label Hollywood films as decidedly conservative, while viewing independent cinema as "located in difference, resistance, [and] opposition" (Newman 2). However, as Newman points out, the oppositional status of independent film in relation to Hollywood film is not so clear cut. Newman argues that while "[i]ndie film culture profits from its alterity," which gives it "the potential to be progressive and even counter-hegemonic," it also "functions to reproduce social class stratification by offering an elite, culturally legitimate alternative to the mass-market Hollywood offerings of the megaplex" (Newman 2). Indeed, the independent film audience is "generally urban, affluent, well-educated, and fairly narrow by comparison with the audience for studio pictures" (Newman 2). In this way, indie cinema becomes "parallel to Hollywood," occupying the contradictory position of both "resisting and perpetuating...dominant ideolog[ies]" (Newman 3). The increasingly nebulous character of indie cinema within contemporary culture is largely a

result of its status as a “brand” rather than as an alternative filmmaking practice that is antithetical to mainstream Hollywood film (Newman 4). As Newman asserts, “[t]o an extent, the diminutive indie is simply a synonym for independent with an added connotation of fashionable cool. But it also functions as a mystification of the more straightforward category ‘independent.’ This mystification diminishes or makes vague the significance of economic distinctions” (4). For example, while the marketing and reception of *Lars and the Real Girl* touts the film as “indie”—most likely because of its high concentrations of those familiar indie attributes of “whimsy” and quirkiness (Tobias)—it was both produced and distributed by a major Hollywood studio, MGM. Moreover, despite its “indie” status, *Lars* is ultimately a conservative film, one that reinforces the hegemony of a heteronormative life trajectory. Within the corpus of woman-child films in this project, *Laggies* is also labeled as “indie,” not only because of its relatively independent production and distribution outlets, but also because of the “indie” credibility of its director, Lynn Shelton. Despite the indie label, however, *Laggies* is also rather conservative, positioning heteronormative coupledness as the ultimate marker of maturity. These above examples demonstrate that the “indie” moniker is not an automatic indicator of a film’s progressive leanings. Conversely, a Hollywood film is not unequivocally conservative. As mentioned above, *Stepbrothers* is relatively progressive for a Hollywood man-child film. Thus, these examples not only demonstrate the precariousness of the labels “Hollywood” and “indie,” they also call into question the very usefulness of these genre distinctions.

In terms of historical time period, the corpus of films in this project focuses on the 1950s in the first chapter, moving forward to the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s in the second and third chapters. I decided to begin this project with a focus on the postwar era because it provides the

necessary contextual background for a study on immaturity in American film. As discussed in the first chapter, immaturity occupied a contradictory position in the postwar era, as it was both greatly feared and desired. Hence, while immaturity in the postwar period was pathologized through its connection to homosexuality (especially with the figure of the mama's boy), it was also constructed as an attractive trait through the eroticization of boyishness, epitomized by young actors such as Marlon Brando and Montgomery Clift. Moreover, as I also argue in this chapter, the male melodramas starring these actors ultimately trouble the pathologizing discourse surrounding the mama's boy, presenting the mother-child-like dynamic structuring the romantic relationships in these films as desirable. Thus, the first chapter is foundational in that it traces the emergence of the fear/desire dynamic surrounding male immaturity in the 1950s, a dynamic that is still evident in contemporary representations of male immaturity, such as those explored in the second chapter.

The second and third chapters of this project focus on more contemporary films, spanning the time period between the mid-1990s to the present day, with the exception of *The Nutty Professor* (1963) and *Diner* (1982), which are included primarily for contextual purposes: *The Nutty Professor* acts as a bridge from the first chapter to the second chapter, providing an example of postwar male immaturity in the comedy film, and thus serving as an introduction to the discussion of the contemporary comedic boy-man in the second chapter. *Diner* is included as the foundational film for what I refer to as the contemporary "bro-ensemble" genre. The rest of the chapter's focus on films released between the 1990s to the present day is due primarily to scope and relevancy. While there are certainly films released in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s that feature immature males, the recognition of the boy-man as a cultural figure and the emergence of

the boy-man or man-child genre in film really only came into being in the last ten years or so, contemporaneous with Judd Apatow's *The 40-Year-old Virgin* (2005) and *Knocked Up* (2007). Thus, the majority of the films examined in this chapter were released between 2005 and 2013, encompassing the emergence and so-called "golden age" of the boy-man genre. The inclusion of films released in the 1990s and early 2000s are again, primarily contextual: Adam Sandler's *Billy Madison* (1995) and *The Wedding Singer* (1998) are proto-boy-man films, as they predate the Apatowian boy-man while still paving the way for him. *High Fidelity* (2000) and *About A Boy* (2002), both of which are based on novels by Nick Hornby, are also important cultural progenitors of the contemporary cinematic boy-man. For example, the boy-man turned surrogate father theme of *About A Boy* re-emerges in 2013's *The Way, Way Back*.

The films featuring immature women in this project are all recent works, released between 2011 and 2016 (if we also consider films mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, as well as in endnotes). The reason I am focusing on films released in the last six years or so is largely due to the fact that films centering on female immaturity and arrested development is a rather recent phenomenon, one that emerged mainly in response to the ubiquity of the boy-man in popular culture. While immature female characters have always populated the screen, films whose subject matter focuses specifically on female immaturity or women in an extended adolescence is a trend that was set in motion after the release and immense success of *Bridesmaids* (2011), a film that was produced with the idea of creating the "female equivalent" to the bromance genre (Modleski 138). Thus, the corpus of films examined in this chapter are reflective of a cultural shift in which telling stories about women who are stunted, drifting, or choosing to live their lives outside of conventional understandings of maturity and success is

both acceptable and even celebrated. It is as if these films are saying, “If men are allowed to be immature, lost, or stuck, then why can’t women as well?”

Another point that should be discussed is the absence of race and class issues in the films under study, and, by extension, in this project as a whole: the films examined here feature white, middle to upper-middle-class subjects. The lack of minoritarian identities in the man-child and woman-child film is primarily a result of the hegemony of whiteness in popular culture—the idea that whiteness is so readily accepted as the norm that it becomes invisible, wielding its power through its invisibility (Dyer 47)—and thus the lack of diversity in American and, especially, Hollywood films. As explained previously, questions of race and class have analogical connections to immaturity: Through the lens of nineteenth-century scientific discourse, African Americans and other minorities were constructed as “primitive” and “backwards,” and therefore immature and arrested in their development (Rohy xii).⁹ In terms of class, Derek Nystrom argues that working class identities are often linked to immaturity in our culture, as part of a larger narrative that views working class subjects as impulsive and incapable of delaying gratification, like children (121). While there are clearly interesting and extensive linkages between race,

⁹ Closely related to notions of immaturity is childhood and the figure of the child. In *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2011), Robin Bernstein explores how the construction of childhood in American culture is fundamentally tied to issues of race. Central to Bernstein’s argument are the linkages between childhood and innocence—a connection, she argues, that is “not essential...but historically located” (17). Indeed, Bernstein explains that within the Calvinist tradition, children were regarded as “inherently sinful,” and that it was only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that the idea of children as innocent emerged within popular discourse, reaching its apotheosis in the “sentimental culture” of the mid-nineteenth century (17). Within this culture, innocence was “raced white,” rooted in the figure of the white (female) child (17), whose “performance” of innocence (that is, a performance of “obliviousness” or a “performed claim of slipping beyond social categories” such as race) helped to maintain the hegemony of whiteness “as an unmarked category” (19-21). As discussed above, Edelman also examines the cultural currency of the child in reinforcing hegemonic power structures, specifically heteronormativity.

class, and immaturity, to thoroughly unpack these issues goes beyond the scope of this project. However, the issue of class is still engaged with in my analysis of *Bridesmaids* and *The Wedding Singer*, for example, where I demonstrate how immaturity challenges bourgeois (hetero)normativity.

Chapter One

The first chapter of this project focuses on the contradictory status of the immature male and the equally conflicted figure of the mother, both of whom were simultaneously idealized and vilified in the postwar era. While the relationship between the mama's boy and his overbearing mother is pathologized in several films of the period—which link the childish male's deviant behaviour to his abnormally close relationship to his mother—I argue that the transposition of the mother-child dynamic onto the romantic relationships in the male-centered melodrama is treated much more ambivalently. In this scenario, the brooding, immature male is taken care of by his maternal female love interest, so that the mother-child dynamic, while still a source of anxiety, is also romanticized and even eroticized. The contradictory status of the maternal lover, childish male relationship is examined through close readings of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *A Place in the Sun* (1951) and *The Country Girl* (1954).

Although I do not examine the three above films through a psychoanalytic lens, my discussion of the mother-child-like romantic relationship in the male-centered melodrama is indeed indebted to psychoanalytic theory. The obvious association to psychoanalysis here is the Oedipal nature of this central relationship, where the female character becomes a kind of surrogate mother to the male protagonist, underlining his stuntedness or inability to become a full subject. Moreover, my analysis of these films against the historical backdrop of momism in

the postwar era also evokes the figure of the “castrating mother,” made popular by the films of Alfred Hitchcock. The image of the domineering mother who is infantilizing her son, a misogynistic idea that reached its height with the publication of Philip Wylie’s *A Generation of Vipers* in 1943, reverberates throughout *A Place in The Sun*, for example, where the Shelley Winters character is presented as an overbearing maternal figure to boyish Montgomery Clift. Kaja Silverman’s theorization of the postwar male subject as symbolically castrated from the trauma of war also underpins my close readings; indeed, the postwar male’s subconscious desire to assume a passive position in relation to his female love interest (Silverman 71) bespeaks a wish to regress to a child-like state and escape the responsibilities of adulthood.

The textual analysis of films in this chapter is grounded in a historical examination of male immaturity and the mother figure in the 1950s, where I connect these figures to the larger postwar discourses of homophobia, communism, and momism. Beginning with the idea of maturity as a central preoccupation of postwar culture, I trace the ways in which maturity became synonymous with adult masculinity during this era, so that immaturity was tantamount to emasculation, and therefore homosexuality. Not only were homosexuals linked to an erosion of masculinity, but they were also linked to communism; it was held that homosexuals, as ‘moral degenerates,’ were susceptible to communist extortion and therefore “national security risks” (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 52). The scapegoat for these supposed immature and depraved individuals fell squarely on the shoulders of the mother figure: it was believed that a mother who was either too overbearing or too detached hindered the normal development of her son, leading to arrested development and homosexuality. Hence, the discourse of momism painted both the immature male and the mother figure as threats to American national and ideological stability.

But if immaturity was feared, it was also simultaneously desired in an era that became increasingly weary of maturity's near synonymy with conformity. Indeed, the emergence of a youthful, rebel male counterculture (as embodied by the boyish Montgomery Clift, James Dean, and Marlon Brando) made immaturity look cool and attractive. Moreover, as my close readings of the films demonstrate, maternal characteristics were also made desirable, so long as they were attached to a male protagonist's preferred female love interest.

I decided to anchor the textual analysis of my chosen films through a historical lens in order to best demonstrate the contradictory character of male immaturity in the 1950s, an incongruence that continues to structure discourses surrounding male immaturity in contemporary culture. Examining the postwar relationship between masculinity and maturity/immaturity, as well as how the figure of the mother plays into these connections, provides the necessary historical and cultural context for close readings of the above three films. For example, my analysis of *A Place in the Sun* demonstrates the contradictory status of both the immature male and the maternal figure in the postwar era through the triangulation of the central romantic relationship. Thus, the two central love interests of Montgomery Clift in the film, played by Shelley Winters and Elizabeth Taylor, respectively, represent competing images of the "good" and "bad" mother/lover. While Shelley Winters is figured as the domineering maternal lover, evocative of cultural anxieties surrounding momism, Elizabeth Taylor becomes the beautiful, nurturing, albeit ethereal surrogate mother for the childish Clift, representing the fantasy of upward class mobility. My readings of these characters are rooted in the bipolar cultural construction of the mother in the postwar period as both "idealized and vilified" (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 132). Moreover, corresponding to his relationship with each of his maternal lovers,

Clift's childishness in the film is constructed as both attractive (his scenes with Taylor) and anxiety-provoking (his scenes with Winters), mirroring the conflicted character of immature masculinity in the 1950s.

The methodological approach used in this chapter is very similar to that of Steven Cohan's in *Masked Men*, where he combines textual analysis and historical analysis in his study of masculinity in 1950s Hollywood films. While Cohan's historical analysis is conducted through the lens of "contemporary gender [and queer] theory" (Cohan x-xi), a vantage point I do not use in this chapter, the strong connections he makes between the films and their respective historical and cultural contexts decidedly informs my own approach, as demonstrated above with the example of *A Place in the Sun*. The importance of examining the discursive contexts surrounding a film is indicative of a shift in film studies that sought to look beyond the text as the primary site of signification, in order to examine the historical and cultural background in which the text was produced and received (Smoodin 9). For example, Garth Jowett's *Film: The Democratic Art* (1976), Robert Allan and Douglas Gomery's *Film History: Theory and Practice* (1985), and Lea Jacobs' *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (1991) were pioneering texts in this movement, all of which "made extremely sophisticated historiographic interventions in the field through the use of primary materials" (Smoodin 10-11). Indeed, the emphasis upon "contextual factors, as opposed to textual devices or viewer subjectivities" is at the crux of the approaches to reception studies taken up by Janet Staiger¹⁰ and Barbara Klinger (1994), both of whom share the "materialist contention...that the text itself has no intrinsic meaning" (Klinger xvi). For Klinger, devices such as the historical case study

¹⁰ See Staiger's *Interpreting Films* (1992) and *Perverse Spectators* (2000) for her "historical materialist approach to reception studies."

demonstrate to us that “films assume different identities and cultural functions” within various social and historical contexts (xvii). Klinger’s project on the films of Douglas Sirk illustrates this assertion, as each one of her chapters covers “a specific institutional context or discourse associated with the cultural circulation of films” (Klinger xvii).

Although my chapter falls outside of Staiger and Klinger’s reception studies approach (I do not examine the reception contexts of my films), the significance that both scholars place upon establishing a film’s discursive context is integral to my first chapter, where I thoroughly map out the various historical and cultural discourses pertaining to maturity/immaturity, masculinity, and the mother figure in the postwar period. Indeed, following Staiger and Klinger, I examine primary materials such as Philip Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers* (1946) and Edward Strecker’s *Their Mother’s Sons* (1946) in order to demonstrate the misogynistic undertones of momism, undertones which permeate all three films: In *Streetcar*, Vivien Leigh’s Blanche is the perverse mother figure, oscillating between child-like innocence and predatory pedophilia; in *Sun* (as discussed above), Shelley Winters’ Alice is the mousy, yet domineering, wet-blanket mother who ruins all of Clift’s adolescent fun, and in *The Country Girl*, Grace Kelly’s Georgie is the depressive mother, repressing her youthful femininity underneath a hardened, matronly exterior, the role she must assume to take care of her alcoholic husband. All three of these representations are rooted in the discourse of momism, which promoted an image of the mother as overbearing and smothering, and therefore primarily responsible for the perceived epidemic of stunted masculinity plaguing postwar American culture. Thus, while I focus on contextual factors in this chapter, my analysis is still very much based on the film texts themselves; in this way, my approach takes after Michael Chopra-Gant’s (2006), who asserts that his historical examination

of postwar films “privileges neither the films nor other materials used to establish a cultural context for those films, but rather sees both the movies and the wider cultural context as being involved in a dialogic, discursive relationship” (2). Akin to Chopra-Gant, the textual analysis of films in my first chapter corresponds to, and is in conversation with, broader socio-historical circumstances.

In terms of the corpus of films for this chapter, I chose my films according to the parameters of whether they met the chapter’s thematic requirements—that is, 1950s Hollywood films whose central romantic relationship possesses a mother-child-like dynamic, a dynamic which bespeaks the contradictory discourses encompassing male immaturity and the mother figure in the postwar period. Scholars such as Kristen Hatch (2005) and Amy Lawrence (2010) have noted the mother-child-like nature of the romantic relationships in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and *A Place in The Sun* (1951), but I extend these readings to include a discussion of how the discourse of momism also plays into these films, as well as how Blanche in *Streetcar* and Alice in *Sun* can be read as maternal figures. I included *The Country Girl* (1954) because the relationship between the husband and wife characters is also uncannily evocative of one between a mother and son; moreover, Grace Kelly’s status as a mother figure is treated rather ambivalently in the film: while William Holden is initially peeved by Kelly’s maternal characteristics, they are also (ironically) what ultimately draws him to her.

As I pointed out earlier, the first chapter of this project is a foundational chapter, in that it establishes the fear/desire dynamic characterizing male immaturity through a historically-oriented analysis of postwar American culture. With the first chapter as providing the necessary historical context for male immaturity, the second chapter examines more contemporary films

about childish men, grounding its textual analysis in queer theories of temporality, and thus beginning to illustrate how immature subjectivities challenge heteronormativity. The third chapter corresponds to the second by focusing on the female counterpart to the immature male, utilizing a broader range of queer temporal theories to demonstrate the political potential of immature womanhood, where “immature” gains agency through its queer and feminist resistance to the oppression of heteronormative adulthood. What unites these chapters is the contradictory status of immaturity in our culture: while its otherness to heteronormative adulthood creates feelings of anxiety and fear, this otherness is also what makes it desirable—that is, as an oppositional subjectivity reminiscent of youthful rebellion. The oppositional nature of immaturity is also what makes it queer; thus, it is the power of queerness, in defying “regimes of the normal,” that ultimately binds these chapters together.

Chapter 1

Motherly Love: Maternal Lovers and Childish Men in Postwar Male-Centered Melodrama

As previously stated in the introduction, male immaturity and its representation possess a contradictory status in our culture. While there is cultural anxiety surrounding the idea of adult men rejecting traditional “markers of maturity” (marriage, family, a steady job), there is also a simultaneous desire for images of immature masculinity, for they represent an escape from the standards of maturity that men have been expected to live up to. This dualism of fear/desire surrounding the childish adult male is especially prominent in the Hollywood melodramas of the postwar period, when ideas about gender and gender roles “were in a state of intensive flux” (Hatch 46). The contradictory status of the immature male in the postwar era is paralleled by the equally conflicted figure of the mother, who was simultaneously idealized and demonized in both popular and psychiatric discourse.

The “mama’s boy” and his domineering mother are pathologized in several postwar Hollywood films (Biskind 297), where deviance and criminality are shown to be products of a character’s arrested development at the hands of his overbearing mother (Biskind 297; Fischer 72). The mother-child relationship is treated much more ambivalently, however, when it is transposed on to a romantic relationship where a brooding, childish male is taken care of by his maternal (and more mature) female love interest. Here, while the mother-child dynamic is still fraught with anxiety, it is also idealized and romanticized, and at times eroticized. The contradictory character of the maternal lover, childish male relationship will be explored through close readings of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *A Place in the Sun* (1951), and *The*

Country Girl (1954). These films reinforce the incongruous status of the postwar mother as both idealized and vilified by offering competing images of the “good” and “bad” mother/lover.

The male-centered melodramas under study here are related to the evolution of the social problem film into a variation of the family melodrama (Byars 114). As Jackie Byars (1991) argues, “[f]amily had become an issue in a way that it had never been before,” as anxieties surrounding the “familial institution” and gender roles were on the rise (114). Moreover, she further argues that these family melodramas—such as *Come Back Little Sheba* (1952), *The Country Girl*, and *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955)—“showed a desperate and basic need for children and parenthood, a need for strong family ties and durable family structure” (129). Thus, this need was expressed through the theme of surrogate families and surrogate parents and children. For example, in *Rebel Without a Cause*, when both Jim (James Dean) and Judy (Natalie Wood) are disillusioned with their own families, particularly the behavior of their parents, they run away to an abandoned mansion with the “emotionally troubled and physically immature Plato (Sal Mineo)” (Byars 127). There, they form their own temporary surrogate family unit, with Jim and Judy acting as parents to Plato, the child (Byars 127).

In *Come Back Little Sheba* (1952), the absence of children is the central problem of the film (Byars 118). Not only are the Delaneys (Burt Lancaster and Shirley Booth) childless as a result of a miscarriage, but their dog Sheba, their surrogate child, has run away and is believed to be dead (Byars 118). Their “repressed desire for parenthood” is triggered when a female college student, Marie (Terry Moore), comes to live with them, and the Delaneys treat her like the daughter they never had (Byars 118). The surrogate parent-child theme is further reinforced when the alcoholic Doc returns from the hospital after a messy drinking binge, and his wife tells

him, “I’d never leave you, Daddy,” projecting her own desire for a father figure (she is estranged from her father) on to her husband (Byars 119). Similarly, in *The Country Girl*, Frank (Bing Crosby) and Georgie (Grace Kelly) are rendered childless after they lose their little boy in a traffic accident. Frank holds himself responsible for their son’s death and turns to alcoholism to deal with the trauma (Byars 119). Later on in the film, Bernie Dodd (William Holden) asks Georgie why her husband “fell to pieces,” and she replies that “responsibility became too much for him. He hates himself.” Thus, Frank regresses to a child-like state in response to the trauma and through his debilitating alcoholism, and his wife satisfies her unfulfilled need to be maternal by taking care of him. Although not as obvious, this dynamic of the maternal lover or wife and her child-like male husband or love interest, is mirrored in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *A Place in The Sun*.

In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992), Kaja Silverman discusses the way in which numerous Hollywood films released during the Second World War feature male characters who are symbolically castrated from the trauma of war. She argues that films such as *Lost Weekend* (1945), *Pride of the Marines* (1945), and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) focus on male protagonists who possess a “physical or psychic wound which marks [them] as somehow deficient, and which renders [them] incapable of functioning smoothly in civilian life” (53). As a result of the male subject’s “lack,” these films give the female character the “narrative agency” which is usually attributed to the male (Silverman 53). The dynamic of the wounded male and his “active” female counterpart is directly related to the mother-child-like romantic relationship discussed here, especially considering the majority of the male protagonists examined in this chapter assume a passivity that bespeaks a desire to relinquish control (narrative or otherwise).

Silverman cites a quote from Robert Warshow's 1947 essay on *The Best Years of Our Lives*, where he explains how the scene in which Wilma (Cathy O'Donnell) helps her handicapped husband (Harold Russell) to bed stages the war-time male's subconscious desire to be passive (Warshow qtd. in Silverman 89). Warshow writes: "...Every night, his wife will have to put him to bed, and then it will be her hands that must be used in making love. Beneath the pathos of the scene...one feels a current of excitement, in which the sailor's misfortune becomes a kind of wish-fulfillment, as one might actually dream it: he *must* be passive; therefore, he can be passive without guilt" (qtd. in Silverman 71). Indeed, the desire to be passive, to renounce responsibility in response to the trauma of war is mirrored in the 1950s male-centered melodramas discussed in this chapter. Similar to the war-time male, the postwar male also suffers a "crisis of male subjectivity" (Silverman 53), where he dreams of escape from his soul-crushing existence as a breadwinner or "organization man." Thus, the immature males in *Streetcar*, *A Place in the Sun*, and *The Country Girl* also fulfill the postwar male fantasy of assuming a passive position—that is, regressing to a child-like state where one is taken care of by a maternal figure. Before examining the films themselves, it is important to situate them within the historical and cultural discourses of the era. What follows is a thorough overview of these discourses.

Maturity was a central theme in both popular culture and psychiatric discourse in the postwar era (Ehrenreich 17; Cuordileone, *Manhood* 130; Chopra-Gant 84). Barbara Ehrenreich (1983) argues that maturity held a special "authority" in the 1950s; it was idealized as a trait to which one should aspire, which, she contends, is difficult to understand in a culture which has lived through the youth political activism of the 1960s (17). But maturity was indeed "'heroic,' a measured acceptance of the limits of one's private endeavors at a time when action on a broader

political scale could only seem foolish—or suspect” (Ehrenreich 17). As a testament to maturity’s profound influence, novels such as *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* and *Marjorie Morningstar* championed maturity as the ultimate ideal, while H.A. Overstreet’s *The Mature Mind* became a 1950 national bestseller, touting maturity “as an evolutionary achievement” (Ehrenreich 17).

For Overstreet, all human fault can be attributed to immaturity, from war and racism to promiscuity and labour conflict (Ehrenreich 17). Moreover, he argues that maturity is measured by the fulfillment of three major conditions. First, “the individual has to learn to accept his human role” and to realize that he is not an “exception” to the “shared [human] experience” (Overstreet 51). Second is “the development of a sense of function” (Overstreet 52), or, as Ehrenreich sees it, the “acceptance of adult sex roles” (17). In the 1950s, these would have been the roles of housewife (female) and breadwinner (male) (Ehrenreich 16). Overstreet elaborates: “...a woman is immature if she wants all the advantages of marriage but resents the work she has to do to keep a home in running order and to bring up a family. Similarly, a man is immature if he regards the support of a family as a kind of trap in which he, an unsuspecting male, has somehow been caught” (52). Overstreet argues that someone who is unable to “settle down—who remains a vocational drifter...are immature in their sense of function” (52). In the same vein as Overstreet, psychologist R.J. Havighurst outlined eight “developmental tasks of early adulthood” in 1953 (Ehrenreich 18). The fulfillment of these developmental tasks was a precondition to “mature adulthood” (Ehrenreich 18). This checklist, Ehrenreich argues, “was to be repeated in developmental psychology textbooks for nearly three decades” (18) and included the following: “(1) selecting a mate, (2) learning to live with a marriage partner, (3) starting a family, (4) rearing children, (5) managing a home, (6) getting started in an occupation, (7) taking

on civic responsibility, and (8) finding a congenial social group” (Ehrenreich 18). In other words, Ehrenreich contends, “maturity [was] contingent upon the number of adult developmental tasks successfully completed” (18).

Those who did not complete the expected developmental markers were considered immature and therefore abnormal. Although this was true for both men and women, the anxiety surrounding immaturity and its consequences was primarily gendered towards men, as their role in society in the postwar era was deemed more “crucial” than that of their female counterparts (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 153). Single, unmarried men over the age of thirty not only raised eyebrows in the postwar period, they were also pathologized as “perverts” or as possessing “severe emotional problems” (Ruitenbeek qtd. in Ehrenreich 14). As Ehrenreich observes, the psychiatric discourse of the era “developed a massive weight of theory establishing that marriage—and, within that, the breadwinner role—was the only normal state for the adult male” (15). Adult masculinity was synonymous with the breadwinner role, and thus its reverse logic meant that men who did not fulfill this role were “either not fully adult or not fully masculine” (Ehrenreich 20). Within psychological theories of male pathology, “immaturity shaded into infantilism,” which was understood to be symptomatic of an “unnatural fixation on the mother” (Ehrenreich 20). This reasoning culminated in “the diagnosis of homosexuality” (Ehrenreich 20). The themes of maternal over-attachment and homosexuality will be explored further below.

Just as the “sissified bachelor” was labeled as immature, so too was the rebellious individual labelled as such within psychological discourse (Ehrenreich 22). Male rebelliousness was problematic to mid-century psychiatrists because it possessed “a certain seductive

appeal” (Ehrenreich 23); something that was clearly evidenced by the popularity of the young “rebel males” in 1950s Hollywood. But if the rebel was immature, then the conformist was obviously the opposite. As Ehrenreich explains, maturity soon became “a professional code wor[d] for conformity” for mental health experts (17). Moreover, as maturity became synonymous with conformity, conformity was soon the “code word” for the ennui and “discontent” of the American male (Ehrenreich 30). In the 1950s, conformity emerged as a national preoccupation, with several popular magazines covering the issue, such as *Look*’s 1958 feature, “The American Male: Why Is He So Afraid to Be Different?” (Ehrenreich 30). Moreover, Robert Lindner attacked conformity in his popular book, *Must You Conform?* (1955) (Ehrenreich 30), where he criticized the “Mass Man” as a “mechanized, robotized caricature of humanity...a lost creature without separate identity in the herding collectivity, [and] a mindless integer of the pack...” (Lindner 23).

Conformity was doing more than “destroy[ing]...men’s souls” (Ehrenreich 31), however. It was also eroding their masculinity (Ehrenreich 31). The mantra of “adjustment” endorsed by psychologists and psychiatrists “was not the route to adult masculinity, but to emasculation” (Ehrenreich 32): “And I mean is it any wonder all men end up emasculated? Because that *is* what happens; that *is* what’s reflected in all this bleating about ‘adjustment’ and ‘security’ and ‘togetherness’....” laments Frank Wheeler to his wife in Richard Yates’s novel, *Revolutionary Road* (1961) (qtd. in Ehrenreich 32). These sentiments were echoed by sociologist David Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), which also conveyed the idea that conformity was more or less synonymous with emasculation (Ehrenreich 32). Reisman’s main thesis argued that contemporary society was characterized by a new personality type called “other-directed,” in

contrast to the “inner-directed” personality type of the industrial past. Whereas the “production-oriented” inner-directed society was populated by people who were “driven by inner ideals and values” and a sense of individuality, the other-directed society was consumer-oriented, and its inhabitants lacked strong individual values (Breines 602). As a result, the other-directed person constantly looked to others for direction as well as approval (Breines 602). In other words, the other-directed person was a conformist (Ehrenreich 33). Moreover, the emasculating aspects of the other-directed character type were unequivocally conveyed by its feminizing traits, such as “being attuned to others, worrying about their opinions and feelings, [and] being adaptable and avoiding conflict” (Breines 602-3). These “feminine” characteristics were interchangeable with those of the 1950s white-collar worker (Breines 603). The plight of the white-collar worker was captured in William H. Whyte Jr.’s *The Organization Man* (1956). In a similar vein to Reisman, Whyte discussed how workers of large corporate organizations were required to adopt a group mentality, cooperate with others, and suppress their own unique opinions and traits (Breines 602).

If conformity meant emasculation, then the larger fear looming over anxieties about conformity was the idea that American masculinity was under serious threat. This fear acquired a name in Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.’s 1958 article in *Esquire Magazine*, “The Crisis of American Masculinity,” as well as in a *Look* magazine series entitled “The Decline of the American Male,” published the same year (Cuordileone, “Politics” 522). The concerns voiced in these articles very much reflected those of the conformity critics, as the “recognizable refrain” of these pieces lamented that “American males had become the victims of a smothering, overpowering, suspiciously collectivist mass society...[one] that had smashed the once-autonomous male self,

elevated women to a position of power in the home, and doomed men to a slavish conformity...” (Cuordileone, “Politics” 522).

As Cuordileone (2000) argues, the “inevitable corollary” to this crisis in American masculinity was a “fear of homosexuality” (“Politics” 528). In order to fully explain how this fear materialized, however, it is important to return to the idea of maturity as a central theme of popular discourse in the 1950s. It is evident that maturity held a rather contradictory and conflicted status in the postwar era; while it was praised by psychological and psychiatric professionals as the ideal of normative adulthood, its near synonymy with conformity made it a subject of critical analysis and debate (Reisman and Whyte for example). However, when it came to homosexuality, even critics of conformity made exceptions to their strongly held ideologies. For example, while Lindner attacked modern conformity in *Must You Conform?* (1956), he nevertheless thought that conformity was imperative in terms of sexual orientation. Arguing that “homosexuality was a ‘negative’ form of nonconformity,” Lindner’s book ultimately reinforced the conformist ideology he was railing against (Cuordileone, “Politics” 530). In fact, homosexuality became the ultimate consequence of conformity. As Cuordileone argues, “the male homosexual becomes the logical, tragic culmination of the trend toward mass man: loss of self means loss of masculinity; man becomes effeminate, he becomes woman, ‘regressive,’ ‘immature,’ and finally, for Lindner, an impediment to the progress of mankind” (162). Examining the link between immature masculinity and homosexuality, Ehrenreich explains that in both psychiatric/psychological discourse and in popular culture, “the image of the irresponsible male blurred into the shadowy figure of the homosexual. Men who failed as breadwinners and husbands were ‘immature,’ while homosexuals were, in psychiatric judgment,

‘aspirants to perpetual adolescence’” (25). In fact, the connection between the immature, failed breadwinner and the homosexual became so prominent that a new category, called “pseudohomosexuality” emerged (Ehrenreich 25). The pseudohomosexual fell in the middle of the categories of the immature male and the homosexual to describe an individual who was not able to measure up to the ideal of masculine maturity “and had begun a subconscious slide toward a homosexual identity” (Ehrenreich 25). Psychoanalyst Lionel Ovesey argued that this “subconscious slide” of the pseudohomosexual could be demonstrated in an equation: “I am a failure = I am castrated = I am not a man = I am a woman = I am a homosexual” (qtd. in Ehrenreich 25).

It was homosexuality’s link to communism, however, which ultimately propelled it to the level of a nationwide homophobia. According to Elaine Tyler May (2008), all types of non-marital sexual behaviour “became a national obsession” in the postwar era (91). She contends that “[m]any high-level government officials, along with individuals in positions of power and influence in fields ranging from industry to medicine and from science to psychology believed wholeheartedly that there was a direct connection between communism and sexual depravity” (91). May explains that the logic behind this connection lay in the reasoning that “national strength depended upon the ability of strong, manly men to stand up against communist threats” (91). Thus, it was thought that those who were sexually deviant were more vulnerable to communist indoctrination (May 91). Concomitant with the “witch-hunt” for communists, the so-called Red Scare, there was a parallel search for homosexuals, the Lavender Scare. From 1950 to 1954, both of these campaigns were led by Senator Joseph McCarthy in what would come to be known as the ‘purge of the perverts’” (Van Den Oever 35). “If you want to be against McCarthy,

boys, you've got to be either a Communist or a cocksucker," McCarthy crudely remarked to reporters, solidifying the connection between communism and homosexuality (Cuordileone, "Politics" 521). As the figures of the communist and the homosexual became inextricably linked, homosexuals were viewed as "dangerous" individuals who were genuine threats to national security. For example, many believed that there was a "homosexual agenda" which would compromise and corrupt the country on both moral and political levels (Van Den Oever 35). The anxieties surrounding homosexuality fueled the witchhunt for "queers," which led to a 1950 Senate investigation and subsequent report, *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government* (May 91). The report declared that "those who engage in overt acts of sexual perversion lack the emotional stability of normal persons' and that engaging in these acts "weakens the moral fiber of the individual" (May 91). Thus, the report reinforced the prejudice that homosexuals were "vulnerable to extortion...and thus national security risks" (Cuordileone, "Politics" 533).

Although the targets of "gay baiting" were usually men, May argues that it was women who were most often the scapegoats of male sexual perversion. "As temptresses who seduced men into evil or as overprotective mothers guilty of 'Momism,' women were blamed for men's sexual transgressions that could lead them down the path to communism" (May 93). Before we get to momism, however, it is important to explore this connection between the masculinity crisis and anxieties pertaining to female power and sexuality. Wini Breines (1985) and other commentators argue that the so-called crisis of masculinity was firmly linked to anxieties about women's new-found independence and power (Breines 603; Cuordileone, *Manhood* 125; Van Den Oever 20). Women's entry into the labor force during the war set a new standard for female

independence, one that created much anxiety and unrest for the male-dominated government and industry, both of which felt that women's self-sufficiency was "unfeminine" and "undomestic" and that their proper place was in the home (Breines 603). Moreover, with economic independence also came sexual emancipation, and women's sexuality became a major focal point of concern in the midst of the red scare. Female sexuality and communism became deeply linked in popular culture; novels such as *Kiss Me Deadly* and *One Lonely Night* featured "foolish or evil women working for the communists [and] try[ing] to steal atomic secrets from hapless men who are unable to resist their seduction" (May 94). Thus, as May contends, the assuaging or "'taming' [of] fears in the atomic age" was firmly connected to the "taming [of] women" (105).

But if women were a major source of anxiety in the postwar era, it was the mother specifically who was the most socially and politically fraught figure. The mother occupied a rather complex position within American culture, as she was simultaneously "idealized and vilified" (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 132), "glorifi[ed] and feared" (Rogin 3). Reinforcing the contradictory status of mothers in the postwar period, Breines argues that "while women were continuously encouraged toward full-time motherhood, full-time mothers were criticized as domineering, too involved in their children's lives and too controlling" (601). The oppressive image of the mother turned into a discourse which came to be known as "Momism." The discourse gained legitimacy when sociologists and psychological professionals promoted the notion that a mother who is either too overbearing or too detached hinders "the social and psychosexual development of her son" leading to a variety of conditions, the worst of them being homosexuality (Van Den Oever 1). Roel Van Den Oever (2012) argues that Momism emerged in the postwar era as a result of three factors (20). First, there was the anxiety pertaining to gender

roles (Van Den Oever 20), specifically about the new-found independence of women and thus the postwar crusade to get her back into the home (as discussed above). Once in the home, Michael Rogin (1984) argues that women were given more power within the domestic sphere “in return for accepting their economic and political subordination” (6). However, when that power became too overbearing, mothers were turned into “menacing figures in the male imagination” (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 132). The second factor attributed to Momism is “Cold War paranoia” (Van Den Oever 20). As briefly stated above, weak, “effeminate” (read: homosexual) men were thought to be easy prey for communist infiltration, and the blame for their moral and sexual depravity was squarely placed on their over-affectionate, domineering ‘Moms.’ The last contributing factor, according to Van Den Oever, is “the popularization of a pragmatic and moralizing version of psychoanalysis in 1940s and 1950s America” (2). Thus, while Freud and his followers viewed psychoanalysis as a method “to come to terms with their condition,” American psychoanalysis argued that it was the parents’ responsibility to prevent these conditions, and that psychotherapy was primarily a “tool to create healthy and morally uplifted citizens who could contribute to the social welfare of the nation” (Van Den Oever 22). Van Den Oever argues that this “moralizing” aspect of American psychoanalysis is what makes it the third factor contributing to the emergence of Momism (22).

The word “Momism” was coined by Philip Wylie in his book, *Generation of Vipers* (1942), where he levels a scathing, misogynistic critique of mothers (or ‘Mom’ as he puts it) in contemporary society. Wylie argues that “‘Mom’ is an American creation” (184), one that is a product of a culture that reveres her unlike any other: “I cannot think, offhand, of any civilization except ours in which an entire division of living men has been used, during wartime...to spell out

the word ‘mom’ on a drill field, or to perform any equivalent act” (Wylie 184). Discussing the pervasiveness of “momworship” across the nation, Wylie asserts that “our land, subjectively mapped, would have more silver cords and apron strings crisscrossing it than railroads and telephone wires” (185). It is not long, however, before the misogyny at the heart of Wylie’s critique rears its ugly head, such as his argument that the inauguration of “Mom’s” right to vote led to moral and political corruption (189), or his comparison of domineering ‘Mom’ to Hitler (193). The main thrust of Wylie’s argument lies in his blaming of mothers for infantilizing their sons. He writes: “Her boy, having been ‘protected’ by her love, and carefully, even shudderingly, shielded from his logical development through his barbaric period, or childhood...is cushioned against any major step in his progress toward maturity” (195-6). Moreover, he argues that the too- close relationship between mother and son hinders the boy’s entry into a mature heterosexual relationship: “Mom steals from the generation of women behind her...that part of the boy’s personality which should have become the love of a female contemporary” (Wylie 196).

Despite the fact that Wiley lacked the credentials of a psychologist or psychiatrist, he was a very popular writer, and so his ideas about momism took off, and were subsequently given “intellectual legitimacy” by more reputable authors and mental health professionals (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 129). One such professional was Dr. David Levy, whose book, *Maternal Overprotection* (1943) argued that “excessive mothering was the cause of a host of adjustment problems for children” (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 129). Following suit, psychiatrist Edward Strecker published *Their Mother’s Sons* in 1946, which also examined the “American problem” of Momism. What distinguished Strecker’s book from the rest, however, was that it framed the

overbearing or overaffectionate mother as “a threat to national defense” (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 129). Strecker was a military psychiatrist during the war, and he examined soldiers “rejected at induction or discharged from the army for psychiatric reasons” (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 129). He argued that the reason why so many young men did not meet the induction requirements or were unable to handle military stress was due to “a growing immaturity in American life, and a corresponding ‘psychoneurosis’ among males” (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 129). Although Strecker believed that momism wasn’t the only reason for male immaturity, he argued that it did play a pivotal role in the infantilization of American men (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 130). In his book, Strecker argues that “Mom” can be differentiated from a mother through her failure “to prepare her offspring emotionally for living a productive adult life on an adult social plane” (30). He further contends that unlike a mother, “[a] mom does not untie the emotional apron strings—the Silver Cord—which binds her children to her” (30). Echoing Wylie’s language (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 130), Strecker argues that “momism is a product of a social system veering toward a matriarchy in which each individual mom plays only a small part” (30). Moreover, commenting on the unhealthy attachment style between Mom and her children, Strecker writes that all Moms “have one thing in common—the emotional satisfaction...[they] deriv[e] from keeping [their] children paddling about in a kind of psychological amniotic fluid...[in] the emotional maternal womb” (31).

Furthermore, in keeping with his idea of American society being enwombed by a matriarchy, he argues that there are a number of “mom surrogates” or “moms by proxy” who are just as detrimental to the development of youth “as a parental mom” (Strecker 95). The “surrogate” moms he lists are grandmothers, mother-in-laws, nurses, and teachers. The latter

two, according to Strecker, are usually “spinsters, emotionally cheated by life” (99). He further argues that “mom substitutes” go beyond “flesh and blood” to include a host of institutions and beliefs, from “sanatoriums” and “mental hospitals” to religion and even Nazism (“Nazism was...a mom surrogate with a swastika for a heart”) (Strecker 134). Thus, as Van Den Oever remarks, Strecker “remakes Momism into both a theoretical model and a root cause for everything that he finds reprehensible...in this world” (9). Although the core of Strecker’s critique is also deeply misogynistic, his idea of surrogate moms is helpful to my own analysis of the “maternal” female lover/love interest, who, one could argue, is also a surrogate mom of sorts.

Psychologist Erik Erikson also had opinions about “Mom,” ones that Cuordileone (2005) argues “could have given credence to Wylie’s depiction of the middle-aged mom as hopelessly batty and narcissistic” (*Manhood* 131). Erikson writes that “‘Mom’ is a woman in whose life cycle remnants of infantility join advanced senility to crowd out the middle range of mature womanhood, which thus becomes self-absorbed and stagnant” (Erikson qtd. in Cuordileone, *Manhood* 131). It is interesting that in Erikson’s analysis, mom is the one who is immature and not her offspring. In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan reacts against Erikson’s assessment of Mom, arguing that Momism is the result of the infantilizing effects of domesticity on women. In turn, she argues, the underdeveloped woman infantilizes her children (Cuordileone, *Manhood* 131).

If Mom was to blame for her immature sons, she was also readily compared to the soul-crushing organization. It was already believed that domineering women in general were responsible for creating the “organization man,” the emblem of 1950s conformity. The argument was that the controlling wife created an “oppressive” domestic atmosphere which drove men to

seek refuge in the “pleasures and fraternity of corporate life” (Moskin qtd. in Cuordileone, *Manhood* 126). In a 1958 article for *Look* magazine, J. Robert Moskin writes that “female dominance may, in fact, be one of several causes of the ‘organization man’ who is so deplored today” (qtd. in Cuordileone, *Manhood* 126). Cuordileone argues that Mom was especially linked to the organization in *Generation of Vipers*, where she came to emblemize the “pressure to conform” (*Manhood* 128). Cuordileone asserts that Wiley’s book “collapsed the organization, its deceptively benevolent social ethic, and mom’s controlling maternalism into a single ominous image” (128). Thus, Wiley writes: “Mom is organization-minded. Organizations, she has happily discovered, are intimidating to all men...They frighten politicians to sniveling servility and they terrify pastors...Mom has many such organizations, the real purpose of which is to compel an abject compliance of her environs to her personal desires” (190). Moreover, Wiley blames Mom for raising sons to be other-directed, organization men: “...there burned within him a dim ideal which had to do with proper behavior, getting along, and, especially, making his mark. Mom has already shaken him out of that notion of being a surveyor in the Andes...so there was nothing left to do, anyway, but to take a stock-job in the hairpin factory and try to work up to the vice presidency” (188).

The way in which Moms were implicated in the fear of a communist threat has already been briefly addressed above. However, it is worth delving into this subject further to truly grasp how momism and communist hysteria fed into one another. In his essay, “Kiss Me Deadly: Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies” (1984), Michael Rogin draws connections between fears of communist infiltration and anxieties pertaining to domineering motherhood. For Rogin, “Momism is the demonic version of domestic ideology. It uncovers the buried anxieties

over boundary invasion, loss of autonomy, and maternal power generated by domesticity” (6-7). Thus, linking the image of the powerful, manipulative ‘Mom’ promoted by Wiley to fears of communist infiltration, Cuordileone explains that akin to “the Communist ideological apparatus,” Mom was viewed as a figure that “entered the self, formed, cajoled, punished and manipulated it; like the party, she built around her image a ‘cult,’ one that demanded surrender of self to her hypnotic, sexually charged authority” (*Manhood* 133). Moreover, as alluded to above, it was also thought that this “excessive mothering” would produce weak, dependent children (“sissies”) who would grow up to be homosexuals and therefore pawns for communist subversion (May 4). Rogin explains that Cold War films played into this fear, as they suggested that “domestic ideology, far from protecting America against alien ideas, generated aliens from within its bosom” (13). Rogin argues that the film *My Son John* (1952) is exemplary in terms of demonstrating how Mom is blamed for communism (13). The film insinuates that John becomes a communist because of his mother’s “liberal ideas and sexual availability” (Rogin 14).

That the communist John was also coded in the film as a homosexual (Biskind) is not surprising, given that the era routinely conflated these two figures. But what does Mom have to do with it? As also addressed above, it was a widely held belief in the 1950s that homosexuals were partially a product of smothering, overbearing mothers. Cuordileone argues that while momism was certainly symptomatic of anxieties pertaining to gender roles and communist infiltration, “what primarily drove the preoccupation with momism” was “the fear of an epidemic of homosexuality” (133). This pervasive anxiety can be gleaned from the literature previously discussed. For example, Strecker contends that moms are primarily to blame for their son’s homosexuality: “A mom who gets too much personal satisfaction from her son’s deep attachment

to her as his ‘love object’...instead of freeing him gently but firmly and guiding him along the path of normal sexual development which ends in mature heterosexuality, often sows the seeds of latent or even overt homosexuality in her son” (131).

What is clear about the discourse of momism is how utterly contradictory it is. As Van Den Oever points out, Mom “is at once too hot and too cold, overaffectionate and rejecting, staying at home with the kids and away working, frigid and oversexed” (23). Echoing these sentiments, May also points to the Catch-22 in which mothers were trapped in the postwar era: “[m]others who neglected their children bred criminals; mothers who overindulged their sons turned them into passive, weak, and effeminate ‘perverts’ (93). Thus, mothers in the 1950s just couldn’t win.

Indeed, the cultural anxiety surrounding momism is epitomized in several postwar films; the overbearing mother and her weak, effete (read: homosexual) son became familiar cinematic tropes. As already discussed in the literature review, both Peter Biskind (1984) and Lucy Fischer (1995) point to the way in which the mama’s boy is pathologized as both a criminal and/or a homosexual in films such as *White Heat* (1949), *Strangers on a Train* (1951), and *My Son John*. Similarly, Van Den Oever discusses the perverse attachment between mother and son in *Suddenly Last Summer* (75). Nowhere, however, are the fears and anxieties of momism more perfectly expressed than in the films of Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock’s films are known for their representation of the “darker side of motherhood” (Wood 361), and Van Den Oever argues that it is more than coincidental that Hitchcock’s cinematic career in the United States was contemporaneous with the rise of Momism in the 1940s (107). Thus, films like “*Notorious* (1946), *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *North by Northwest* (1959) and *The Birds* (1963) are all

populated by overbearing mothers and queer sons” (Van Den Oever 107). Moreover, Van Den Oever points out that *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *Marnie* (1964) offer variations of this theme, with a “maternal older sister” in the former and a “queer daughter” in the latter. Interestingly, Uncle Charlie’s (Joseph Cotton) misogynistic contempt for older women in *Shadow of A Doubt* is eerily reminiscent of Philip Wylie’s. At the dinner table, Charlie’s tirade against parasitic, wealthy widows could have easily been a page out of Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers*: “You see them in the hotels, the best hotels, every day by the thousands—drinking the money, eating the money, losing the money at bridge...smelling of money. Proud of their jewellery but of nothing else. Horrible, faded, fat, greedy women.” Moreover, Madame Sebastian’s (Leopoldine Konstantin) severe possessiveness of her son (she tries to kill the woman who comes between them) in *Notorious* is an extreme example of the overbearing maternalism that both Wylie and Strecker warn against.

According to Van Den Oever, however, “the American cultural momism text *par excellence*” is *Psycho* (1960). The film demonstrates the way in which a “too-close bind between mother and son” not only leads to arrested development, but also to “psychotic behavior” (Van Den Oever 108-109). The psychiatrist in the film attempts to elucidate Norman’s psychosis in “Momism terms” (109), explaining that after Norman’s father died while he was young, he and his ““clinging, demanding”” mother ““lived as if there was no one else in the world”” (Van Den Oever 109). In keeping with the discourse of momism, the psychiatrist blames the domineering mother for her son’s crimes, arguing that Mrs. Bates’ perverse attachment to her son “supposedly resulted in his psychotic behavior” (Van Den Oever 109). Moreover, as a “sissy” mama’s boy, Norman is also coded as queer in the film, consistent with Alexander Doty’s contention that all

psychopaths in Hitchcock's oeuvre defy a "conventionally masculine heterosexual" identity (165).

The anxiety surrounding the mama's boy and his domineering mother was, at its core, an anxiety pertaining to immaturity. Consistent with the "structure of feeling" of the period, there were also a number of other Hollywood films which dealt with the themes of maturity and immaturity in the 1950s. For example, Douglas Sirk's *Magnificent Obsession* (1954) and *Written on the Wind* (1956) both feature immature male protagonists "who are wasting their lives in dissipation, avoiding the cultural imperatives to get married, have children, work, or take responsibility for their actions" (Lutz 196). In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), Brick Pollitt (Paul Newman) stubbornly hangs on to his adolescent past by killing himself slowly through alcoholism, refusing to fulfill the standards of maturity that are expected of him (Palmer and Bray 164). The film's critique of maturity, and by extension, conformity, lies in the figure of Gooper, Brick's "henpecked" older brother (Palmer and Bray 178), whose organization man-like eagerness to please and "do the right thing" is utterly objectionable to his father, Big Daddy. Despite the film's "endorsement of maturity" through Brick's ultimate acceptance of his adult responsibilities (Palmer and Bray 177), Big Daddy's decision to give his inheritance to the "perpetually adolescent" Brick over his responsible older brother reinforces the film's critique of maturity's "soul-destroying uxoriousness" (Palmer and Bray 178). These contrasting images of masculinity are also found in *Picnic* (1955), where the mature and sensible Alan is diametrically opposed to William Holden's wild and boy-like Hal (Pravadelli 137). Madge, the poor "local beauty queen" is supposed to marry Alan, but she is drawn to Hal, whom she finds "erotic and exciting" (Pravadelli 137).

Thus, according to Ehrenreich, “despite all the developmental psychology and high school ‘life adjustment’ texts, maturity just wasn’t sexy” (57). Against the prevailing discourse of maturity, then, emerged a countercultural force of rebellion encapsulated in “The Beat Generation of writers, the bebop subculture, rock ‘n’ rollers” and *Playboy* magazine, which “offer[ed] alternatives to the emptiness of male experience” (Lutz 194). Moreover, within this culture of dissent appeared a new kind of masculinity embodied in the “rebel male” actors of the day, whose youthful looks and “adolescent defiance” (Ehrenreich 57) had “an undeniably attractive quality” (Cohan 238). As discussed in the literature review, Cohan argues that the boyish allure of actors like Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, and James Dean lay in their “bisexual effect,” and thus their status as erotic objects who problematized the era’s conflation of gender and sexuality, i.e., the idea that masculinity was unequivocally heterosexual (244). Cohan explains that the term “boy” was used in postwar culture “to critique grown men who failed to live up to the culture’s standard of hegemonic masculinity” –that is, the breadwinner role (238). On the other hand, however, the figure of the boy “also personified the nation’s promise and potential,” especially given Kinsey’s discovery that males reach their sexual peak in their adolescence, and in the face of cold war anxiety and a perceived masculinity crisis (238). While a “boy” represented “the failure to achieve manhood,” he also epitomized “the price of a man’s maturity,” and thus the youth and freedom he would have to relinquish in becoming an adult (Cohan 239). The “new faces of masculinity” in 1950s Hollywood personified this dualism of not being a man yet possessing all the benefits of youth (Cohan 239).

Kristin Hatch argues that while Montgomery Clift and Marlon Brando’s rejection of a mature and conformist masculinity would influence generations of actors after them, “their

refusal to embrace middle-class masculinity was often interpreted as childish” (52). Thus, Stella Adler described Marlon Brando as “high-spirited and full of fun—perhaps a little reckless at times” as well as “very young” (qtd. in Cohan 243). Hatch further contends that Clift and Brando’s failure to embody adult, hegemonic masculinities onscreen also conveys their immaturity (52). In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, there is a clear Oedipal component to Stella and Stanley’s relationship (Hatch 57). Stanley’s unhealthy attachment to his wife “infantilizes him” (Hatch 57), and this is most pointedly captured in the iconic scene in which he calls out for her at the bottom of the stairs, like a child crying out for his mother (Hatch 57). When his wife finally comes to him, he drops to his knees and “buries his head in her midriff like a child seeking comfort and forgiveness” (Hatch 57). The mother-child dynamic between husband and wife is introduced to us in an earlier scene, when Stella hangs off of Stanley as he eats, smothering him with kisses and instructing him on how he should behave in front of her sister, Blanche (Vivian Leigh), who is extremely fragile. Moreover, Blanche reinforces Stanley’s immaturity by addressing and referring to him as a “boy” (Cohan 248). For example, when Stanley rudely rummages through her luggage to find the papers to prove the bankruptcy of her family’s estate, Blanche responds by saying, “what’s in the back of that little boy’s mind of yours?” Later, when Stella inquires about her sister’s interaction with her husband, Blanche explains that she “talked to [Stanley] like a little boy and flirted.” Indeed, as Cohan points out, Stanley’s boyishness is again emphasized upon “return[ing] from the garage the morning after his fight and reconciliation with Stella”; he is “dressed like a dead-end kid... his grinning face framed by a cap and streaked with grease” (247). Stella then assumes her usual motherly role by ordering Stanley to go and “wash up.”

James Naremore (1988) also comments on Brando's childish demeanor in *On the Waterfront* (1954), singling out a particular scene in which Brando and Eva Marie Saint walk through a children's playground. Brando sits on a swing and puts on Saint's glove, which she has accidentally dropped (193). Director Elia Kazan has remarked that this gesture is Brando's way of "holding" Saint without actually touching her (Naremore 193), but the gesture is also indicative of the character's childishness, reinforced by his pose on the swing (Naremore 195), and the fact that he is in a children's space. Further describing his "childlike nature" (Naremore 195) in *Waterfront*, Naremore writes: "His shy but streetwise remarks, the sway of his walk, the absent-minded look in his eye as he chews gum, the way he sprawls on a pile of gunnysacks and flips through pages of a girlie magazine—all these things function to establish him as a sort of child" (205). Naremore argues that Brando wavers between being childlike and violent in the film, a dynamic that is mirrored in the way in which Saint "alternately mothers him and shrinks away in fear" (206). Interestingly, this bipolarity also characterizes Stanley's behaviour, and, in turn, his relationship to Stella in *Streetcar*. Like Saint in *Waterfront*, Stella also mothers Stanley, and cowers in fear when he is violent towards her. This disturbing dynamic is exemplified in the iconic scene described above: Stella runs away to her upstairs neighbour's apartment to escape her husband's abuse only to return to him when he cries out for her like a wailing child. R. Barton Palmer and William Robert Bray (2009) describe Stella and Stanley's co-dependent relationship as possessing a "strong sense of interlocking pathologies, both violent jealousy and infantile need" (172).

The perversity of Stanley and Stella's mother-child dynamic is echoed through the character of Mitch (Karl Malden), who still lives with his mother and displays a strong

attachment to her. For example, during a poker game with Stanley and the boys, Mitch abruptly gets up and explains he has to go home to put his sick mother to bed. Later on, while out on a date with Blanche, Mitch tells Blanche that he has spoken about her to his mother and that she would like to see him settled, reinforcing the momist narrative that mothers are too enmeshed with their sons.¹¹ Even Mitch's interaction with Blanche mimics that of a boy boasting to his mother about his accomplishments: "Blanche, guess how much I weigh," he asks her excitedly, standing up from his chair. When she guesses incorrectly, he asks her to guess again, before proudly announcing, "I weigh 207 pounds, I'm 6 feet, 1 and 1/2 inches tall in my bare feet, without shoes on." Mitch sounds like a child looking for motherly praise. Indeed, Blanche plays the part of the adoring mother by responding with an exaggerated enthusiasm: "Oh, my goodness! It's awe-inspiring." Thus, it seems that Mitch's only reference for conversing with the opposite sex is his mother.

It is soon revealed that Blanche lost her husband to suicide years ago when they were very young. The trauma of her husband's death, of which she holds herself responsible, has stunted Blanche. Because her husband was, in her words, "just a boy" when he died, Blanche continues to have a proclivity towards adolescent boys well into her thirties, a transgression that gets her fired from her job as a schoolteacher. Her arrested development is also conveyed by her performance of youthful femininity (Krauss 2); stuck in the past, she is not able to accept that she is aging, so she pretends to be much younger than she actually is. Blanche's attraction towards adolescent males is demonstrated when she desperately seeks attention from a young man who is collecting money for the evening paper. Blanche tells the boy that she doesn't have any money,

¹¹ Palmer and Bray see Mitch as oppressed by "the psychological bondage of 'Momism'" (79).

so he turns away and says he will come back later. But Blanche stalls him by asking him for a light, and then for the time. When he walks towards the door, she stalls him again by poetically talking about the weather, before moving in closer to kiss him. Interestingly, there is also a strange mother-child dynamic that comes through in this scene. Like a concerned mother, Blanche asks the boy if he got caught in the rain, and then inquires about what flavour of soda he had at the drugstore. The perversity of Blanche's maternal, yet sexual desire for the boy, in combination with Mitch's momism-like attachment to his mother, makes the mother-child relationship between Stanley and Stella all the more unsettling.

However, while there is certainly anxiety surrounding Stanley and Stella's twisted relationship, it is difficult not to notice how this relationship is simultaneously romanticized and eroticized. This is accomplished primarily through Brando's sexy boyishness. For Cohan, Brando's body became a crucial component in his embodiment of 1950s "youthful male sexuality" (244). Brando is clearly the object of the gaze, reversing the Mulvian paradigm in a film that does not give us a "compensatory image of female beauty" (Hatch 58). Brando's to-be-looked-at-ness is firmly established in the scene where he meets Blanche for the first time. Here, his sweaty T-shirt clings to his chest, emphasizing his "muscular beauty" (Hatch 58). Aware that he is being looked at, Stanley then takes off his shirt and turns towards Blanche to display his perfectly sculpted bare chest in act of unashamed exhibitionism (Cohan 247). Moreover, in the iconic scene where he summons his wife back downstairs, Brando's wet, torn T-shirt further objectifies his body (Cohan), and the way in which Stella runs her hands down his exposed back with desire works to eroticize a dynamic, which, at its core, is toxically co-dependent. Cohan argues that Brando's disruptive sexuality and his status as an erotic object clearly disturbs the

collapse of sexuality into gender through his “bisexual effect” (Cohan 244). In other words, Brando both “acknowledges” and “solicits” the gaze through his eroticized body, “thereby jeopardizing the conventions by which a Hollywood film typically secures the heterosexuality of its leading man” (247). If Brando’s unequivocal sexuality queers his relationship with Stella, so too does their unorthodox partnership—one that incorporates both self-annihilating desire and a maternal-infantile dynamic.

Like Brando, Montgomery Clift also represents a radical departure from traditional, hegemonic masculinity. As cited by Cohan, Sidney Skolsky’s feature on Clift in the July 1957 issue of *Photoplay* highlights the actor’s difference from Hollywood’s classic leading men: “Clad in T-shirt and blue jeans, serious, moody, and individualist to the core, Montgomery Clift was a far cry from any of the previous screen-hero styles” (qtd. in Cohan 201). Echoing this assessment of Clift as different, Elisabetta Girelli (2014) writes that “together with his youth, ambiguous sexual persona, and stunning performances, Clift emerged as an immensely attractive yet unsettling figure in postwar Hollywood” (3). Thus, Clift embodies the dualism of fear and desire encapsulating male immaturity in the 1950s. Akin to Brando, Clift’s “ambiguous sexual persona” is partly attributed to the way in which his youthful image as “a boy who is not a man” (203) challenges the postwar era’s conflation of gender and sexuality, i.e., the belief that virility is contingent on heterosexuality (Cohan xiii). Thus, like Brando, Clift’s “persona exceeds the strict heterosexualization of male desire as active, aggressive, and in complete command of the gaze” through his status as an “eroticized boy” (Cohan 229, 261).

Further comparable to Brando is the understanding of Clift’s masculinity as immature and childish. Several critics have pointed to Clift’s immaturity and child-like demeanor both on and

off screen. For example, Kenneth Krauss (2014) argues that “in front of women, Clift’s characters, such as Steve in *The Search*, Danny in *The Big Lift* and George in *A Place in the Sun*, become childlike, boyish perhaps, harkening back to an earlier developmental stage...” (124). Commenting on Clift offscreen, director Elia Kazan described Clift’s sexuality as “that of a child waiting for his mother to put his arms around him” (McCann 62). Further remarking on Clift’s immaturity, Girelli writes that “Clift regularly displayed attitudes that were socially unacceptable for an adult; for example, he had a life-long dread of being alone at night and went to extreme lengths to avoid being in that situation. When still in his twenties, he regularly shared the matrimonial bed of his close friends Jeanne and Fred Green, driven by a neediness that was entirely nonsexual” (202). Moreover, a biographer of Clift’s describes the way in which director Joseph Mankiewicz was shocked at Clift’s childlike behaviour when he invited him over for dinner: “Mankiewicz was appalled at the sight of a grown man reaching for food on the plates of others, throwing it around, blurting things out to strangers, eating with his hands, and engaging in other acts of embarrassingly infantile behavior” (LaGuardia 182).

Clift’s childish behaviour in real life mirrors that of several characters he played in his films, and *A Place in the Sun* is especially notable. Hatch describes Clift’s character, George Eastman, as “an insecure and childlike man” (53) and Graham McCann (1993) argues that George is arrested in his development as a consequence of perpetually acceding to the demands of the women in his life; he is never able to develop his own sense of identity (52). Clift’s status as a “mama’s boy” (Hatch 56) is established when he is at a party in his rich relatives’ home. His uncle is a wealthy business owner who gave George a job working at his factory, and, upon giving George a promotion, invites him to one of his big parties. While at the party, George feels

like he doesn't fit in, so he retires to a room to play pool by himself. Angela Vickers (Elizabeth Taylor), a society girl, notices George when she walks by the room, intrigued by his lonerism and impressed by his skill at pool. They greet each other, and there is an instant mutual attraction. George's uncle then interrupts their encounter, and tells George that he should call his mother, a poor missionary, about his promotion. His exchange with his mother on the telephone, punctuated with several "yes mama, no mama" responses, makes it clear that he is a mama's boy, especially his promise to his mother that he will be a good son before he hangs up. Angela makes fun of George's childlike obedience, and then takes his hand to lead him to the dance floor. While they dance, an image of George's mother caressing the telephone is superimposed onscreen, as if to suggest that her specter is looming over him, reminding him to be a good boy. Unlike a fully developed individual, George has not fully separated from his mother to find his own identity. Angela will soon become the substitute for his mother, as his identity fuses with hers in an equally enmeshed relationship.¹² In a clever use of foreshadowing, the film draws a parallel between George's needy attachment to his mother and his soon-to-be mother substitute through this superimposition.¹³

Indeed, Angela's role as George's surrogate mother is established when George expresses his love for Angela and she responds "Tell mama all." Cohan points out that many critics cite this

¹² Cohan argues that George and Angela are intimately linked through their reflexive desire for one another, conveyed through director George Stevens' "repeated use of extremely large close-ups to structure the lovers' private encounters" (232). Similarly, Girelli contends that the love between George and Angela is primarily "a desire for mirrorlike self completion...emphasiz[ing] sameness and complicity" (87).

¹³ Hatch also draws a parallel between George's mother and the maternal Angela, asserting that "it is no accident that [George and Angela's] first meeting is interrupted by a phone call to his actual mother" (56).

line to demonstrate the way in which the film reflects Clift's star image "as a man in search of a mother," emphasizing his boyish persona (LaGuardia qtd. in Cohan 231).¹⁴ Hatch argues that this mother child-dynamic is conveyed when George and Angela are in her car: "he is hunched down so he appears smaller than she is. He rests his head on her shoulder and even falls asleep at her breast" (54). Angela also assumes the motherly role when she talks to George about spending his vacation with her at her family's summer home: "I'll cook you breakfast every morning and you can sleep late. I'll bring it to you," she says to him. It is Angela who assumes the active, dominant role in the relationship (Cohan 232; Hatch 54; Lawrence 75), leaving George to be the passive boy, and "object of spectacle" (Lawrence 75). Clift's role as the childish man to his maternal female lover would be repeated in *From Here to Eternity* (1953), where Prewitt's (Clift) attraction to Alma (Donna Reed) stems primarily from a desire for maternal comfort (Girelli 115). Even the fan discourse surrounding Clift emphasizes the maternal feelings that were often directed towards the star. In her book, *The Passion of Montgomery Clift* (2010), Amy Lawrence interviews her own mother about what attracted her to Clift when she was a teenager growing up in the 50s, and she responds, "He seemed so fragile. It brought out the mother in me...It was as if

¹⁴ Hatch also identifies Angela as a mother figure to George, arguing that George "seeks comfort like a child seeking comfort from his mother" (54). She further argues that the "Tell Mama all" line is conveying the idea that this "is a relationship in which [Angela] will assume a role of maternal dominance, [George] one of filial submission" (54). Moreover, Hatch asserts that the film ultimately reinforces cultural anxiety surrounding the mama's boy. She writes, "a man in the grip of Oedipal desire, trapped in an infantile masculinity and unable to assert his dominance, is understood as potentially perverse" (56). Although Hatch highlights the attractiveness of Clift's boyish masculinity in 1950s Hollywood, she does not see the way in which his son-like relationship to the maternal Angela appears equally attractive. Lawrence also comments upon Angela's motherly role in the film, arguing that "Angela knows that George has been trained to obey, having observed his telephone conversation with his mother" (76). "Later, as they melt into each other in a series of unforgettable close-ups," Lawrence continues, "[Angela] assumes the kind of authority she knows [George] responds to. 'Tell Mama. Tell Mama all'" (76).

he needed someone to take care of him” (55). Lawrence notes that Clift’s “sensitivity and vulnerability” are what many fans find most attractive about him (55).

Angela’s confidence and “luminous” beauty contrast sharply with George’s other love interest in the film, Alice Tripp (Shelley Winters), who appears “insecure and depressingly mousy” (Girelli 84). George meets Alice, a fellow factory worker, when he begins working for his uncle, and, despite a workplace ban on fraternizing with other employees, they begin dating. Jackie Byars (1991) sees Alice as embodying the cinematic stereotype of the “Woman Alone,” in other words, the “desperate, single, working woman” (101). Byars also explains that the “Woman Alone” is presumed to be “loose” and promiscuous by virtue of the fact she is independent and lives alone, away from her family (101). In contrast, Angela inhabits the stereotype of the “Nice Girl.” Living at home with her family, she is also presumed to be virginal (Byars 102). As Angela embodies the “virginal side of the ‘age-old dualism between...virgin and whore’” (Byars 102), it seems logical that she also takes up the role of the mother, the “Madonna,” in her non-sexual relationship with George. However, upon closer inspection, Alice is also a mother of sorts to George in the film, albeit one who is decidedly undesirable. Thus, while the film constructs Angela as the beautiful, desirable mother/lover, Alice is the ‘Mom’ out of Wiley’s *Generation of Vipers*—overbearing, parasitic, and stifling. The ‘momist’ side of Alice is most apparent when she calls George while he is at Angela’s family’s lake house and threatens to expose the truth—the fact that she is carrying George’s child. Alice thought that George was spending the weekend with his uncle’s family to advance his career, but she then finds a picture of George in the newspaper with Angela and her friends. Hurt and furious, she warns George that he better come and get her at the bus station in half an hour or she will come to where he is and expose their

relationship. Having no choice, George feigns to Angela and her family that his mother is sick, and informs them that he must leave immediately. It is interesting that George chooses this excuse, as it further reinforces Alice's connection to his own mother. Like his real mother, Alice is poor and working class, and plain. Furthermore, akin to his mother, Alice orders George to be a "good boy" by being accountable for his actions and doing the right thing. Thus, when George finally arrives at the bus station, Alice demands that they get married tomorrow, and refuses to leave the station until he agrees. Alice's domineering, 'mom'-like attitude is established earlier on, when George complains to her that she's always "needling," him, as if he is speaking to his own nagging mother. Moreover, in keeping with the misogynist literature on momism, Alice is figured as an overbearing woman who is stifling George and keeping him from realizing his full potential—that is, having the opportunity to transcend class barriers by marrying Angela.

While several scholars have argued that the George-Alice relationship has a "clear homosexual subtext"—as evidenced by the way in which it is shrouded in secrecy, inflected with guilt and "carried out in liminal spaces such as darkened rooms or cinema halls"—Girelli contends that George's relationship with Angela can also be read as queer (79). Girelli writes that "George's desire for Angela is effectively an act of social subversion, whose abnormality can be read in the 'excessive symbiosis' between the couple, and in their apparent lack of sexual activity" (84). This 'excessive symbiosis' that Girelli identifies can also be attributed to the mother-son dynamic between George and Angela, one that is clearly co-dependent and hinges on "mirrorlike self-completion" rather than sexual desire (Girelli 87).

As mentioned above, *The Country Girl* also illustrates the maternal lover, childish male dynamic through the relationship between alcoholic, has-been actor Frank Elgin (Bing Crosby)

and his wife. Denise Herd (1986) describes Frank as “a childlike alcoholic man...who is too weak, suicidal, and irresponsible to work without being propped up by his strong-willed wife” (231). Herd argues that alcoholism in 1950s melodrama is characterized by traits of “perpetual stagnation and failure” (238), an image that certainly captures Frank’s regressive and childish behaviour in the film. As Georgie Elgin, Frank’s wife, Grace Kelly is decidedly pared down for this role, with minimal makeup and matronly clothing, in contrast to her usual star image of elegance and glamour. Thus, she is codified in the film as more of a mother than a wife, something that Bernie Dodd (William Holden) alludes to when he goes to the Elgin residence looking for Frank. Bernie is the director of the play for which Frank just auditioned, and despite the fact that Frank is washed-up, Bernie believes in Frank and wants to take a chance on him by hiring him for the part. But Frank mysteriously disappeared after the audition, which leads Bernie to Mrs. Elgin. Commenting upon her appearance, Bernie tells Georgie that both her clothing and her hairstyle make her look older than she is: “You look like an old lady and you’re not,” he says. Continuing this sexist commentary, he remarks, “There’s two kinds of women: those that pay attention to themselves and those that don’t pay enough.” Clearly, Georgie falls into the latter category because she is too busy taking care of her infantile husband, something that Bernie is not yet aware of.

The mother-child dynamic between husband and wife is established when Frank finally returns home following his audition. Although Bernie offers Frank the part, Frank remains hesitant and ambivalent, which his wife attributes to his fear of responsibility. The ensuing conversation between Georgie and Frank mirrors that of one between a mother and child. Upset that Frank didn’t inform her about his audition, Georgie tells him, “You musn’t keep things from

me...you must tell me everything.” “I can’t do it, can I,” Frank responds with crippling self-doubt, referring to his taking on the lead role in the musical. “Of course you can...you’ve just got to try again and this seems a perfect opportunity,” Georgie says reassuringly. Then, like an anxious child, Frank responds: “If I do take it, Georgie, I’ll need you...every second, every step of the way.” Moreover, their mother-child-like relationship is explicitly referred to when, following a rehearsal, Bernie suggests that they all go out for coffee. Frank waits to accept the invitation, explaining to Bernie that his wife makes all the decisions in their family. When Bernie asks Georgie if this is true, she responds: “To the extent that Frank’s brought out the mother in me, yes.” Frank’s fear of responsibility and taking control stems from the trauma of his son’s death, for which he believes he is responsible: “I’ll never be able to go through with this show,” he laments to his wife. “I’ll mess it up, just like I’ve messed up everything else in my life.” Although Georgie’s maternal-like support is the reason why Frank is still functioning, Bernie believes Frank’s lies, blaming Georgie for her husband’s infantile weakness and passivity, and thus his ongoing failures (Byars 120). In an effort to mask his own insecurities, Frank projects his alcoholism and depression on to his wife, lying to Bernie that he has to let his wife control his life and career to give her a sense of purpose. Moreover, in an attempt to conceal his extreme dependence on his wife, Frank explains to Bernie that he had to pretend that he didn’t want the job so that it would be up to his wife to convince him, “like it was her idea and not mine,” he says.

Reinforcing Frank’s lies, Bernie calls Georgie “domineering,” and when Frank says that his wife wasn’t always that way, Bernie replies, “They all start out like Juliets and wind up like Lady Macbeths.” Outside of the theatre during a dress rehearsal, Georgie asks Bernie if the

understudy backstage can be moved to the audience after Frank expresses that the understudy's presence is making him feel insecure. But believing Frank's lies, Bernie thinks she is causing problems where there are none and asks that she doesn't interfere. "Frank is weak," Georgie explains. "He's a leaner...and I happen to be the one he leans on." Bernie, however, doesn't buy it, and chastises Georgie for being a domineering wife: "Did it ever occur to you that you, your strength, might be the very reason he is weak?" Soon after, responding to a theatre review that criticizes Frank's lack of authority in his role, Bernie cries, "You know why he lacks authority? because his wife has too much of it." Indeed, Bernie certainly invokes the misogynistic rhetoric of mid-century writers like Wiley and Strecker, who believed that women, and mothers in particular, were emasculating their husbands and sons through their oppressive dominance. Further consistent with the sociological literature of the period, the people-pleasing, self-denying traits that Frank displays adhere to what Riesman (1950) called "other-directed," and what Whyte (1956) referred to as the "organization man." Thus, Georgie explains to Bernie that "Frank doesn't like to make the slightest remark that might lose him people's regard or affection," and then later remarks that "he'll do or say anything to be liked by others." It is was this kind of conformist behaviour that sociologists like Whyte and Reisman held up as proof of a masculinity crisis in the 1950s. Therefore, it is not surprising that the film uses this rhetoric to point to Frank's emasculation.

Soon, Bernie realizes that Frank has been lying to him, and that Georgie's wifely (or motherly) devotion is actually the reason why Frank is able to work in the first place. He is so touched by the fact that she is "loyal and steadfast" to her husband, that he also realizes that he is in love with her. Thus, what was earlier thought as domineering and overbearing is now

recognized as loving and devoted, pointing to the contradictory status of the mother figure in the postwar era. At the end of the film, Georgie must choose between Bernie and her husband, and, despite her husband's warning that he can't promise he'll change, she decides to stay with him. As Byars argues, "the female-lead, long-suffering, but supportive, is tempted to leave her man but ultimately overcomes temptation, resisting because the solution for her as well as her man is the re-creation of a domestic order, a family" (118). The family that is created is not a traditional one, however. Georgie's loyalty to her husband is just as much a product of co-dependence as it is of love. In fact, love and co-dependence mean the same thing in this film. Georgie and Frank's mother-child-like relationship doesn't help either of them, but ultimately the film reinforces the idea that motherly love for one's husband is the best kind of love.

A Streetcar Named Desire, *A Place in the Sun*, and *The Country Girl* aptly demonstrate the way in which the mother-child-like romantic relationship is both feared and desired, in keeping with the contradictory postwar attitudes regarding both male immaturity and the mother figure. In *Streetcar*, while both Mitch and Blanche reinforce the pathology of the Kowalski's marriage, Stanley and Stella's eroticized relationship is simultaneously shown to be 'queerly' desirable. In *Sun*, Angela's status as the maternal lover to George reinforces the desirability of this kind of comforting romantic relationship, while Alice functions as a reminder of the way in which the mother figure can also be demanding and domineering, the kind of mother that many believed was responsible for raising weak mama's boys. Finally, *A Country Girl* also reveals the contradictory nature of the maternal lover-childish male dynamic, especially through the competing images of the good and bad mother projected on to Mrs. Elgin.

Chapter 2

“Fk Mature!”: The Boy-Man and His Vicissitudes in Comedy and Dramedy Films**

While the male-centered melodrama certainly possesses images of immature masculinity, they are also prevalent in the comedies of the postwar era. A comedic actor well-known for his childish characters is Jerry Lewis. “Lewis is one of the most crazily infantile of comedian stars, his performances built to a large extent out of childish mannerisms and incapacities,” argues Geoff King. “The speech of his characters lapses frequently into screeches, screams or incoherent and childlike stammering and burbling” (King qtd. in Balducci 81). Indeed, Lewis himself called his onscreen persona “the nine-year-old kid” (Balducci 81). Lewis’ “image as a bratty boy” is evoked in the 1955 remake of Billy Wilder’s *The Major and the Minor* (1942), *You’re Never Too Young* (1955). Fittingly, Lewis plays “a man masquerading as boy” in the film (Balducci 68). In that same year, Lewis played a young man, Eugene Fullstack, who is unable to let go of his childhood in *Artists and Models* (1955) (Balducci 80). His arrested development is manifested by his obsession with comic books as well as his strong attachment to his best friend since childhood, Rick Todd (Dean Martin) (Balducci 80). The idea of a grown man hanging on to the past through his undying “devot[ion]” (Balducci 80) to an adolescent friendship would also be explored in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), albeit the “pathology” of such an attachment was more emphasized. Lewis further perpetuated his immature persona in *The Ladies Man* (1961), where he is carried and spoon-fed by an older, matronly woman (Balducci 81, 83).

In *The Nutty Professor* (1963) Lewis reprises his childlike role playing Professor Julius Kelp—a diminutive, awkward young man with a squeaky, high-pitched voice. The film begins with one of Kelp’s science experiments gone awry—his experiment blows up and violently shakes

the walls of a neighbouring building in which the Dean is holding a meeting. His disruption of the meeting and thus the forward marching of time is a metaphor for the way in which Professor Kelp is fundamentally at odds with normative temporality; this is further highlighted when the Dean (somewhat rhetorically) asks Kelp how long he has been part of the science faculty at the university, and he replies with a muddled, meandering response. Although obviously an intelligent man, Professor Kelp's cluelessness regarding social norms engenders a childlike innocence about him that is reminiscent of earlier comedians, such as Lou Costello (Balducci 1). Moreover, his socially-awkward innocence is also what draws one of his students (turned love interest), Stella (Stella Stevens) to him. When he concocts an elixir to turn himself into the suave, pompous, hyper-masculinized Buddy Love, Stella laments that she wishes he would "unlock his inner man"; what she seems to be implying, however, is that she longs for Buddy to unlock his "inner child" and to be more like Professor Kelp. Thus, at the end of the film, Lewis reverts back to his nerdy, childish self and gets the girl. Films like *Billy Madison* (1995), *Tommy Boy* (1995) and *Stepbrothers* (2008) follow in the footsteps of this narrative model, whereby the immaturity and childlike naiveté of the male lead(s) is alluring to a female love interest. Moreover, Lewis's hyper-frenetic, yet childishly clumsy physical comedy would also be adopted by comedians such as Chris Farley (most memorably in his "fat guy in a little coat" sketch in *Tommy Boy*) and Will Ferrell. The immaturity that is central to Lewis's comedy and that of the other comedians that both preceded and came after him is a reminder that (as stated in the literature review) immaturity and comedy often go hand-in-hand (Balducci 1).

This chapter focuses on male immaturity, arrested development, and regression in comedy and dramedy films of the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s (except for one film, *Diner*, which

was released in 1982). The contemporary cinematic boy-man is a product of what Jenna Weiman (2014) calls the “mainstreaming of raunch culture,” which began with the “animal comed[ies]” of the 1970s and 80s, such as *Animal House* (1978) and *Porky’s* (1982) (Weiman 43). The animal comedy is characterized by both “misogynistic and homophobic humor as well as...gross-out excesses” (Weiman 43) all of which would be adopted by the boy-man comedies that emerged in the 1990s and after. The animal comedy, also known as the “teen sex comedy” (Tropiano 142) promoted the puerile and the immature; *Animal House*, for example, “was one of the earlier movies...to actually celebrate the ideas of debauchery, laziness and rejection of all things otherwise” (Arbeiter qtd. in Balducci 110). The “frat-boy high jinks” of *Animal House* (Cross 176) would be paid homage in 2003’s *Old School*, where a group of men in their thirties create their own college fraternity (Hymowitz 117).

Gary Cross argues that the cinematic trend of crude and puerile comedies gained momentum with the release of the Farrelly Brothers’ *Dumb and Dumber* in 1994 (173). The film’s excessively immature and gross-out humour made actor Jim Carrey “the king of childish vulgarity” (Cross 173), building on the juvenile persona he had already created with both *The Mask* (1994) and *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994), released that same year. Indeed, the “child-man binge” in Hollywood in the mid-to-late 1990s launched the careers of several male comedians in their twenties and thirties who would come to be collectively referred to as “The Frat Pack” (Hymowitz 117). The Frat Pack included actors “Will Ferrell, Ben Stiller, Vince Vaughan, Owen and Luke Wilson, Steve Carrell, and...Jack Black” (Hymowitz 117). *Bottle Rocket* and *The Cable Guy* were the first of the Frat Pack movies, released in 1996 (Hymowitz 117). Later films of the genre included *There’s Something About Mary* (1998), *Meet the Parents*

(2000), *Zoolander* (2001), *Anchorman* (2004) and *Dodgeball* (2004) (Hymowitz 117). These actors were united by their “talent for crude physical comedy, gleeful juvenility, and self-humiliation” (Hymowitz 117), which placed them in direct opposition to traditional notions of masculinity represented by actors like George Clooney and Brad Pitt (Hymowitz 117).

For Cross, the trend of “crude and potty-mouthed comedies” in Hollywood reached its culmination in the summer of 1999, when film critics took note of a shift in the cinematic landscape (172-73). Never before had there been so many movies capitalizing on vulgar and puerile comedy—and capitalizing on it they were, as these films experienced “amazing success” (Cross 173). Films such as *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*, *Big Daddy*, *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut*, *There’s Something About Mary*, and *American Pie* were all released that summer (Cross 173); what these films shared primarily was a gross-out factor that appealed to the single young male demographic (Hymowitz 117). As Cross writes, “Over and over, the bodily fluids usually deposited in the toilet were found in the mouths of the heroes (liquid feces taken for coffee or urine for beer)” (173).

Cross attributes the surge of man-child movies in the summer of 1999 to three major theories. Reinforcing the argument put forward by film critics at the time, Cross contends that these films could be seen as contemporary “incarnation[s]” of what comedy had been doing all along— that is, “mocking...authority” and laughing at the “pratfalls of the naive and incompetent” (175). Cross cites comedy duo Laurel and Hardy, and films such as *Blazing Saddles* (1974) and *Animal House* as “clear[ing] the way” for the comedies that emerged that summer of 1999 (176). The second explanation given by Cross is that these puerile comedies represented a new thrill for a generation that had grown up and therefore grown bored with the

“endless array” of sex and violence available to them on film and television (176). If “sexual titillation and graphic violence” was thrilling to teenagers and young adults in the 1980s, Cross argues, then toilet humour and other gross-out gags became the ultimate draw for this same demographic on the cusp of the twenty-first century (176). The third “hypothesis” Cross puts forward has to do with the emergence of a more permissible culture, one that he traces back to the renunciation of the Motion Picture Production Code and its replacement by the rating system in 1968 (Cross 177). The creation of the PG-13 rating in 1984 is especially indicative of “propriety’s collapse” (Cross 177). While a PG-13 film lacked explicit sexual content, it could allude to this content through highly “suggestive” scenes (Cross 178), meaning that children aged 13 and younger were now privy to themes and ideas once reserved for adult audiences only (Cross 178). It is no surprise then, that Cross further points out that it is the prevalence of a “childlike culture,” one where “adults have adopted the bathroom humor of the six-year-old” in which such crude and immature films were produced (178). In other words, “the movie-going audience” has become puerile itself (Cross 178). As stated in the literature review, the “culture of immaturity” that Cross writes about is a “structure of feeling” that is rooted in a desire to never grow up; the modern boy-man would much rather engage in fleeting excitement and childish indulgences than fulfill the markers of maturity expected of him to become an adult. Thus, these puerile comedies cater to this immature male audience, making boy-men the “tastemakers” of popular culture (Cross 6). Moreover, the popularity of these films points to the fact that our culture “find[s] boy-men appealing” (Cross 7).

The appeal of immature masculinity and the fear/desire dynamic surrounding it is at the crux of this project. Thus, while childish masculinity and the culture of immaturity is indeed

alluring, there is also a palpable fear projected by our culture about men (and women, but this will be discussed in the next chapter) stuck in a state of perpetual adolescence. The anxiety underpinning male immaturity bespeaks a cultural uneasiness about going against a culturally-sanctioned trajectory of maturity. Moreover, as emphasized in the previous chapter, the immature male has often been conflated with the homosexual male; thus, the fear of male immaturity is indicative of a larger, cultural homophobia. The homophobia underlying male immaturity will be examined in the bromance section of this chapter. Ironically, however, despite the anxiety surrounding the boy-man, he has, in the words of Cross, “become the norm rather than the exception” (2). Thus, the ubiquity of male immaturity has turned it into a facet of heteronormative culture and the status quo. In *Guyland* (2008), Michael Kimmel examines the potentially dark side of male immaturity in his discussion of what he calls the “Guy Code,” the ‘rules’ and norms by which young men conduct themselves within their homosocial peer groups. Not surprisingly, the Guy Code is replete with both misogynistic and homophobic practices, such as “treating women as objects of hormonal revenge and making ‘you’re so gay’ quips with [one’s] bros” (Hymowitz 16).

As already mentioned in the theoretical orientation section, Halberstam warns against viewing all forms of “extended adolescence” as politically resistant to the status quo (175). She reminds us that films like *Jackass* (2002), based on the reality television series of the same name, reinforce the normality of “young white men” living in a protracted state of adolescence and engaging in puerile behaviour (Halberstam 175). Furthermore, she argues, the prolonging of youth promoted by this immature frat-boy culture must be clearly distinguished from the kind of “stretched-out adolescence” practiced by “nonreproductive queer subcultural participants,” such

as those in lesbian subcultures, for example (175). Thus, while the former is often “accompanied by high degrees of misogyny and homophobia” (Halberstam 175), the latter encourages the development of community and “alternative life narratives” (Halberstam 175).

The fact that the culture of immaturity espoused by white “bro” culture is fundamentally inimical to queer politics makes it especially problematic for one to apply theories of queer temporality to films reflecting this culture. At the same time, however, not all of the films under study here represent the misogynistic and/or homophobic “jackass culture” that Halberstam refers to. Moreover, while (white) male immaturity has certainly become a facet of heteronormative culture, it is not unequivocally so; as discussed above, the idea of an adult male eschewing markers of maturity is still a source of cultural anxiety. As a case in point, nearly all of the comedy films discussed in this chapter end with the immature male being “rehabilitated” onto a trajectory of maturity; it is too risky, the films convey, for the male characters to live in their arrested states indefinitely.

As previously discussed in the methodology section, Michael DeAngelis (2014) applies theories of queer temporality to the bromance genre in his analysis of the 2007 film, *Superbad*. DeAngelis demonstrates how this theoretical lens can elucidate the homoerotic potentialities of a genre that ultimately privileges heteronormativity (215). DeAngelis’ discussion of the character Seth (Jonah Hill) is especially useful to this chapter, as he shows how Seth’s disinterest in following the normative temporal imperatives of “chronobiopolitical ‘straight time’” can be read as queer (221). He argues that Seth’s temporal experience includes characteristics of Lee Edelman’s theory of queer temporality (DeAngelis 222). “If Edelman’s version of queer involves a refusal to look toward the future as a site of redemption,” DeAngelis writes, “Seth

conceptualizes the future as a continuous present, as an extension of the ‘now’ that he is already experiencing—a future that lacks heteronormative goals and responsibilities...” (222). Following DeAngelis, this chapter will also use ideas of queer temporality in examining cinematic men who are arrested in their development, regressive, or otherwise immature. In the films to be discussed, queerness is not about sexual orientation per se, but is “a way of being and living in the world—one that is opposed to the principles of... ‘heteronormativity’” (DeAngelis 214). Similarly, and as stated in the theoretical orientation section, Halberstam imagines queerness as going beyond sexual identity to being “an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices” (*Queer Time* 1). For Edelman, queerness is about engaging in acts of jouissance that reject the heteronormative logic of futurity (25). The immature male characters discussed in this chapter participate in queer temporalities by way of their rejection of normative regimes of time—that is, the time of family and reproduction, but also “of labor and production” (Halberstam 10). Moreover, while these films demonstrate the desirability of living outside of the dominant temporal order, they also point to the fear and anxiety underpinning the idea of an extended adolescence; as Halberstam argues, lifestyles that do not subscribe to longevity and stability are not only labelled as immature, they are often pathologized as “dangerous” (*Queer Time* 5). Dangerous because they do not promise the predictability and security of “reproductive futurism” (Edelman 2). For Edelman, one must embrace this dangerousness; one must embrace the politics of negation at the heart of jouissance, and the death drive it elicits. It is only then that one can challenge the politics of heteronormativity (25). While the majority of the films examined here are far from reflecting the radical politics of Edelman’s “no future” polemic—many of them are Hollywood films, and all of them feature

white, heterosexual males—their representations of immaturity and arrested development provide opportunities for counter-hegemonic readings (Hall 1980), ones that reveal the ways in which these characters “queer” normative conceptions of not only temporality, but also masculinity.

***Diner*, “Bro Time,” and the Emergence of the Contemporary Bro-Ensemble Film**

This chapter begins with a film that I believe is the primary progenitor of what I call the “bro-ensemble film” – that is, a film that features a group of male friends (bros) who hang out together and engage in “seemingly meaningless banter” (Price 2), make jokes, and play juvenile pranks and games with each other. The film I am referring to is Barry Levinson’s *Diner* (1982). In his *Vanity Fair* article, “Much Ado About Nothing” (2012), S.L. Price discusses *Diner*’s enormous influence on popular culture, from *Seinfeld* to the man-child comedies of Judd Apatow. Price describes the film as a “pitch-perfect comedy about twenty-something men, their nocturnal ramblings in 1959 Baltimore, their confused stumble to adulthood” (1). For Price, what is so influential about the film is that it popularized the concept of having no real concept, the plot with no real plot. “*Diner* invented...nothing,” Price writes.

Or, to put it in quotes: Levinson invented the concept of ‘nothing’ that was popularized eight years later with the premiere of *Seinfeld*. In *Diner*...Levinson took the stuff that usually fills time between the car chase, the fiery kiss, the dramatic reveal—the seemingly meaningless banter...tossed about by men over drinks, behind the wheel, in front of a cooling plate of french fries—and made it central. (Price)

The “Guy talk” or “Diner talk” in the film “changed the way men interact with each other” in everything from film comedies to radio, argues Price (3). He specifically points out *Diner*’s

influence on the homosocial banter between John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) (3). Judd Apatow's work has also been clearly imprinted by the Levinson film, with several of his movies focusing on male bonding and the kind of dialogue that emerges within this environment (Price 3). Apatow himself has admitted that the scenes in his films featuring a group of guys hanging out and talking are "all at some level influenced by the dialogue style that Barry Levinson is the master at" (Price 3).

According to Price, "[t]he diner itself was a central cast member" (6). It functions in the film as a sacred homosocial space where the male friends are free from the anxieties and pressures of the external world. At one point in the film, a disillusioned Shrevie (Daniel Stern) complains to his soon-to-be-married friend, Eddie (Steve Guttenberg), that he and his wife have nothing to talk about. Eddie replies, "at least we got the diner," reassuring both his friend and himself that they'll always have a place to seek refuge from their married lives—like an adult version of a boy's treehouse. The homosocial space of the diner is an example of what Michael Kimmel refers to as "Guyland." For Kimmel, "Guyland...is both a stage of life, a liminal undefined time span between adolescence and adulthood that can often stretch for a decade or more, and a place, or, rather, a bunch of places where guys gather to be guys with each other, unhassled by the demands of parents, girlfriends, jobs, kids, and the other nuisances of adult life" (*Guyland* 4). The diner comes to represent that liminal space that Kimmel refers to. When the six friends enter the space of the diner, time seems to stop amidst their "bro" banter about everything from make-out music ("Sinatra or Mathis?") to the merits of being direct when you want to eat the other half of a friend's roast beef sandwich. It is as if the space of the diner has its

own kind of temporality—a temporality that allows men to just talk amongst themselves about the minutiae of life.

The way in which this temporality is inextricably linked to the homosocial space of the diner is reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, what he defines as the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed" (Bakhtin qtd. in Ganser et. al 2). For Bakhtin, the chronotope functions as "a spatiotemporal structure of meaning" (Sobchack 149) that connects both the "actual world as a source of representation and the world represented in the work" (Bakhtin qtd. in Sobchack 149). In this way, the chronotope constructs a feeling of "shared place" (Montgomery qtd. in Sobchack 149) between these two worlds. Moreover, chronotopes come to be both associated with and constitutive of certain genres (Sobchack 151). In her essay, "Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir" (1998), Vivian Sobchack suggests that the genre of film noir possesses its own unique chronotope, one that "includes the privileged spaces of wartime and postwar American culture transported and hyperbolized on the screen" (156). She argues that the spaces of "nightclubs, cocktail lounges, bars, anonymous hotel or motel rooms, boardinghouses, cheap roadhouses and diners" construct the chronotope of what she calls "lounge time" (156). For Sobchack, these spaces represent threats to the stability and "security of domestic space and time" (157). In contrast to the chronotope of the home, the spaces of noir are transitory, fragmented, and "impersonal," and the people who inhabit these spaces "embody and narrativize [these] very qualit[ies]" (Sobchack 158-9). Moreover, unlike "the cycles and rituals of family continuity and generation" (Sobchack 158), the temporality of lounge time "de-generates" through "repetitive patterns in which the past and future collapse" (Sobchack 161). Interestingly,

lounge time's opposition to the generational temporality of domestic space constructs it as a kind of queer time, in that its temporal structure does not follow the forward march of heteronormative or "straight" time.

As stated above, the space of the diner in Levinson's film possesses its own temporality structured by the homosocial bonding of the six male friends. Through their aimless banter, time seems arrested and inconsequential, much like the young men themselves, who appear to be fixed in a liminal state between adolescence and adulthood. Similar to Sobchack's "lounge time," the spatio-temporal relationship structuring *Diner* is what I would like to call "bro time," a chronotope that reflects the "temporalization" of male friends conversing and bonding with each other in homosocial spaces. The diner is the primary space in the film where bro time occurs, although it is also present in other spaces where the friends gather, such as in cars or movie theatres. While Sobchack's lounge time is characteristic of a specific historical context—that is, wartime and postwar America in the 1940s—bro time is not specific to any one time period, and in this way it does not function as an "ideological index" (Ganser et. al 2) of a specific historical context. For example, *Diner* takes place in Baltimore in 1959, but bro time is not indicative of this specific era; it is also present in other films and thus other eras where men hang out with each other and converse in a unique temporality that seems suspended or at least separate from the pressures of normative adulthood. For example, *Knocked Up* (2007) also features bro time in its depictions of homosocial bonding, taking place nearly fifty years after *Diner*. Although bro time is not limited to one particular genre, I believe it is especially characteristic of bromance and bro-ensemble films, where homosocial bonding and friendships are at the forefront of the narrative.

For Sobchack, leisure, coded as “lounge time” within film noir “is temporalized negatively as idle restlessness, as a lack of occupation, as a disturbing, ambiguous, and public display of unemployment” (158). In contrast, the leisure of bro time is indicative of freedom and fun; it is a utopic, homosocial time-space where men can be idle and aimless without consequence or judgement. For example, in *Knocked Up*, Ben (Seth Rogen) is unemployed, save for a website he and his roommates are working on. The guys spend most days hanging around—making bets and playing pranks on each other, as well as playing with the many toys (swords, light sabres, video games) they have at their disposal. Thus, bro time bespeaks the desire to extend one’s adolescence, the allure of being free from the responsibilities of adulthood.

The young men in *Diner* are certainly ambivalent about the prospect of growing up; they would rather revel in their extended adolescence for as long as possible. Fenwick (Kevin Bacon) is the most obviously immature character in the film. His adolescent, somewhat delinquent behaviour is apparent from the moment he is introduced onscreen, where he is maniacally smashing windows in the basement of a Christmas party. Fenwick is also an alcoholic, which largely contributes to his childish and destructive behaviour. Driving from the party to the diner, Fenwick decides to play a prank on his friends by turning over his car and lying on the ground, simulating a car accident. He even pours ketchup on himself to look like blood. “That’s really mature, Fenwick,” quips Shrevie’s wife, Beth (Ellen Barkin), clearly unamused by his little stunt. “Fuck mature!” Fenwicke replies defiantly, a motto that more or less encapsulates the entire film. Fenwicke’s immaturity becomes a more literal regression later on, when, in his inebriated state, he takes off his clothes and lies in a public nativity scene manger like baby Jesus, singing to himself. His friends eventually find him and try to get him to get up and dressed, but he refuses

to cooperate, vandalizing the nativity scene like a young delinquent. The ruckus eventually causes the police to be called, landing all four friends in jail.

Immaturity is not only limited to Fenwick, however. The other friends are also caught up in their own versions of an extended adolescence. For example, when Billy surprises Eddie by coming into town earlier than expected (he is Eddie's best man), he finds Eddie still asleep well into the afternoon (2:30 pm), like a teenager. He wakes his friend up and teasingly remarks, "Still the early riser, huh?" "Yeah, nothing changes," Eddie replies, with a knowing smirk. When Eddie stumbles downstairs, he sits down at the kitchen table and asks his mother, "what's for breakfast?" She tells him that "the kitchen is closed" and that if he wants to eat something he'll have to make it himself. "I don't have all day to wait on you," she says disapprovingly, fed up with his adolescent antics. Then, like an insolent child, he whines, "C'mon mom, don't give me that shit! A fried bologna sandwich would be good." His mother eventually acquiesces, but only because she wants him out of her hair. Billy, witnessing this interaction, remarks sarcastically, "a lot's changed around here." Then, in a clever transition, the film cuts to a close-up of *Little Women* (1949) playing on a television screen in the store where Shrevie works as a salesman. The character Jo laments, "I'm never going to get married, never, never," a fitting line in the context of the previous scene with Eddie. Thus, despite the fact that Eddie is getting married in a couple of days, he is not ready to give up his adolescent lifestyle. Boogie (Mickey Rourke) is also an "arrested" character of sorts, as evidenced by the several bets he makes with his friends, usually revolving around a woman. One that is particularly juvenile involves Boogie betting his friends that he can get an apparently "cold" girl "to touch [his] pecker on the first date." With his friends tagging along as witnesses, Boogie takes the girl to the movies and, unbeknownst to her,

manages to stick his penis through the bottom of the popcorn box so that she touches it by accident. The puerile, frat-boy humour of this scene pays homage to films like *Animal House* and *Porky's*, the latter of which was released just one year earlier than *Diner*, in 1981.

Trivia and fanboy obsessions are other elements of the film that point to the extended adolescence of the characters. For example, Shrevie's encyclopedic knowledge of music borders on obsessive-compulsive, evidenced especially by the extremely meticulous way in which he organizes his record collection—alphabetically, chronologically, and by genre. Shrevie's neuroticism surrounding his record collection is revealed in a scene in which his wife, Beth, mistakenly puts a James Brown record back under the Js instead of the Bs. Furthermore, she erroneously files the record under rock n' roll instead of R&B. "How could you do that?!" Shrevie asks her, flabbergasted, as if she has deeply betrayed him. He then becomes infuriated by the fact that his wife doesn't know who Charlie Parker is, let alone what genre of music he belongs to: "Jazz! Jazz!" he yells maniacally. "He was the greatest saxophone player that ever lived!" Unable to understand why he is so upset, Beth replies that "it's just music. It's not that big a deal." His wife's lack of understanding and appreciation of music is both frustrating and disheartening for Shrevie, who wishes that she would show interest in something that is so important to him. "Every one of my records means something," Shrevie tells his wife. "The label, producer, the year it was made, who was copying whose style, who was expanding on that. Don't you understand?" He then storms out of the room, leaving his wife teary-eyed and confused. Shrevie's privileging of his record collection over his wife and her feelings points to his emotional immaturity. Moreover, his fanboy fixation with music is a precursor to *High*

Fidelity (2000), which features a music-obsessed record store owner who is also clueless when it comes to relationships.¹⁵

Eddie is also a fanboy, but instead of being obsessed with music, he is obsessed with the Baltimore pro football team, the Colts. Eddie is so passionate about his football team that he stipulates that his fiancée must pass his test on Colts history if she wants to marry him. The test becomes an event in itself, as his friends gather and drink in Eddie's mother's basement, eagerly listening on outside the door of where the quiz is taking place. She ends up scoring 63 percent, just two points shy of Eddie's version of a passing grade. Eddie comes out of the room looking disappointed and declares, "the wedding is off." Eddie's fanaticism about the Colts reinforces his childishness established earlier, when he sleeps late into the afternoon and demands that his mother make him a sandwich. Trivia is also a focus in another scene, when Fenwicke sits in front of the TV watching a Jeopardy-type show and chuckles to himself in self-satisfaction when he is able to answer the questions better than the Ivy League university students on the program. The geeky obsession theme is further demonstrated by a minor character in the film "who compulsively recites lines from [The Sweet Smell of Success]" in lieu of talking (Price 1). The film's focus on young men's obsessions with pop culture goes hand-in-hand with its central theme of young men being arrested in their development; the fanboy obsessions of these characters are another way for them to hang on to their adolescence, to distract themselves from the responsibilities of their impending adulthood, to delay the inevitable. Thus, their adolescent

¹⁵ Price also draws a connection between *Diner* and *High Fidelity*, writing that "Hornby's subsequent books about a fan obsessed with Arsenal football (*Fever Pitch*) and another obsessed with pop music (*High Fidelity*)—two postmodern slackers who could easily have slid into a booth at the Fells point Diner—are only the most obvious branches of the movie's family tree" (1).

fixations are extensions of the “bro time” they experience at the diner—they allow them to escape the markers of maturity dictated by the forward march of time.

Even at the end of the film, however, bro time gets the final word, and rather literally, as the banter between the male friends continues offscreen, over the closing credits. But even before this, the film makes it clear that the homosocial space of male friendship is ultimately more important (or at least more desirable) than marriage or other romantic relationships. This is largely conveyed to us by the fact that the bride, the figure who is normally the center of attention at weddings, is never once on camera. Instead, during a wedding speech, the camera remains focused on the group of male friends, joyously laughing together. Unlike many other bro-ensemble films to come after it, *Diner* does not feel the need to show us a resolution in which the men come to accept their posts as mature adults. It chooses to revel in the ambiguity, in the liminal space between adolescence and adulthood, demonstrating the allure of not growing up.

Kicking and Screaming (1995) is like a modern, 1990s version of *Diner*. Similar to the Levinson film, Noah Baumbach’s movie centers on a group of male friends who are both anxious and ambivalent about moving on with their life after graduating from college. “What do I do, besides being a college major?,” declares Max (Chris Eigeman) to his friends at their college graduation party. “All my accomplishments are in the past.” In an essay on the film, Jonathan Rosenbaum (2006) writes that “the pain of paralysis comes through loud and clear,” (Rosenbaum), and his assessment could not be more accurate—all four friends are stuck in some way, unable to move forward to their next phase of life. The film’s theme of stagnation is explicitly referenced when Grover’s (Josh Hamilton) girlfriend, Jane (Olivia d’Abo), decides to

go to Prague on a scholarship instead of staying with him in Brooklyn as originally planned. Grover tries to convince her to stay, telling her that she'll be postponing the start of her writing career in the U.S., but she knows better, replying that she'll only be "postponing months of emotional paralysis," referring to their codependent relationship. "You're like a child sometimes," Jane laments to her boyfriend. "You're not interested in me unless I'm suffering with you." When Jane flies off to Prague, Grover begins sleeping with freshmen women as a way of both staying in and reliving the past. The other friends are also complicit in their own arrested development, such as Otis (Carlos Jacott), "who finds himself incapable of flying to grad school in Milwaukee, only one time zone away." Instead, he decides to move back in with his mother (Rosenbaum). "I hate readjusting my watch," complains Otis to Max and Grover while waiting for his flight at the airport, an apt metaphor for the self-imposed paralysis of all four friends.

Like *Diner*, the male friends in the film hang out together and banter about the minutiae of everyday life, such as the dilemma of sending back a beer with food in it when your waitress "seems a little irritable," or how to make one's job of driving a cheese truck sound impressive on a resume. Moreover, similar to *Diner*, they are fans of trivia, quizzing each other on topics ranging from movies to European capitals. Two women in the film even comment on separate occasions that the young men "talk alike" (Rosenbaum), taking note of their shared homosocial "language." Akin to Levinson's film, there are spaces in the film that are reserved for "bro time," such as Grover and Max's apartment, or the Penguin, the local campus bar. The strictly homosocial nature of these spaces is demonstrated when Skippy (Jason Wiles), asks Kate (Cara

Buono), Max's latest love interest,¹⁶ if she would mind leaving their table at the bar so that he can talk to his friends privately. Indeed, the enmeshment of the four friends is a point of contention for Miami (Parker Posey), Skipper's girlfriend, who sees the young men's close-knit relationship as dysfunctional. "You and your friends are all in love with each other and it makes me sick," she scoffs. Max insinuates that the friendship between the four of them has just become another "habit," something that they do because it feels comfortable and familiar. "We stay together out of fear, that's all we know," he says, his comment reflecting their collective arrested development.

Also consistent with *Diner*, *Kicking and Screaming* does not give us a clean resolution wherein the friends unequivocally "grow up" by the film's end. Although Otis finally gets up the courage to fly to Milwaukee for grad school, the fates of the rest of the group remain unclear. Grover, who has been ignoring the numerous calls and voicemails left by his long-distance girlfriend for months, decides at the last minute to buy a plane ticket to Prague to make things right with her. Just as the airline attendant is finalizing his flight, however, he turns ambivalent, telling himself that "there's always tomorrow." Similarly, Max does not seem to be in a rush to move forward either; his announcement that he'll be taking his teenaged girlfriend to prom consolidates his regressive slide towards adolescence. A character that particularly embodies the ethos of embracing a queer temporality is Chet (Eric Stoltz), "a long-term philosophy major and bartender who's remained on campus for ten years" (Rosenbaum). "Somehow I've experienced my time as a postponement of my life," he tells Grover in one of his philosophical musings

¹⁶ Max's decision to date Kate, a 17-year-old high school girl, is symptomatic of his emotional paralysis—he doesn't want to grow up. This aspect of the film is also shared with *Diner*, as Fenwicke also dates a high school girl, indicative of his arrested development.

behind the bar. “But eventually I just realized this is my life...I’m a student. That’s what I chose” (*Kicking and Screaming*). As Rosenbaum argues, Chet “accepts the identity of being a permanent student as something more than a default position” (DVD jacket). Instead of seeing his student lifestyle as a precursor to his adult life, he embraces this usually transitory stage as his primary occupation. “Some people need to have a real career, which is something I’ve never really understood...you know, why someone would want to be a vet or a lawyer,” continues Chet to Grover. Although he does mention he has a child, Chet’s decision to evade a normative trajectory in terms of career makes him a decidedly queer character, where queerness is defined as embracing “imaginative life schedules and eccentric economic practices” (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 1). Moreover, his decision to be a life-long student demonstrates a rejection of futurity, and thus a primary aspect of heteronormative ideology (Edelman).

As stated above, *Diner* is a proto-form of what I call the bro-ensemble film, of which *Kicking and Screaming* is also a part. The other two films of this genre to be discussed are *Knocked Up* and *The Hangover* (2009), both of which feature groups of male friends who hang out together in a state of extended adolescence. Hence, they engage in “seemingly meaningless banter,” play pranks on each other, and make juvenile jokes and bets, usually at the expense of someone in the group.

Knocked Up begins with a montage of homosocial fun: Ben and his roommates are riding on roller coasters, smoking pot, and fighting with pugil sticks. Amidst this adolescent amusement, the camera cuts to a blaring alarm clock, displaying the time of 7 am. Alison (Katherine Heigl) gets up for work. The comparative editing at work here sets up the central dichotomy of the film: Ben’s lack of discipline and direction (immaturity) is contrasted with

Hegel's responsible, and generally more mature, persona. Moreover, this establishing comparison between the two characters also points to a contrast in terms of temporality. While Ben and his roommates exist in a homosocial time-space that embraces having fun in the present and negating futurity ("bro time"), Alison follows the schedule of normative temporality ("straight time"), getting up and going to work each day, in the hopes of getting a promotion (future-oriented).¹⁷ This kind of comparative editing continues on throughout the film. For example, while Alison drives her nieces to school, Ben and his roommates concoct a bet to entertain themselves, involving one of the group not shaving his beard for an entire year. In another instance, Alison is fretting about her discovery of being pregnant, and meanwhile, back at Ben's bachelor pad, he is getting high wearing a Darth Vader helmet-bong.

The appeal of bro time over the responsibilities of adulthood is further demonstrated when Alison's sister, Debbie (Leslie Mann), suspects her husband is cheating on her, only to find that he is actually sneaking off to play fantasy football with his buddies. The scene is set up so that the viewer suspects that Debbie is about to walk in on her husband with another woman, but when she opens the door, her husband is sitting around with his friends in a baseball hat, indulging in an adolescent game. The way in which her husband's fantasy football pastime is

¹⁷ The (hetero)normative temporality structuring Alison's life reaches its apotheosis when she becomes pregnant, in that she is fulfilling the heterosexual imperative and the mandate of "reproductive futurism." However, this reading is complicated by the fact that her pregnancy wasn't planned, and was instead a result of a casual sexual experience.

initially framed as an extramarital affair, a secret, constructs homosocial bonding as both thrilling and illicit, an alluring escape from the pressures and responsibilities of family life.¹⁸

While the film presents staying in an extended adolescence as an appealing venture, however, it ultimately supports the idea of becoming a mature adult in a heterosexual relationship. This is conveyed when Ben and Pete (Paul Rudd) long for the comfort of domesticity when they have a bad trip on psychedelic mushrooms. Although they were initially excited to escape their partners and have a “guys weekend,” they grow sad in their mind-altered state and want to go home. Ben also realizes that he wants to change his ways and become a responsible partner and father. He begins to adopt the markers of mature adulthood—he gets a job, finds his own apartment, and begins reading baby and parenting books. He essentially “grows up” through the prospect of fatherhood and redeems himself from his slacker-like existence. Hannah Hamad argues that the “redemption” (Weiman 46) of the immature male in films like *Knocked Up* is often at the expense of his female love interest, who must suppress her own success and ambition (105). Thus, Jenna Weiman asserts that Alison “becomes a screen for the immensely powerful image of the fetus, whose development marks the terms of Ben’s maturation” (46). At the end of the film, therefore, the queer temporality of homosocial bro time

¹⁸ It is important to note that the pleasures of escape are only available to men in the film. Weiman argues that “[w]hile *Knocked Up* does make the desire to escape available to both sexes, it does not make the modes of escape equally available. For example, as the guys enjoy lap dances and hallucinogenic drugs in Vegas, Debbie and Alison are refused entry into a nightclub on the basis of being pregnant and ‘old as fuck’” (46). Later, as the two sisters cry on the curb of a sidewalk, Debbie laments that her youth is over. “I just want to dance,” she complains to her sister, implicitly acknowledging the fact that she is no longer allowed to have fun at her age. What she is really getting at, however, is the double standard at the heart of this film and other films like it: grown men are permitted to act younger than their years, but adult women “should know better.” Debbie extends this logic to the idea that female beauty is dependent on youth in our culture, while men are often said to look better as they age. “Fucking men,” Debbie rants. “I get worse looking and he gets better looking, and it’s so unfair.”

is shown to be merely transitory; a bump in the road on the trajectory towards “mature” heteronormativity. The “reproductive futurism” espoused by the film is reinforced by its “closing montage—a sappy collection of baby snapshots and footage from the cast and crew...marshal[ling] an excessive celebration of heteronormativity” (Weiman 45).

The Hangover (2009) would seem like the ultimate bro-ensemble film: four friends take off on a road trip to Vegas for their friend Doug’s bachelor party. Disaster ensues, however, after Alan (Zach Galifianakis) drugs the group’s drinks with rohypnol; they wake up the next morning to find evidence of a wild, debauchorous night, but they are unable to remember anything. To make matters worse, Doug is missing. As they retrace their steps to find Doug, they engage in a series of adolescent hijinks, including being used as targets for a taser workshop at the police station, finding a baby in the cupboard who happens to belong to a stripper whom Stu (Ed Helms) married the night before, and trying to return a tiger to its rightful owner. The wild quest that they embark on to find Doug and the homosocial bonding that follows is appropriate to the genre, as it works to halt or delay the matrimonial ceremony and thus the ongoing march of “reproductive futurity” (Modleski 136).

Balducci describes the film as a “drug-induced regression of four men during a bachelor party...The drug frees them of all the inhibitions that they have developed as adults” (128). While the men certainly engage in childish behaviour in their intoxicated state, the word regression is inaccurate, as the majority of them are already rather emotionally immature. For example, Phil (Bradley Cooper), seems to possess a lower level of emotional maturity than the high school students he teaches, “act[ing] smug and insincere” towards his pupils (Balducci 128) instead of being supportive and encouraging of them. Moreover, under the pretense of a field trip, he steals

money from his students so that he can have cash to spend in Vegas (Balducci 128). Alan, Doug's future brother-in-law, is also immature. Balducci describes him as a "namby-pamby man-child" who is "earnest and innocent," but who is also "dimwitted, helpless, and possibly insane" (128). The one character who appears mature in the film is Stu, a dentist with an extremely overbearing girlfriend. At one point in the film, his girlfriend even comments that she wishes his friends "were as mature as [him]." When Stu wakes up the next morning after the debauchorous night, however, he discovers that one of his teeth is missing, and that he has married a stripper (Jade) in a Vegas chapel; indeed, Stu had regressed to an impulsive adolescent while under the influence.

Although *The Hangover* revels in the escape from responsibility conducive to bro time, it ultimately reinforces the heterosexual sanction of marriage and thus heteronormative temporality with the celebration of Doug's wedding. Moreover, we discover that Phil is actually married with a child—a surprising turn of events, considering he acts like an unattached frat boy throughout the film. Stu, however, feels like he has turned a new leaf with his "liberating" experience in Vegas, and decides "he no longer wants his mean-spirited girlfriend" (Balducci 128). After he "tells her off" at the wedding, he introduces her to Allan, before inviting Allan to dance with him on the dance floor. This moment reinforces the idea that homosocial relationships are paramount in this film, rivaling heterosexual ones. Heteronormativity wins in the end, however, as Stu reunites with Jade and they begin dating. Thus, while the film presents bro time and the juvenile hijinks inherent to homosocial bonding as an attractive escape from the pressures and responsibilities of adulthood, it makes it clear that this escape can only be temporary, and that these boy-men must go back to their respective family lives and therefore back to the temporal order of

heteronormativity. The fear of staying single and therefore immature is demonstrated through the character of Allan, who is not only presented as childish, but also as feminized. For example, he carries around a “man purse” and likes the Jonas Brothers, a boy band popular with pre-teen girls. “He’s an odd guy,” Phil remarks to his friends about Allan, the word “odd” very much implying queer. Allan, then, serves as a cultural barometer for acceptable and unacceptable forms of immaturity. It is acceptable, the film is saying, for a bunch of guys (“bros”) to go to Vegas together and engage in juvenile antics, but to live outside of heteronormativity and its temporal imperatives permanently (like Allan does) is unacceptable.

Boy-Men in Bromance: *Wedding Crashers* and *I Love You, Man*

The underlying homophobia of *The Hangover* is not unique to this film; rather, it is a structuring component of nearly all the comedy films discussed in this chapter. It is especially prevalent in the bromance comedy, or “brom-com,” to which I will turn now. The fear of queer desire and lifestyles is central to the “bro” culture both portrayed in these films and to whom these films are aimed. As discussed in the previous chapter, male immaturity has been both historically and culturally linked to homosexuality. While male immaturity is now the “norm” as Cross points out, its connection to queerness looms over these comedy films as both a warning and a possibility. Thus, the potential for queer desire is always underpinning the homosocial relationship in the bromance comedy, but this possibility is never realized, as the male friends enter into their respective heterosexual relationships at the end of the film, marking their entrance into mature adulthood. In this sense, homosexuality serves as a warning, conveying the idea that to stay in the space of the homosocial too long is to veer into “queer” territory.

David Greven (2014) argues that akin to “the spate of late 1990s gross-out and sex-fueled teen comedies emblemized by *American Pie* and *Dude, Where’s My Car?*” bromances take as their subject white heterosexual manhood as it has been refashioned over recent decades to meet challenges from feminism and a newly visible gay culture” (*Scream’s Queer Killers*” 102). What he means by this is that the bromance films are symptomatic of “shifts in the national construction of gender in the past two decades” (“*Scream’s Queer Killers*” 102). Thus, these films focus on the “emotional lives” of the male characters, foregrounding their “masochistic suffering” (“*Scream’s Queer Killers*” 102). However, despite their apparent progressiveness, Greven argues that these bromance comedies display an “ambivalen[t]” attitude toward the male characters, one that is largely a product of anxieties pertaining to the “homoerotic” undertones of the central male friendship (102). Indeed, as mentioned in the literature review, the bromance film is rather conservative (San Filippo 183), as it ultimately promotes heteronormativity despite presenting homosocial relationships as more appealing (Forster 209). For DeAngelis, the homosocial relationships in the bromance function “primarily as plot complications whose anticipated resolutions serve to reinforce the integrity of the contractual commitments and obligations...between man and woman” (215-16). Moreover, as Greven points out, the potential for queer desire in these “bromantic” relationships must be constantly “defended” and deflected (105). For example, the tendency in these films for the male characters to defensively spout “You know how I know you’re gay” insults to each other. Connected to this is what Weiman refers to as “‘gay chicken’ – a contest of sorts in which straight men/boys engage in various degrees of homosexual activity until one of them expresses discomfort—across a number of media platforms” (47). Weiman asserts, however, that this juvenile game that heterosexual men play

with each other “does not automatically imply progress or understanding—hence the homophobic humour and routine degradation of token gay characters that still permeates the brom-com cycle” (47).

Despite the conservatism and homophobia of these films, however, DeAngelis asserts that the queer temporality structuring the male friendship in these films—that is, the way in which the homosocial relationships “relish an immersion in the present” (DeAngelis 227)—allow one to imagine their queer potentialities, and thus the possibility of queer desire (DeAngelis 217). Recalling the literature review, Modleski also presents an optimistic outlook on homosocial relationships in the bromance, arguing that unlike the romantic comedy, where queer desire is always “foreclose[d],” the bromance comedy does not deny the possibility of same-sex desire (127). The films to be discussed in this section are *Wedding Crashers* (2005) and *I Love You, Man* (2009), both of which are ultimately conservative, to varying degrees.

“The real enemy here is the institution of marriage,” declares divorce mediator Jeremy Grey (Vince Vaughn) to the warring couple in his office, in the opening scene of *Wedding Crashers*. Jeremy’s statement might as well be a mantra for him and his best friend and colleague, John Beckwith, with whom he crashes weddings every weekend to pick up women. In other words, while the institution of marriage is the enemy, the wedding reception is certainly not, as Jeremy and John revel in the “jouissance” of homosocial bonding and sexual escapades without the fear of commitment. In a line that would seem self-reflexive if this film had been released today—that is, amidst the over-saturation of childish men in popular culture—John asks Jeremy, following a slew of weddings and sexual exploits, “Do you think we’re being a little irresponsible?” Indeed, the men are being “irresponsible,” but that is part of the fun: as divorce

mediators they are not fooled by the mythology of marriage, and would rather have a good time like a “couple of young kids” (Jeremy’s words) than be tied down to a long-term relationship. Moreover, while bedding women is their ultimate goal, wedding crashing is also about (and, perhaps, more about) homosocial bonding and adhering to “the sacred rules of wedding crashing,” like a secret club that only they are a part. Jeremy speaks of wedding crashing as a “legacy” that they must keep alive, having been passed down the “sacred rules” from the original wedding crasher, Chazz Reinhold (Will Ferrell), whom he views as a “pioneer.” The language and behaviour surrounding wedding crashing evokes Kimmel’s notion of the “Guy Code,” discussed earlier—that is, the culturally-imposed norms that (young) men follow within their peer groups, norms that are often both misogynistic and homophobic. Thus, while the lifestyle of wedding crashing goes against a normative trajectory of mature adulthood, in that the temporality it espouses does not support reproductive futurism, its foundations in male chauvinism and misogyny (treating women as sexual conquests) greatly divorces it from being understood as a form of queer temporality.

Consistent with the bromance genre, *Wedding Crashers* is inherently homophobic. This is demonstrated especially with the son of Secretary Cleary (Christopher Walken), Todd (Keir O’Donnell)—a reclusive and eccentric teenage artist who is also queer. Todd’s caricature-like brooding intensity and teenage angst evoke Richard Dyer’s (2002) concept of “the sad young man,” a trans-medial stereotype which represents the homosexual male as perpetually melancholic (*Culture of Queers* 116). The homophobic tone is set during a family dinner at the Cleary estate, to which both John and Jeremy are invited under false pretenses (they pretend they are distant relatives of the family). The grandmother at the table mentions, in a moment of

senility, that her husband was the secretary of state for Franklin Roosevelt, whom she describes as “a doll.” “The wife though, Eleanor—big dyke! Huge dyke...Looked like a big lesbian mule,” she announces shamelessly. Soon after this, Jeremy remarks that Todd hasn’t touched any of his food. “I don’t eat meat or fish,” Todd replies, and then the grandmother interjects and blurts out that “he’s a homo,” and the table erupts into laughter. The way in which his family tries to maintain an image of propriety and normativity above all else angers Todd, who feels like the black sheep of the family. “Dad used to think I’d be a political liability...you know, in case he ever ran for President,” he declares at the table, bitterly. His father then corrects him, stating that “polling shows that a majority of the American people would ultimately empathize with our situation,” implying that he is only accepting of his son’s homosexuality because it would serve his political career. After his grandmother calls him a “homo” for a second time, Todd gets up abruptly from the dinner table and announces angrily that he is going to go to his room to paint “homo things.” The “sad young man” stereotype that Todd inhabits connects to Sara Ahmed’s contention that

[b]ecoming queer is narrated as giving up on happiness, as deviating from its points.

We know too well the figure of the ‘unhappy queer’...the queer life is already constructed as the unhappy life, as a life without the ‘things’ that make you happy, or as a life that is depressed because it lacks certain things: ‘a husband, children.’ (165)

Thus, Todd serves as a reminder in the film of what one would become if they were to “deviate” from the trajectory of heteronormativity permanently—that is, according to the film, one would lead a sad and depraved life. Reinforcing the film’s blatant homophobia, the film also constructs Todd’s homosexuality as predatory and pathological, evidenced by the scene in which he crawls

into Jeremy's bed while he is sleeping and insists that they "had a moment at the dinner table." Jeremy states firmly that they did not, but Todd is adamant, and shows Jeremy a painting he made for him, depicting Jeremy as a naked forest nymph. Terrified, Jeremy then hears somebody outside of the door, and demands that Todd hide. "Get in the closet!" he yells at him repeatedly, his words knowingly referring to the metaphor of the closet. While the scene's primary objective is for the audience to laugh at Jeremy's victimization at the hands of Todd's delusional desire, its other purpose is to convey the idea that homosexuality should be feared and therefore hidden; a message that is certainly not lost in the film's repression and deflection of the homoeroticism between the two "bromantic" leads.

Jeremy becomes "feminized" through his repeated woundings and beatings: first he is injured in a touch football game, then he is gagged and restrained against his will by his love interest, Gloria (Isla Fisher), (the youngest daughter of Secretary Cleary), and finally (while still tied to the bed), he is subjected to Todd's sexual advances. When he comes downstairs the next morning, he tells John in so many words that he was taken advantage of the night before, his divulgence meant to be comical on the basis that he is a man and not a woman. John responds to him supportively, encouraging him to talk about it and that he "want[s] to listen." Jeremy declines his support, however, and proceeds to eat his breakfast alone. John then tells him that he loves him, and Jeremy mirrors these words, reinforcing the homoerotic undertones of their relationship.

Predictably, however, both men relinquish their playboy ways as well as the exclusivity of their bromance by settling down with a woman by the end of the film. "It was childish and juvenile," John admits to his love interest, Claire (Rachel McAdams), referring to his wedding

crashing pastime. The juvenility of such a pastime is further solidified when the original wedding crasher, Chazz, is revealed to be a spoiled boy-man who still lives with his mother at forty. Indeed, like Todd, Chazz serves as a warning in the film of what one becomes if they do not engage in the ideology of reproductive futurity and thus enter into a committed, heterosexual relationship. Akin to homosexuality, male immaturity is also constructed as both “pathological and hazardous” in the film (Weiman 43). The film’s focus on reproductive futurism is most strongly conveyed when Secretary Cleary expresses his enthusiasm about his daughter, Claire, marrying her boyfriend, Sack (Bradley Cooper): “Two of the great American families, the Clearys and the Lodges, will finally unite” he announces, toasting to the idea of carrying on a lineage of American wealth (and whiteness) only made possible by fulfilling the ultimate heterosexual imperative—reproduction. Thus, although *Wedding Crashers* is not an official “bromance” film, as it predates the coining of this term, its conservatism is surely in keeping with the genre, as we shall see in an analysis of the next film, *I Love You, Man*.

According to Weiman, what distinguishes *I Love You, Man* from other bromance comedies is that “the narrative actually posits bromance as a marker of the central character’s mature masculinity” (48). Peter (Paul Rudd) is presented “as insufficiently masculine” not only because he displays an unusual level of excitement about his upcoming nuptials for a man (Weiman 48), but also because he has no male friends to speak of (“his best friend is his mother,” laments his fiancée to her friends). Thus, in an effort to acquire a best man for his wedding as well as “butch up his reputation with his fiancée’s friends, one of whom he overhears saying ‘a guy without friends can be really clingy’ (the most unattractive of stereotypically female traits),” he embarks on a quest to find a male buddy (Forster 194).

Peter meets Sidney (Jason Segel) at an open house he is hosting for a large property he is trying to sell, and they immediately hit it off. Sidney is the opposite of Peter—he is cool, laid-back, is socially astute (in contrast to Peter’s social awkwardness), and lives in the Venice neighbourhood of Los Angeles—a mecca for artists, hipsters, and other unconventional types. Moreover, Sidney’s slacker-like wardrobe and lifestyle make him a twenty-first century version of “The Dude” in *The Big Lebowski* (1998), another notable cinematic boy-man. Sidney is presented as more “manly” than Peter, as evidenced by the various *Iron John*-like tips he gives Peter to embrace his primal masculinity, such as eating his fish tacos with his hands (“we’re barbarians after all..[we’re] men”) or letting out manly bellows (“I’m a man, Peter. I’ve got an ocean of testosterone running through my veins...the truth is, we’re animals. Sometimes you gotta let it out. Try it”). Moreover, Sidney introduces Peter to his “man cave,” the garage-turned-strictly-homosocial space in which he houses guitars, beer, and a “jerking off” station. The man cave becomes a sacred homosocial space for the friends, who bond over their shared love of the rock band, Rush, playing their music during several jam sessions. Indeed, the man cave is the space of bro-time in the film, where the men can just be themselves and let loose, away from the expectations and pressures of adulthood and “chrononormativity.”

Although the nature of Sidney and Peter’s relationship is strictly platonic, Peter Forster (2014) argues that “[t]he film glibly conflates the notions of making a friend and finding a lover or getting laid” (Forster 194). Thus, Peter calls Sydney to ask him out on a “‘man date,’” and his palpable nervousness, both before and during their phone conversation, makes it seem as if he is talking to a romantic interest (Forster 194). The homoeroticism between the two men reaches its pinnacle at the Rush concert, where they sing aloud together and perform exaggerated, air-guitar-

like actions with each other, some of them being rather suggestive. Their bromance is made even more queer in this moment because Peter's fiancée has tagged along to the concert, but Peter does not pay her any attention. Forster argues that it is here, at the Rush concert, that [t]he homosocial/heteroromantic competition that has been simmering comes to a boil" (205). Zooey confronts Peter and tells him that she's "totally weirded out by what's going on between [him and Sydney]" and that she feels "like [she doesn't] even exist" (Forster 205). The way in which Zooey now sees Sydney as a threat to her relationship with Peter underlines the film's anxiety surrounding close homosocial relationships, an aspect of male immaturity. The threat of Sydney to the heterosexual relationship becomes a reality when Zooey and Peter get into a fight over Peter lending Sydney a large sum of money. Zooey storms out of their house and goes to stay with one of her girlfriends. Distraught, Peter tells Sydney that they can no longer be friends. "I think you're threatened by what Zooey and I have because you're afraid we won't be able to hang out every night," Peter says to Sydney spitefully. When Sydney retorts that he has "a ton of friends," Peter reminds him that these friends of his "are all moving on with their lives." "They're in relationships, they have kids. They're growing up!" Peter tells him smugly, naming the key markers of heteronormative maturity as well as shaming his friend's bachelor (boy-man) lifestyle.

Near the end of the film, however, the two friends reconcile when Zooey invites Sydney to their wedding, unbeknownst to Peter. Sydney arrives on a moped, interrupting the wedding ceremony, and, explicitly referring to the film's title, the two men declare variations of "I love you, man" to each other. The homoeroticism of this "bromantic" exchange is extinguished, however, as Peter turns to his soon-to-be wife and proclaims excitedly, "I so want to marry you."

Thus, the film ultimately reinforces Weiman's contention that bromance is used "as an ancillary to heterosexual marriage, which remains the official stamp of adulthood" (48). Moreover, commenting on the film's endorsement of heteronormative temporality, DeAngelis argues that *I Love You, Man* adhere[s] to the plot structures of 'marriage time' and its promise of the stable and heteronormatively grounded relationship" (216).

It is also worth mentioning the way in which women are ultimately "disempowered" in the bromance (Forster 207). According to Forster, women are "essential" to the bromance because of the way in which they function as "institutionalized object[s] of normative male desire," allowing the men to engage in homosocial closeness "while at the same time providing them the assurance (or the loophole) that they do not feel any desire for the same sex in general and for each other in particular" (208). Women in the bromance comedy, therefore, are not much more than safeguards of heterosexuality, often appearing as "vacant" (Weiman 48) and one-dimensional. "In the afterbirth of *Knocked Up*," Weiman argues, "women continue to find themselves shoved to the wayside, reduced to empty shells, or forced into excessively maternal roles while bromance flourishes" (47). The idea of the woman in the brom-com parenting her husband or partner is demonstrated in films such as *Knocked Up* and *Juno* (2007). For example, in *Juno*, Vanessa (Jennifer Garner) must "mother" her husband, Mark (Jason Bateman), who is still stuck in his adolescent dream of being a rockstar (Balducci 152). And, of course, the mothering of the boy-man does not place the heroine in a favourable light. In *Hall Pass* (2011) for example, Balducci argues that "stern-faced wives habitually admonish their husbands as if these men are feeble-minded children" (153). What he does not mention, however, is how the wives in this film are also made to look like unattractive drags who have no fantasies or desires

of their own. As much as the bromance imagines an alternative, homosocial temporality removed from heteronormativity, the homophobia and misogyny at its core reinforces its stalwart conservatism.

Basement Boys (or, Boy-Men Who Still Live with Their Parents/Other Family Members)

Continuing on with the examination of male immaturity and its vicissitudes, this next section focuses on cinematic men who embody the figure of what Cross refers to as the “basement boy.” The basement boy refers to a man who still lives with his parents, usually in their basement, where he reaps all the benefits of living at home while still maintaining independence with his own apartment-like space: “These young men find not only free lodging, meals, and security at home,” argues Cross, “but also the freedom to come and go at will, and, in the privacy of their converted subterranean lairs where no one will tell them to make their beds, to play endlessly on their Playstation consoles” (5). While not all of the boy-men discussed in this section live in the basement literally, they are “basement boys” by virtue of the fact that they still live with their parents or another family member well beyond their adolescent years. Moreover, they are all shown to be arrested in their development, whether that be economically, socially and/or emotionally.

In *Billy Madison* (1995), dimwitted 28-year-old Billy (Adam Sandler) still lives at home (albeit in his millionaire father’s mansion) and spends his days drinking and lounging by the

pool.¹⁹ Billy dreams of taking over his father's Fortune 500 company, but first he must prove himself worthy of such an endeavor by repeating grades one through twelve. For Aaron Taylor (2013), Sandler represents a different breed of immaturity compared to other cinematic boy-men. "While his contemporary cronies are reluctant to leave the frat house," Taylor argues, "Sandler has yet to discover the world outside kindergarten" (31). This contention is demonstrated most literally in *Billy Madison*, as Billy's social and emotional intelligence appears to be on par with his elementary school classmates. For example, in one scene, Billy plays with his shampoo and conditioner bottles in the bath, making them talk to each other in a juvenile game of personification. Indeed, Taylor contends that "Sandler's physiognomy and comic performativity evoke anxious masculinity that is not merely juvenile but instead is positively prepubescent" (24). For instance, in another scene, Billy and his third-grade classmate prank call their teacher to find out if she has a boyfriend. Interestingly, this same teacher starts to fall for Billy because of his sensitive, child-like nature. Hence, when another classmate of Billy's pees himself on a field trip, hiding in humiliation, Billy decides to wet the crotch of his pants with water, declaring "peeing yourself is cool" before the young boy can be subject to ridicule and bullying. The teacher witnesses this act of kindness and becomes even further enamoured with Billy and his childish ways. As already stated in the literature review, Taylor argues that the heroine of the 1930s screwball comedy is attracted to her male love interest "because of, not in

¹⁹ Another "basement boy" film released in 1995 is *Mallrats*. Brody (Jason Lee) still lives at home, much to the dismay of his girlfriend, Rene (Shannon Doherty), who has to sneak in and out of his bedroom window like a teenager. Brody, however, is more concerned about playing his video games than with Rene's feelings. Fed up with Brody's lack of direction and ambition, Rene breaks up with him, leaving him with a "laundry list of [her] complaints." Brody's best friend, T.S. (Jeremy London), also gets dumped by his girlfriend with the charge of arrested development, so the two of them commiserate by heading to the mall—a place where they can wander aimlessly without judgement.

spite of, his boyishness” (42). This convention is mirrored here and in another one of Sandler’s films, *Punch Drunk Love*, where, as Taylor argues, Sandler’s female love interest is drawn to his “downtrodden boyishness” (42).

Billy’s juvenility is diametrically opposed to the antagonist of the film, Eric Gordon (Bradley Whitford), a scheming and mean-spirited “suit” who is in line to take over the company if Billy fails to prove himself worthy. Thus, in *Billy Madison*, adults are the enemy—they are too caught up with getting ahead that they have forgotten how to be decent human beings. For Taylor, Sandler represents the dichotomy of fear and anxiety encompassing the figure of the child. “Sandler’s overgrown babies make transparent our opposing expectations of children: our yearning for and fear of their irresponsibility, their effortless freedom” (32). As stated in the introduction, the fear/desire dynamic surrounding the figure of the child (and by extension, Sandler) that Taylor identifies is at the center of this project—namely, that male immaturity in our culture is also situated ambivalently between anxiety and desire, or admiration.

In another Sandler film, *The Wedding Singer* (1998), Robbie’s (Adam Sandler) fiancée leaves him at the altar because she realizes she doesn’t “want to spend the rest of her life with a wedding singer who lives in his sister’s basement.” In this film, Sandler is literally a basement boy; however, while he may be “arrested” according to normative markers of maturity (such as having one’s own place by a certain age), he seems to be emotionally mature. For example, during one of his wedding gigs, he manages to stop a very inebriated brother of the groom from sabotaging the reception. Moreover, he helps an elderly neighbour prepare a song for her 50th wedding anniversary pro bono (she pays for his lessons in meatballs). At the same time, Sandler’s usual “infantile neurotics” are still present, displayed prominently in a scene in which

he plays one of his songs for Julia (Drew Barrymore) (Taylor 22); he explains to her that he wrote the first part of the song when he was with his fiancée and very much in love, and the latter half of the song after she left him at the altar. As Taylor elucidates, “he moves from a halting, cutesy falsetto during the chugging verses to a shrieking, feedback-laden chorus of ‘SOMEBODY KILL ME PLEEEASE!’” (22). Thus, the bipolarity of the song mirrors the bipolarity typical of Sandler’s characters (Taylor 22). Taylor argues that “Sandler’s own performance style can be characterized by turn-on-a-dime alternations between passive taciturnity and eruptions of pedomorphic aggression” (22).

The thematic crux of the film centers on the conflict between material wealth as a societal marker of maturity versus the romanticism of the idea that being a kind and loving human being—that is, emotionally mature—is ultimately what is most important. At one point in the film, Julia’s superficial friend, Holly (Christine Taylor) asks Robbie, “You know why [Julia’s] marrying [Glen], don’t you?” To which he replies, “The money thing? Security, nice house? I guess that’s important to some people.” Then, with a look of shock on her face, Holly retorts, “No, it’s not important to some people, Robbie. It’s important to all people.” Julia’s fiancée is a womanizing philanderer who wants to marry Julia for the status of being a married man, but not because he truly loves her. As a successful businessman, he is able to buy Julia nice things, but it is clear that they do not have an authentic connection. While Julia and Robbie do share an authentic connection, Robbie mistakenly thinks that Julia wants a provider figure, so he goes to the city to find a “real” job. “But you don’t want to be another yuppie idiot,” Julia tells Robbie exasperatedly, after she finds out that he has given up wedding singing as well as free singing lessons to his elderly neighbour. “Why not? I don’t want to live in my sister’s basement

anymore,” he responds. Robbie is clueless to the fact that Julia admires Robbie precisely because he doesn’t care about money or status—the very things that he thinks she is looking for in a man.

When Robbie discovers that Julia has feelings for him too, he runs after her, hopping on a plane to Vegas where she is going to elope with Glen. Realizing that they are actually on the same plane, he decides to serenade her with a song he wrote for her over the loudspeaker, entitled “Grow Old With You.” According to Taylor, “the film depicts [Robbie’s] evolving romanticism as he moves from viewing marriage institutionally as a symbolic sign of social accreditation and security to appreciating it personally as an expression of perfect mutuality between two lovers” (40). However, although the film appears to be endorsing the message that marriage/partnership is more than “social accreditation,” it nevertheless conveys the idea that marriage and the reproductive futurism endemic to it are imperative to normative conceptions of maturity. Robbie sings to Julia, “I want to grow old with you,” emphasizing that futurity is central to their partnership and thus to his own maturation. Thus, while Robbie and Julia are not “yuppie idiots,” they are certainly not anti-establishment either, as their relationship is legitimized at the end of the film with their own wedding.

Failure to Launch (2006) is a more obvious basement boy film, as the title of the movie and its premise center around the idea that Tripp (Matthew McConaughey) is still living with his parents at 35-years-old. We soon learn that Tripp chooses to live at home primarily to stave off the prospect of being in a committed relationship; when he senses that a woman he is dating wants something more serious, he brings her home to his parents to scare her off. Unlike Robbie in *The Wedding Singer*, who doesn’t seem particularly pleased with living in his sister’s basement, Tripp enjoys living at home, and is even proud of it. For example, in one scene, Tripp

and his buddies toast to their lifestyle as grown men who still live with their parents: “In America, we’re shamed for our lifestyle,” laments Tripp’s friend Demo (Bradley Cooper), to which Tripp interjects, “when we should be celebrating our lifestyle. We are men who still live at home. I’m not here to apologize about who we are, how we do it, or who we live with. Looking around this table, hombres, I see three winners. And every one of those out there who sees something different...I say bring it on.” While it might seem odd that Tripp is so self-satisfied with being a basement boy, his life is presented as desirable, and even enviable. As he sells sailboats for a living, he enjoys a flexible schedule and has the freedom to spend his time however he chooses. Moreover, he doesn’t have to worry about cooking or laundry.

However, although Tripp’s extended adolescence seems appealing, it is also pathologized in the film. The pathology of Tripp’s lifestyle is alluded to in a particular scene in which Tripp and his friends go rock climbing. When Tripp gets bitten by a small reptile, Demo says that he has a theory as to why Tripp is continually being bitten by wildlife: “I believe it’s because your life is fundamentally at odds with the natural world,” he comments. “Therefore, nature rejects you.” What is implied by the “natural” world is the heteronormative world, and thus the hegemony of heteronormativity and its cultural imperatives. Tripp is “fundamentally at odds with the natural world” because he is living a life that does not adhere to a normative life schedule: he lives with his parents at 35 and avoids relationships with long-term commitment. The “abnormality” of Tripp’s way of life is emphasized when his fellow basement boy friends reveal that they are not actually dependent on their parents. Tripp’s friend Ace (Justin Bartha) discloses that he owns the house he lives in with his mother, debunking the idea that he is a true basement boy. Moreover, Ace reminds Tripp that Demo’s wandering lifestyle as a world traveler means

that he is also not a real basement boy, even though he “technically still lives at home.” By emphasizing that both Demo and Ace are not actually dependents, the film assuages the anxiety surrounding the idea of a grown man living with his parents. “The two of us are happy, and we’re perfectly functional,” Demo adds, further mitigating any anxiety. They then comment that Tripp is neither happy nor functional since splitting up with Paula (Sarah Jessica Parker).²⁰ Thus, in order to be “happy and functional,” Tripp must reunite with Paula and commit to her, thereby joining the “natural world” of heteronormativity and its temporal order. By the end of the film, Tripp does just that—demonstrating his maturation and thus graduation from basement boy to husband material.

Stepbrothers (2008) begins with a quote onscreen about family. It is not so much the contents of the quote that is important as it is the author of the quote; the author is George W. Bush, former President of the United States and also one of the quintessential boy-men of the early twenty-first century. Michael Arbiter has labeled the behaviour of the two stepbrothers as “macho obstinacy” (qtd. in Balducci 151), arguing that the kind of “buffoonish” masculinity espoused by Will Ferrell here and in his other comedies (for example, in *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*) make him the “[p]atron saint of thickheaded alpha male identity” (qtd. in Balducci 151). Not surprisingly, these characterizations of Arbiter’s could also very well apply to Bush, and one wonders whether the former U.S. President and the breed of idiotic masculinity he represents was the inspiration for the characters in this film.

²⁰ Paula is an expert that specializes in getting adult men out of their parents’ homes; her strategy is to get these men to develop an attachment to her, so that they willingly move out. Paula is hired by Tripp’s parents when one of their couple friends tells them that she was able to get their son to leave the nest. The fact that the film wants us to believe that such a profession exists points to the cultural anxiety surrounding men in arrested development.

Brennan (Will Ferrell) and Dale (John C. Reilly) are 40-year-old men who live with their single parents, becoming stepbrothers when their parents decide to marry.²¹ Much of the comedy of the film derives from the fact that their parents are not much older than they are. Both men appear to be children in adult-sized bodies; for example, at their parents' wedding, Brennan throws a temper tantrum over being let go from his job, as well as being served the wrong entrée option: "I said I didn't want salmon!" he screams, like a petulant child unaware of social mores and decorum. Similar to other boy-men films, the juvenility of these two main characters is positioned against the more "mature" and sophisticated masculinity represented by Brennan's younger brother, Derek (Adam Scott). Although Derek is relatively wealthy and accomplished, his pompous, frat-boy attitude, and his overuse of short forms when he speaks (for example, "comish" for commission) make him decidedly insufferable. He is what one would call (using a popular slang term) a "douche." He is also quintessentially normative: He has the wife, the two-and-a-half kids, and he drives a Range Rover. Feeling suffocated by her husband's controlling and perfectionist behaviour, Derek's wife, Alice (Kathryn Hahn), finds herself immediately drawn to Dale when she finds out that he punched Derek in the face. Mistaking Dale's juvenility

²¹ Although not quite as childish as his role in *Stepbrothers*, Reilly is also a boy-man of sorts in the indie dramedy, *Cyrus* (2010), where he portrays a middle-aged divorcée, John. His man-child status is established in the beginning of the film, when his ex-wife walks in on him masturbating to loud music in his bedroom, like a teenager. Depressed and anxious, John feels stagnant until he meets Molly (Marisa Tomei) at a party, and the two of them hit it off. John meets his match, however, when he is introduced to Molly's 21-year-old son, Cyrus (Jonah Hill), a "clingy and emotionally needy" basement boy who makes John look like a mature adult by comparison (Balducci 151). Cyrus' possessiveness over his mother and their enmeshment with each other give their relationship incestuous undertones that are uncannily Hitchcockian. Indeed, Molly acknowledges that their relationship is unhealthy and Cyrus himself admits that he "might be a really fucked up and dysfunctional person." Thus, connecting to the first chapter, this film certainly pathologizes the boy-man and the mama's boy in particular, reinforcing prevailing cultural fears surrounding these figures.

for virility, she corners him and kisses him passionately, before clinging on to him desperately and declaring that she “hate[s] her life.” Meanwhile, her husband calls for her impatiently from his Range Rover, demanding that she hurry up so that they can be home in time to watch a comedy special on subscription cable. Indeed, bourgeois normativity and its temporal imperatives have become, for Alice, contrived and soul-crushing.

Unlike other films of the boy-man genre, normativity and adulthood are ultimately criticized in *Stepbrothers*. In the latter half of the film, both Brennan and Dale “mature,” becoming adults through the encouragement of their parents as well as through therapy. They obtain jobs and their own places, and develop a sense of responsibility. Brennan, who is working for Derek, is put in charge of managing the Catalina Wine Mixer for Derek’s company, and Dale, working as a caterer, is hired by the company. Approaching both Dale and Brennan at the mixer, their father (Richard Jenkins) laments that “it kills [him] to see [them] so crushed and normal,” seeing that they have been forced to suppress their childish whimsy. Thus, when things go awry with the hired band, their father encourages them to return to their adolescent pastimes of singing (Brennan) and drumming (Dale) in order to save the mixer from turning into a disaster. Dale and Brennan take to the stage and perform the operatic song, “Con te Partirò,” which is met with great ovation. When Brennan’s therapist (Andrea Savage) (who has been rejecting his advances) sees Brennan performing in his element, she realizes that she is, in fact, attracted to his adolescent spontaneity and fervour. Moreover, the stepbrothers’ father further encourages their juvenility when he decides to add his boat as an addition to their treehouse in the backyard. In this way, the film ultimately reverses the normative paradigm of arrested development by conveying that embracing one’s inner child is to feel alive and happy, while living one’s life

according to heteronormativity and its temporal markers of maturity is to be stifled and stuck. Thus, despite Brennan's marriage to his therapist at the end, *Stepbrothers* is relatively more progressive than other films in the boy-man genre.

While Andy (Steve Carrel) in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) is not a basement boy, his apartment may as well be the basement of his parents' house, as it is filled with all the trappings of male adolescence. As Weiman notes, "[Andy's] bachelor pad resembles a child's playroom, replete with action figures and video games, which he enjoys in sexless solitude" (45). Aside from his childish hobbies and virginal status, however, Balducci contends that Andy "is a functional adult. He does well on the job. He is, for the most part, socially adept" (161). Moreover, he demonstrates a level of emotional maturity which surpasses that of his sexually experienced friends (Balducci 161). Hence, the real boy-men in the film do seem to be his co-workers/friends, who spend their free time getting high and playing video games, as well as exchanging "You know how I know you're gay" insults with each other. This latter point is an example of the many homophobic quips sprinkled throughout the film, their presence functioning as overly defensive buffers against the possibility that Andy, as a 40-year-old virgin (or any one of his friends), could be gay. Indeed, following the "you know I know you're gay" exchange between David (Paul Rudd) and Cal (Seth Rogen) is a saccharine montage of Andy and his new girlfriend, Trish (Catherine Keener), doing coupley activities together, so as to reinforce the stronghold of heteronormativity. True to the genre, Andy "matures" through his heterosexual relationship, eventually selling all of his collectible action figures to open his own electronics store, and marrying Trish. Thus, the film conveys the idea that in order for Andy to be a legitimate adult, he must follow a heteronormative trajectory of maturity.

In *Lars and the Real Girl* (2008), Lars' (Ryan Gosling) childish curiosity is highlighted at the beginning of the film, when he picks up a toy figurine belonging to a child during church service. Lars is more focused on the toy than on the sermon being delivered, in which the minister talks about interpersonal connection and love as the main purpose of life. Lars is content with being a lone wolf, living as a basement boy of sorts in the converted garage of his brother and sister-in-law's house. We later learn that Lars' proclivity for solitude and his social anxiety are largely the result of growing up with an emotionally unavailable father, which led to his brother leaving home as soon as he was able to, abandoning Lars. Thus, the trauma of these events has left Lars stunted both socially and emotionally.

Lars' social anxiety and avoidance is especially pronounced around women; as a case in point, he continuously evades the advances of a girl he works with, Margo (Kelli Garner), who is genuinely interested in him. For example, after church, Margo witnesses Mrs. Gruner (Nancy Beatty) giving Lars a flower and suggesting that he "give it to someone nice"; seeing this as an opportune moment, Margo approaches Lars in anticipation, but Lars panics and throws the flower to the side, and then sheepishly stares at the ground. "I guess I'll see you at work tomorrow," Margo says awkwardly, to which Lars replies, "Ok, bye," before running away from her like a child. As Lars lives in a small Wisconsin town of church-goers, his single status as a good-looking young man seems unusual to Mrs. Gruner, who asks Lars if he is gay when he replies to her that he doesn't have a girlfriend. While Lars certainly fits the popular cinematic trope of the closeted "sad young man" discussed earlier, being reclusive and rather odd, he appears to be straight. He is queer in another way, however, as he orders a life-sized doll off the internet, introducing her as his girlfriend, Bianca, to his brother and sister-in-law one evening.

Although Lars orders Bianca ostensibly for companionship and not sex (what she is primarily manufactured for), his relationship with her places him outside of heteronormativity, connecting him to the “synthetic love” and “technosexual” subcultures.²² It is in this way that Lars can be regarded as queer. However, the queerness and pathology of Lars’ relationship with a synthetic woman²³ is assuaged in the film with the knowledge that she is a practice run for the real-life partner he will eventually have in a heterosexual relationship. Thus, at the request of his doctor, his family and the people in his town go along with his delusion, treating the doll as a real human being and in turn grooming Lars for heteronormative adulthood.

Interestingly, Lars is not the only one who seems arrested in his development. His workplace is also populated by childlike individuals who are strangely attached to their toys.²⁴ In one scene, Lars’ cubicle mate accuses Margo of stealing three of his action figures, threatening to destroy her teddy bear if she doesn’t return them promptly. Shortly after, Margo finds her teddy

²² See the *Atlantic* article, “Married to a Doll” (2013) by Julie Beck for an in-depth look at the “synthetic love” subculture.

²³ In her essay, “Thinking Sex” (1993), Gayle Rubin argues that “hierarchies of sexual value” function ideologically, “rationaliz[ing] the well-being of the sexually privileged and the adversity of the sexually rabble” (16). She theorizes this “sexual value system” in the form of a circular diagram that she calls “the sex hierarchy.” Sexuality that is deemed “Good, Normal, [and] Natural” within heteronormative ideology comprises the inner or “charmed circle” of the diagram. Thus, sexuality that is “heterosexual, marital monogamous, reproductive, and noncommercial” (16). “Bad” or “abnormal” sexuality comprises “the outer limits” of the circle, and is constituted as that which is “homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, nonprocreative, or commercial” (16). Moreover, it also includes sex “with manufactured objects” (16). Thus, according to Rubin’s diagram, Lars’ relationship with a life-sized doll falls into this latter category of “unnatural” or “damned” sexuality. However, the film palliates the perversity of such a relationship by not only humanizing Bianca, but also by making her a good Christian: she goes to church, attends fundraisers, and volunteers at the hospital.

²⁴ The workplace as a space of play filled with juvenile adults is also a theme in *High Fidelity*, *The Way, Way Back* (2013) and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), which will be discussed below.

bear hanging from a noose and runs off crying (she is also going through a breakup). Lars runs after her to comfort her, proceeding to give the teddy bear CPR in a strange, but tenderly empathic moment. For Lars, the teddy bear is as real as his life-sized plastic companion. However, it is following this interaction with Margo that Lars decides to have Bianca become “sick” and eventually “die,” marking his maturation and his willingness to grow up. This is foreshadowed by a conversation that Lars has with his older brother (Paul Schneider), when he asks him, “How did you know you were a man?” His brother replies that “you grow up when you decide to do right. And not what’s right for you, but what’s right for everybody, even when it hurts...you take care of your family.” Standing at the gravesite of Bianca following her funeral, Lars asks Margo if she would like to take a walk. The film ends here, but one can infer that Lars and Margo will go on to be in a romantic relationship, reinforcing the hegemony of a heteronormative life trajectory and putting to rest any residual anxiety surrounding Lars’ queer attachment to his life-like doll.

The eponymous protagonist of *Jeff, Who Lives at Home* (2011) is different from most cinematic boy-men because he is curious about his future (albeit in a philosophical stoner kind of way): “I can’t help but wonder about my fate...about my destiny,” he muses into his voice recorder while sitting on the toilet one morning. Largely influenced by the M. Night Shayamalan film, *Signs* (2002), Jeff believes that seemingly arbitrary incidents are actually signals from the universe that could lead him to his own destiny.²⁵ Thus, upon receiving a wrong number call

²⁵ Jeff’s passion about his destiny, that there may be something more meaningful that awaits him, is evocative of Jose Esteban Muñoz’s concept of a queer “ecstatic time,” a time which repudiates the present and asserts that there is a “potentiality or concrete possibility of another world” (qtd. in DeAngelis 214). The “ecstatic time” of queerness is opposed to a “straight time that tells us there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life” (qtd. in DeAngelis 214).

from somebody asking for Kevin, Jeff decides that this must be a sign, and looks for other clues while out on an errand for his mother. As one can probably gather from the title, Jeff is indeed a basement boy, unemployed and living in his mother's basement where he gets high and ponders about life.

Jeff's brother, Pat (Ed Helms), feels smugly superior to his younger brother, dismissing Jeff as immature and believing that he doesn't understand responsibility.²⁶ However, Pat is also a man-child; he impulsively buys a Porsche despite his wife's concerns that they should be saving money for a house. His adolescent self-centeredness and emotional immaturity drive his wife away from him, leading her to seek emotional support from another man. Pat leads a life that is superficial and empty. Unlike Jeff, he is unable to appreciate moments and wonders of the universe that connect people to each other. For example, Jeff gets upset with his older brother for not appreciating the extraordinariness of the fact that they share the same recurring dream about their late father. "You're just drifting through life," Jeff tells his brother concernedly, lamenting the way in which he mechanically goes through the motions. Pat replies spitefully that "[w]hat's

²⁶ Similarly, in *Our Idiot Brother* (2011), Miranda (Elizabeth Banks) snootily judges her sister (Zooey Deschanel) for being an adult woman who lives with five roommates: "Can we discuss living with that many people at this age? It's kinda gnarly," she comments. The title character of the film, Ned (Paul Rudd) is also a basement boy, but reluctantly so; he is forced to move back in with his mother and then sister, after his girlfriend leaves him for another man when he returns from prison. While Ned does not possess Jeff's wisdom and insight, he is, like Jeff, able to bring out the truth in his siblings, forcing them to remove the facades they have created as adults and truly examine the problems in their lives. Moreover, like Jeff, Ned possesses a childish innocence and zest for life that allows him to see the best in people, or give them the benefit of the doubt, making him more likable than the cynical adults that surround him. Balducci argues that both *Our Idiot Brother* and *Jeff, Who Lives at Home* "make it clear that slackers have better lives than their uptight siblings, who have been driven miserable by their relentless pursuit of family and career. The two films agree that it is the responsible sibling who is the real screw-up" (151). Thus, like *Jeff, Who Lives at Home*, *Our Idiot Brother* is also suspicious of the adult world, presenting an extended adolescence as a more desirable lifestyle.

happening right now is that I'm getting lectured from my pothead brother who lives in our mom's basement at 30-years-old about how I don't understand the universe. Here's some understanding for you: a job, a car, and a wife, and an apartment." What Pat doesn't understand, however, is that these are merely superficial markers of maturity, the heteronormative "chronobiopolitics" that temporally structure our lives into significant "events and strategies of living" (Freeman qtd. in DeAngelis 214). While Jeff is not "mature" by heteronormative standards, his emotional sensitivity and awareness make him more mature than his relatively successful older brother. Thus, Jeff encourages his brother to be honest and vulnerable with his wife about his feelings, suggesting that doing so may save his crumbling marriage. Moreover, Jeff's seemingly juvenile obsession with looking for signals from the universe ultimately leads him to save two children and their father from drowning, thus legitimizing his strange fixation.

Ultimately, *Jeff, Who Lives At Home* is suspicious of adulthood, or, rather, the socially sanctioned expectations that come with being an adult in a heteronormative society. The film refuses to see normative timelines and markers of maturity as the be-all and end-all of adulthood; in fact, it works to challenge this kind of narrow-mindedness. This is demonstrated in the parallel storyline of Jeff's mother, Sharon (Susan Sarandon). Sharon receives an anonymous message from an alleged secret admirer at work, and then humiliates herself when she approaches a man whom she mistakenly believes is her admirer. Mortified, she runs to the washroom in tears, lamenting to her co-worker, Carol (Rae Dawn Chong), that she doesn't know "how many good years [she] has left." She discloses to Carol that she had imagined her life differently; she was going to be in the Peace Corps with her boyfriend in an exotic locale where they could kiss under waterfalls. "You can still kiss in waterfalls," Carol replies reassuringly. In fact, moments later,

during a fire alarm, Carol kisses Sharon under the rain-like automatic ceiling sprinklers in their office. It turns out that Carol is Sharon's secret admirer. While Carol is primarily attracted to men, she admits to Sharon that at "this point in [her] life...she [just] wants someone who gets [her]," irregardless of their gender. Thus, with the fire alarm as an unsuspected diversion, the two women sneak out of work and decide to take a spontaneous trip to New Orleans together. The film challenges the conception that love and desire are only reserved for younger adults, and, especially, younger women. By focusing on the desires of two post-menopausal women, the film calls into question the heteronormative idea that there is a specific timeline (and thus an expiry date) for one to be desirable and for one to desire another person.

The storyline of Jeff's mother is thus part of the film's larger project of challenging the tenets of heteronormative temporality. Hence, instead of ending the film with a momentous event that marks Jeff's maturation (for example, entering into a heterosexual relationship or landing a successful job), the film instead closes with Jeff fixing a shutter that has broken off the pantry cabinet—a task that his mother has been nagging him to do for weeks. In this way, the film communicates the idea that growth and development is not only measured by significant (heteronormative) milestones, but can be simple and seemingly mundane, such as following through with a much-procrastinated task.

Obsessive Boy-Men in Breakups/Divorce: *High Fidelity* and *Sideways*

What unites the characters in this next section is that they are both emotionally immature men with neurotic fixations (one is obsessed with music and the other with wine) dealing with

their breakup and divorce, respectively. First I will examine *High Fidelity* (2000) and then move on to a discussion of *Sideways* (2004).

High Fidelity is based on the Nick Hornby novel of the same name, published in 1995 after the immense success of Hornby's second book, *Fever Pitch* (1992), "a highly entertaining literary autobiography about an Arsenal football fan based on his own life" (Ochsner, *Lad Trouble* 162). Chris Heath (2005) argues that the appeal of both *Fever Pitch* and *High Fidelity* lies in "their precise, wry understanding of a certain kind of modestly privileged, emotionally clumsy heterosexual white 30-something male" ("A Long Way Down"). Indeed, both books are responsible for establishing the "lad lit" genre, of which Hornby would become the quintessential author (Ochsner, *Lad Trouble* 162). According to Andrea Ochsner (2012), "[l]adlit supposedly articulates the confusion and uncertainty with which the young, [British] male generation of the 1990s struggled against the effects of the sexual revolution and the dissolution of the class system ("Fictions" 91). Ladlit novels are characterized by a male protagonist who is reluctant to mature, avoids or procrastinates with decision-making, and "engages in obsessive pastimes" (Ochsner, "Fictions" 93)—ostensible character flaws which, ultimately, make him a highly sympathetic and relatable figure (Ochsner, "Fictions" 93). This is certainly true of the character of Rob Fleming in *High Fidelity*, who "represents the average guy that readers can identify with: he is a kind of everyman of the 1990s" ("Fictions" 93).

The accessibility of Hornby's novel is largely a result of its confessional narrative style, which "draw[s] the reader into a conspiratorial relationship with the main character" (Ochsner, "Fictions" 92). Indeed, this identificatory mechanism is manifested in the film adaptation through Rob's (John Cusack) frequent confessional asides to the camera, in which he addresses

the audience directly. Moreover, a similar device is used in the film adaptation of Hornby's *About A Boy* (2002) (which I discuss in a section on surrogate fathers below), through the main protagonist's confessional remarks in voice over. *High Fidelity* is generally considered to be "the first male confessional novel of the 1990s" (Ochsner, *Lad Trouble* 160), a genre which is greatly indebted to the "traditional *Bildungsroman*" or "novel of formation," where "the main protagonist typically undergoes a process of maturation or phase of initiation" (Ochsner, "Fictions" 92). Thus, in both *High Fidelity* and Hornby's subsequent novel, *About A Boy*, each of the male protagonists must "overcome [the] flaws that prevent [them] from growing up and engaging in lasting and meaningful relationships" (Ochsner, "Fictions" 92). For Ochsner, the contemporary male confessional novel is "a specific articulation of the structure of feeling of the 1990s," when a perceived crisis of masculinity emerged in response to the aftermath of the feminist movement, as well as "a general gender crisis," in which the categories of masculinity and femininity became increasingly precarious ("Fictions" 93, 95). The film adaptations of both *High Fidelity* (2000) and *About A Boy* (2002) point to the residual effects (or, perhaps, continuation) of this crisis of masculinity at the turn of the new millennium.

"If you really wanted to mess me up, you should have got to me earlier!" Rob yells to his now ex-girlfriend, Laura (Iben Hjejle), from his apartment window in the opening sequence of *High Fidelity*. Rob is stuck in his own narrative of victimization, one that began when his first-ever girlfriend left him for another boy when he was 14. "All of my romantic stories are a scrambled version of that first one," Rob laments in a direct address to the camera, one of many he will make throughout the course of the film. When Laura drops by his place to pick up her belongings, Rob asks her what he should have done to make her happy. "Make yourself happy,"

she replies coolly. “Oh I see. Why am I not happy?” he retorts. “Because you’re the same person you used to be, and I’m not,” she responds, commenting on his stuntedness. When Rob then complains to her about how much she has changed, with her new “clothes and hairstyles, attitudes, and friends,” what he is really bemoaning is the fact that she has grown up: “I couldn’t go to work with my hair dyed pink,” Laura tells him matter-of-factly. “You haven’t changed so much as a pair of socks since I’ve known you....at least you used to talk about the future, now you don’t even do that,” she remarks, his disinterest in futurity underlining his arrested development. Indeed, Rob views heteronormative markers of maturity as bourgeois and outdated, as demonstrated by his facetious remark to his distraught mother over the phone when she asks him what he is going to do now that Laura has left him: “I’m gonna meet a nice girl, and have children, I promise, and the next time we talk I’ll have it all figured out, okay?”

Rob’s emotional immaturity is also established by his obsession with pop music. As an owner of a record shop in downtown Chicago, he and his employees (who are also boy-men) spend the majority of their days debating about music and playing music trivia games with each other. One of such trivia games is their “Top five” game, where they ask each other to name their top five of something music-related. For example, their top five tracks to play on a Monday morning, or their top five side one, track ones. Rob even applies the game to his own life, making a list of his top five worst breakups, each one of them becoming a flashback segment in the film. Rob’s fixation with trivia and his near obsessive-compulsive need to catalogue everything connects him to the boy-men in both *Diner* and *Kicking and Screaming*. Rob’s employee, Barry (Jack Black), is especially juvenile when it comes to music taste, as evidenced by a scene in which he aggressively throws his co-worker Dick’s (Todd Louiso) Belle and

Sebastian tape at him in disapproval, replacing it with his own music. He then yells at Dick like an insolent child when he suspects that he doesn't like the Righteous Brothers. Moreover, on another occasion, Barry disparages a middle-aged man who comes into the store looking to buy the single, "I Just Called to Say I Love You" for his daughter's birthday. Mocking the man's music taste, Barry tells the customer that the song is "sentimental and tacky" and that if he wants to buy music like that, he should go to the mall. Barry's power-tripping behavior is further demonstrated when he refuses to give a particular record to a customer who comes in every week to buy it, turning him away each time by telling him that he's "not selling it this week." The childish snobbery of Rob and his employees is commented upon by one of their customers and friends, Louis (Alex Désert): "You guys are snobs...no, seriously. You're totally elitist. You feel like the unappreciated scholars so you shit on the people who know less than you." Thus, their music snobbery is a compensatory mechanism for their deep-seated insecurities and low self-esteem; at the record store they can be powerful gate keepers where customers are at their mercy. In reality, however, they are arrogant man-children who work in a floundering business.²⁷ "What really matters is *what* you like, not what you *are* like," Rob declares in another direct address to the camera. "Books, records, films...these things matter. Call me shallow—it's the fucking truth," he confesses, emphasizing his pop culture-geek snobbery. For Rob, a potential love interest's taste is more important than who they are as a person. This kind of superficial thinking is a testament to his emotional immaturity.

²⁷ Like *Diner*, however, their boyish fixation is also a fun escape from the reality of their lives, and the ongoing march of time. Moreover, their fan boy snobbery is a way from them to bond with each other, like a secret club in which they are only a part. It is in these ways that their arrested development seems like a desirable venture, especially in comparison to Ian (Tim Robbins), Rob's neighbour and Laura's new lover, a New Age-y, condescending man who represents all that is wrong with being an adult.

In order to figure out why he's been rejected by the women he's dated, Rob decides to contact some of his ex-girlfriends (the ones that comprise his top five worst breakups) and meet up with them to gain some insight. Through this process, he realizes that he had been so caught up in his own selfish narrative of rejection that he failed to consider both his role in these breakups, as well as where the other person was coming from.²⁸ For example, his high school girlfriend reminds him that he was, in fact, the one that dumped her, and not the other way around. He also comes to realize that another one of his exes was not mentally stable, and so the ending of their relationship had very little to do with him. After these revelations, he experiences an epiphany about his most recent breakup: "I can see now that I never really committed to Laura," he confesses to the camera. "I always had one foot out the door, and that prevented me from doing a lot of things. Like thinking about my future..." This revelatory soliloquy marks the beginning of Rob's maturation, and thus his embarkment upon the trajectory of heteronormative adulthood. He gets back together with Laura and tells us in voiceover that they "talked about important stuff—like the future." Then, in the ultimate endorsement of futurity, he proposes to Laura, declaring that he's "tired of the fantasy" and ready to face the reality of being in a committed relationship. While the film appears to be moving in a conservative direction, one that favours the tiresome predictability of heteronormative temporality, the ending of the film suggests otherwise. Hence, the film ends with Rob making a mix tape for Laura with music he feels "she'd like, with stuff that would make her happy." In the past he may have made a mix tape to impress a woman, to show off his music knowledge and taste, but now he realizes it's not

²⁸ Peter (Jason Segel) experiences a similar revelation about his breakup in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (2008). Like Rob, he realizes that he's been too absorbed in self-pity to notice that it was actually his own self-sabotaging behaviour that directly contributed to his girlfriend leaving him.

always about him. This gesture at the end of the film, and not his marriage proposal, is what truly demonstrates Rob's maturation, a narrative decision which points to the film's progressiveness. In other words, instead of ending the film with a momentous event (like a wedding), or the unequivocal affirmation of "chrononormativity," *High Fidelity* stays firmly anchored in the present. Like *Jeff, Who Lives at Home*, it conveys that growth is not only measured by socially sanctioned milestones; it can also be measured in small increments, in the seemingly small gestures which make us human.

This tendency to resist grand gestures as well as neat and tidy endings is also a major characteristic of Hornby's novels. Hence, in his review of Hornby's fourth novel, *A Long Way Down* (2005), Heath argues that "Hornby resists melodramatic resolutions or glorious moments of redemption" ("A Long Way Down"). Indeed, Hornby's avoidance of the "grand [and] sentimental" (Heath) is also evidenced by the way in which his "novels intimate that marriage will not resolve key social tensions or even all the personal issues that estrange their heroes" (Faulk 156). For example, Barry Faulk (2007) asserts that "in *High Fidelity*, the conventional marriage formula no longer provides convincing closure to the story of Rob and Laura" (156), an idea that is carried over to the film adaptation (as discussed above with Rob making a mix tape for Laura). Moreover, Faulk argues that *About A Boy* is similarly weary of traditional values, as the ending of the novel conveys that "the heterosexual couple no longer works as an enabling structure for child-rearing" (a point that is also made by the film. See below) (156).

Upon first glance at *Sideways*, the boy-man in the film is undoubtedly Jack (Thomas Haden Church), a middle-aged has-been actor who has the emotional maturity of an adolescent

boy. Impulsive and free-spirited, Jack is the foil to his friend Miles' (Paul Giamatti) crotchety and anal-retentive neuroticism, an "odd-couple" dynamic that has now become a cinematic cliché. If his irresponsible actions (such as having an affair with another woman days before his wedding) were not enough indication of Jack's juvenility, Miles explicitly calls him an "infant" towards the end of the film, infuriated by his friend's poor judgement. But while Miles appears to be the more "responsible" one, he is not exempt from his own stuntedness. Like Rob in *High Fidelity*, Miles is also stuck in his own self-pitying narrative of rejection. Not only is he still hung up on his divorce from three years ago, his novel manuscript has already been rejected from several publishing houses. Moreover, while Miles is a connoisseur of wine, he is hardly an expert at his own life: he is chronically depressed and teaching eighth grade English despite his aspirations to be a writer. Moreover, neither is he morally sound: he steals cash from his aging mother's dresser drawer under the pretense that he is visiting her for her birthday.

Miles' wine obsession certainly borders on snobbery; for him, drinking the wrong wine is akin to blasphemy. For example, he nearly throws a hissy fit over the prospect of drinking merlot—he tells Jack in a bout of anger that he will leave their double date if anyone orders it. One wonders whether Miles' snobbery is a compensatory mechanism for the impotence he feels in his life, like Rob and his friends in *High Fidelity*. What does become clear is that Miles' wine obsession has substituted any desire to enter into a romantic relationship. It seems that he uses this fixation (subconsciously or not) as a distraction from moving forward. This is demonstrated when Miles and his love interest, Maya (Virginia Madsen), share with each other why and how wine is important to them. Both of their explanations reveal the way in which wine and the process of making it is metaphorical of the human condition (Dargis). When Maya describes to

Miles how it is that a “a bottle of wine is actually alive,” the reverse close-up shots of his face bespeak an expression of someone who is hearing another person speak their own secret language for the first time. Feeling this connection, Maya places her hand on top of his, but Miles becomes uncomfortable, quickly interrupting the moment by awkwardly bringing up his liking of Reisling.

The last third of the film is punctuated by markers of heteronormative “chronobiopolitics”—Jack gets married, and, outside of the church, Miles bumps into his ex-wife, who informs him that she and her new husband are expecting a child. “It seems like everyone’s getting married,” Miles says to her, his smile hardly masking his bitterness. He then must smile through his pain again when his ex-wife tells him that she’s pregnant. This news sends Miles over the edge, so instead of heading to the reception, he rushes home and grabs the bottle of vintage wine he had initially been saving for his 10th wedding anniversary. He proceeds to drink the expensive wine from a styrofoam cup at a burger joint, stealthily refiling his cup under the table, as if he were a teenager drinking in secret. Indeed, his decision to degrade the expensive wine in this way (drinking it in secret, at a burger joint, from a styrofoam cup) functions as an act of adolescent-like rebellion against everything it represents—hope, futurity, the commemoration of a milestone. Miles is no longer seduced by the the promise of a heteronormative life trajectory; he has already been both married and divorced. In fact, he feels like he is going backwards. As Davies and Funke remind us in the introduction to their anthology, life trajectories are never solely linear; they come up against “temporal bumps, nicks, cycles, reversals, and cuts” (10). Thus, while the end of the film sees Miles driving to Santa Barbara County to see Maya—thus providing reassurance that his life might continue to move forward in tandem with a

normative temporal order—we know that he hasn’t arrived at this point in a linear fashion. Rather, he has arrived here by first being stuck, and even regressive. He has arrived here, in other words (and in reference to the film’s title), sideways. Like *High Fidelity*, *Sideways* ends with the prospect of heteronormativity, but in a way that is oblique and unconventional. In this way, both films support a queer rendering of normative temporality and its trajectory.

Boy-Men Turned Surrogate Fathers: *About a Boy* and *School of Rock*

In the next part of this chapter, I examine the ways in which the immature protagonists in *About a Boy* (2002) and *School of Rock* (2004) essentially “grow up” through their surrogate fatherhood, a theme briefly addressed previously in my analysis of *Knocked Up* (although in that case the Seth Rogen character was a biological father).

The opening sequence of *About A Boy* features carefree bachelor, Will (Hugh Grant), surrounded by all the trappings of bourgeois comfort—TV, an espresso maker, a toaster and a microwave. In a voiceover, he smugly tells us that he’s happy with his life as “an island,” where he doesn’t have to answer to or be responsible for anyone but himself. Amidst Will’s musings about his desirable lifestyle, the camera cuts to pre-teen misfit, Marcus (Nicholas Hoult), who despondently lies in his bed while watching his hamster run aimlessly on its wheel. The editing here, and the subsequent intercutting between Will and Marcus, not only highlights how starkly different their lives are (as well as foreshadows how their lives will eventually intertwine), it also emphasizes the central commonality they share—they are, despite their significant age difference, both boys (hence the film’s title).

Indeed, Will certainly doesn't act like a responsible adult—living solely off the royalties of his late father's hit Christmas song, Will fills his days with 30-minute "units" of frivolity, from watching game shows to getting his hair "carefully disheveled" at an expensive salon. Hymowitz likens Will's immaturity to his utter lack of an identity, arguing that he "has no self apart from pop culture effluvia, a fact [that is] symbolize[d] by having him live off the residuals of a popular Christmas song..." (121). While Will is rather self-satisfied with his luxurious, playboy lifestyle, his married friends pathologize the idea that he is 38 and has never had any semblance of what they deem to be a normal adult life (that is, having a job or a long-term relationship): "You're a disaster," his friend Christine (Sharon Small) remarks. "What is the point of your life?" To Christine and her husband, John (Nicholas Hutchison), it is unimaginable to think that somebody would want to live outside of the "chronobiopolitics" of heteronormativity, to choose not to be married or have children. As Balducci argues, however, Will's life is indeed "meaningless, revolving around sexual conquests and leisure activities" (154). Moreover, he himself is vapid; his potential love interest, Rachel (Rachel Weisz), calls him "blank." When Marcus asks Will for guidance around his severely depressed mother (Toni Collette), Will replies, "I can't help you with real things. I can't help you with anything that means anything." Will realizes that both himself and his life lack any form of substance.

In an epiphanic moment, however, Will also realizes that "Marcus is the only thing that mean[s] something to him," and decides to commit to being his father-like figure. Will checks in on Marcus' mother, and then saves Marcus from "social suicide" when he accompanies him onstage with a guitar for his solo act at the school talent show. As stated in the literature review, Hamad discusses how childish men are recuperated into maturity through fatherhood, their

transformation sometimes engendered by an epiphany (109).²⁹ Hence, Will is shown to mature through his surrogate fatherhood, as evidenced by the fact that he is both a father figure to Marcus and in a long-term relationship with Rachel at the end of the film.³⁰ However, instead of moving into the predictable territory of conservative heteronormativity, the film shows us a “queer” family of sorts at its close, with Will, Rachel, Fiona, Marcus, and Rachel’s son all coming together for a Christmas lunch. Indeed, Marcus’ comment before the ending credits points to the possibility of a future that moves beyond heteronormativity’s reductive paradigm; “I don’t think couples are the future,” Marcus reflects in voiceover. “You need more than that. You need backup, and the way I saw it—Will and I both had backup now.” Thus, Marcus’ queer imagining of the future points to Muñoz’s concept of a queer “ecstatic time,” in that it conceptualizes the “possibility of another world,” (Muñoz qtd. in DeAngelis 214), a world where family is not just one’s flesh and blood, but “queer assemblages” of people who take care of each other.

²⁹ As also mentioned in the literature review, there is a gendered double standard at play in representations of parenthood, one that criticizes or demonizes mothers for their shortcomings while being much more sympathetic to fathers, even going as far as “valoriz[ing]” them (Hamad 109). This double standard is certainly present in *About A Boy*. Although Fiona (Marcus’ mother) is presented as being very loving towards her son, her chronic depression (one that leads to a suicide attempt) paints her as both pathetic and “insane,” a word that Will uses more than once to describe her. Moreover, Marcus begins to feel responsible for his mother’s happiness, signing up to sing in his school talent show not because he wants to, but because he knows it will make her happy. Thus, the film often makes Fiona look like an unfit parent. In contrast, Will becomes Marcus’ “cool dad,” buying him new clothes and giving him advice about girls, thus rescuing him from teenage hell. Despite the fact that Will is both shallow and selfish, and that he’s only been in Marcus’ life for a short time, the film extols him as Marcus’ saviour while pitying the woman who has already spent over a decade of her life raising him single-handedly (and with a mental illness).

³⁰ In *Big Daddy* (1999), Sonny (Adam Sandler) also matures through his surrogate fatherhood to his roommate’s son. Thus, at the end of the film, he has been rehabilitated into a heteronormative life trajectory, working as a lawyer and with a baby of his own.

In *School of Rock*, Dewey (Jack Black) is also a man-child who matures through his father-like role as both teacher and mentor to a group of fourth-grade students. Although not exactly a father figure per se, Dewey's encouragement and support of these children, as well as the sense of responsibility he develops for them, bespeak fatherly traits. Dewey's arrested development is clearly indicated at the beginning of the film, when his roommate's girlfriend, Patty (Sarah Silverman), expresses agitation over the fact that he hasn't paid rent in months. "He's a lazy freeloader—it's time for all of this dysfunction to stop!" she exclaims. "We have jobs. We contribute to society," she continues, shaming Dewey for still being in bed on a weekday morning. When Dewey gets fired from his band for being "an embarrassment," his roommate, Ned (Mike White) sits him down and tells him that "maybe it's time to give up those dreams. I did, and things are going really great for me." However, Dewey remains unconvinced about the prospect of adulthood, especially if it means being shackled with an overbearing girlfriend.

Indeed, like many of the other films discussed above, *School of Rock* is suspicious of adulthood, likening it to institutionalized authority as well as the establishment in general. For example, upon witnessing the students' reward and demerit system (consisting of gold stars and black dots that are placed next to their names on a poster in the classroom) Dewey yells out in dismay, "What kind of a sick school is this?!", before tearing down the poster and ripping it to shreds. He then goes on to lecture the children about "the man," the well-known metaphor for corporate and institutionalized hegemony: "the man, he's everywhere...in the White House, down the hall...Mrs. Mullins [the school principal]—she's the man..." For Dewey, "the man" are the powerful adults wielding disciplinary power over children, or, those with a child-like inner

being. Thus, in the spirit of youthful revolt, Dewey Declares that it will be “recess all the time” so long as he’s in charge. Refusing to teach the children the assigned curriculum, Dewey decides to assemble his students into a band (of which he will be lead singer) and its supporting roles, devoting the entirety of each school day to preparing for the “Battle of the Bands,” a competition with a monetary prize. Dewey’s renunciation of the curriculum and thus the promise of “moulding young minds” for the future speaks to Edelman’s polemic against the idea of the child as the “telos of the social order...[and] the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust” (Edelman 11). As stated above, the heteronormative logic of “reproductive futurism” is always connected to the figure of the Child, the “universalized subject” who comes to represent “the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity” (Edelman 21). Thus, by rejecting any semblance of a normative course of study, one that perpetuates the idea that the sole purpose of learning is to groom children for the future (because “children are the future”),³¹ Dewey teaches his class to embrace the “*jouissance*” of playing music, an act that challenges a heteronormative logic of time.

As with *About a Boy*, however, Dewey ultimately graduates to adulthood through his mentorship and surrogate fatherhood. For example, at the audition for Battle of the Bands, Dewey finds out that one of his students, Freddy (Kevin Alexander Clark), has gone off to hang out with another band in their van. Petrified, Dewey runs out to the parking lot to look for him, eventually finding him playing cards with a group of men. He angrily yells at the band, reprimanding them for hanging out with a 10-year-old kid. “Start acting like responsible adults!

³¹ In an ironic moment, Dewey, who is pretending to be a traditional teacher following the curriculum, proclaims to his colleagues, “children are the future.” We know, however, that Dewey does not actually believe these words in the sense of a normative futurity, that is, one that contributes to the “logical historical progression” (DeAngelis 214) of the status quo.

Don't make me come back here!", he warns them, his words mirroring that of an anxious and infuriated parent. Hence, turning to Freddy, he proclaims, "Don't scare me like that again!" While Dewey has become a responsible adult, he retains his child-like enthusiasm and rebelliousness, leading his class on a field trip to the Battle of the Bands against school orders. Moreover, even at the end of the film, when Dewey's maturity is further demonstrated by the opening of his own music school, he is still the same free-spirited man-child, jamming with his former students. Thus, *School of Rock* asserts that adulthood is not necessarily synonymous with the formulaic fulfillment of heteronormative markers of maturity; rather, much like *Jeff, Who Lives at Home*, it conveys that growth is both unique to each individual and ongoing. Moreover, it contends that possessing some juvenility as an adult is good, as it makes one more receptive and empathetic to children, who need a role model who understands them.

Surrogate Fathers (Continued) and Adolescent Adults: *The Way, Way Back*

The Way, Way Back (2013) is a coming-of-age dramedy focusing on the experiences of painfully awkward fourteen-year-old, Duncan (Liam James), who is forced to spend his summer vacation at a beach house with his mother (Toni Collette), her emotionally-abusive boyfriend (Steve Carell), and the boyfriend's teenage daughter (Zoe Levin). *New York Times* critic A.O. Scott's title for his review of the film perfectly captures its central theme: "Coming of Age With Adults Who Haven't." The juvenility of the adults in the film is established with the character of Betty (Allison Janney), a middle-aged, free-spirited alcoholic who lives in the beach house next door. When Duncan and his 'family' arrive, Betty greets them with an enthusiasm that borders on obnoxiousness: "Thank God! Another night of drinking alone, I was gonna kill myself!" Betty's

brazenness, however, is also admirable; she lives in the moment in a way that defies the regulatory regime of futurity, a theme that will extend to other characters in the film. Soon, Betty's adolescent spirit rubs off on both Duncan's mother, Pam, and her boyfriend, Trent, leaving Duncan to fend for himself. Hence, after a late night of drinking, Duncan's mother leaves him a note with some cash, letting him know that she's sleeping in. Then, in an instance of parent-child role reversal, Duncan's mother and Trent go skinny dipping with their friends while Duncan is left to clear the dinner table, like he is the responsible adult. The adults' regressive behaviour continues when they sit around the campfire laughing, drinking, and smoking pot. Indeed, Betty's daughter, Susanna (AnnaSophia Robb) calls the beach house atmosphere "spring break for adults," and her assessment could not be more accurate.

The other immature adult in the film is Owen (Sam Rockwell),³² the playful and gregarious man-child who manages the beach town's water park, Water Wizz. When Duncan first meets Owen, he's playing Pac-Man at the back of a local restaurant, like a teenager. The breed of juvenility that Owen represents, however, is rather different from that of Duncan's mother and her boyfriend. Thus, while Pam and Trent are both irresponsible and neglectful of Duncan, Owen merely chooses to be young-at-heart, offering Duncan a job as well as the emotional support he so desperately needs.³³ "Cut your own path," he tells Duncan at the Pac-Man machine,

³² Rockwell would reprise his role as an endearing boy-man of sorts in *Laggies* (2014), a film that will be discussed in the next chapter.

³³ Indeed, *Meatballs* (1979) is a definite precursor to this film, where the juvenile and gregarious head counsellor, Tripper (Bill Murray) takes a young misfit, Rudy (Chris Makepeace), under his wing, bonding with him and nurturing his confidence, much like Owen does with Duncan here. Moreover, akin to the setting of summer camp in *Meatballs*, *The Way, Way Back* sets its coming-of-age story at a waterpark, a setting that is similarly evocative of adolescent nostalgia, or a place where time seems to stand still.

encouraging him to play the video game without following the specified pattern; his words also becoming a larger metaphor for Duncan's own journey of self-discovery. Owen's fatherly encouragement is contrasted with the tyrannical rigidity of Duncan's other surrogate father, Trent. During a game of Candy Land, Trent becomes enraged over the fact that Duncan and his mother are not following the rules, his outburst serving as a microcosm of his controlling and abusive personality.

Showing Duncan around the waterpark, Owen explains that "it was decried by its creator that 'this place shall never age,'" a statement that also mirrors his own arrested development. "I'm sorry I'm developmentally challenged," Owen says at one point to his disgruntled co-manager, Caitlin (Maya Rudolph), who is fed up with his boyish antics. One suspects that Owen has been working at the park for years—he has never moved on from it. Thus, Water Wizz is figured as a "Neverland" of sorts, populated by employees who are well beyond their adolescence and early twenties—that is, the usual age group to be working at such an establishment. Like the park that they love so much, Owen and his employees embrace a way of living that does not move in tandem with a time that marches relentlessly forward, their refusal to grow up challenging "the inevitable force of progression and succession" inherent to

heteronormative temporality (Halberstam, *Failure* 70).³⁴ “I don’t like patterns [or] rules..You make your own way,” Owen tells Duncan later on, his proclamation both echoing his advice earlier (at the Pac Man machine), as well as speaking to his rejection of a life that follows a normative trajectory.

The waterpark becomes a utopic space for Duncan, offering him a place of refuge away from the problems of the adult world as well as the sense of belonging he needs to find his own identity. This is demonstrated especially in a scene near the end of the film, when, upon witnessing Trent begging his mother to take him back after he has been unfaithful, Duncan flees on his bike to the waterpark with Betty’s son, Peter (River Alexander), in tow. “Take me with you,” Peter implores him, sitting within earshot of Trent and Pam’s argument. He, too, needs an escape from the perils of the adult world. When they arrive at the farewell party for one of the waterpark employees, Owen encourages Peter to take off the eyepatch covering his lazy eye, asserting that it’s “cool” and that he shouldn’t be ashamed of it. Indeed, Peter is among other misfits and outcasts now, the “queer” community that has adopted Duncan, becoming his surrogate family. Thus, in contrast to their lives with their biological families, Duncan and Owen are free to be themselves and let their “freak flags fly” so to speak. Ultimately, *The Way, Way*

³⁴ The idea of the workplace as a space of juvenility and regression is also explored in another film released the same year, *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013). Thus, the opening scene of the film shows stockbroker Jordan Belfort (Leonardo DiCaprio) and his work cronies slingshotting little people into human-sized targets for entertainment. This opening scene is but a taste of the idiotic debauchery that pervades the rest of the film, the majority of which is a result of Jordan’s drug-addled mania. “It was obscene, in the normal world,” Jordan narrates in voiceover about his decadent lifestyle. “But who wanted to live there?” Indeed, Jordan’s hedonistic way of life goes against all that is representative of bourgeois normativity and decorum, something that he does not want any part of. Moreover, his pleasure-seeking lifestyle, one that relies on excessive drug abuse, is quite literally in opposition to a normative temporality that moves forward. For example, at one point in the film, Jordan becomes so high on Quaaludes that he’s forced to (in his words) crawl on the ground like his toddler, demonstrating his rather literal regression.

Back is not only suspicious of adulthood, but it also reveals it to be confining and oppressive, especially if being an adult is constituted by adhering to the rules or standards of normativity.³⁵ Moreover, akin to *School of Rock*, it demonstrates that childishness is not a negative quality in adults; in fact, it makes one more empathetic and open-minded, qualities that are ideal to being a good mentor or parent.

As this chapter demonstrates, representations of male immaturity and arrested development are both complex and contradictory, underlining the ambivalent attitudes towards childish masculinity in our culture. While the sense of freedom and escape inherent to many of these representations make the idea of avoiding adulthood an alluring prospect, a number of the films discussed here also express an evident anxiety towards male immaturity, because of its deviation from heteronormative conceptions of mature adulthood. Thus, whether men are arrested collectively in their “bro ensembles,” stunted by their preference for homosocial

³⁵ In *American Beauty* (1999) the oppressiveness of adulthood is analogized to the soul-sucking normativity of suburban middle-class living; in fact, the film figures bourgeois adulthood as equivalent to death. “In less than a year, I’ll be dead,” Lester narrates in an omniscient voiceover at the beginning of the film. “Of course, I don’t know that yet, and in a way, I’m dead already,” he continues. The sedation of normativity is conveyed by the way in which Lester simply goes through the motions of his life, as well as through Lester’s wife’s (Annette Bening) phony and robotic demeanor as a real estate agent. Inspired by his teenage neighbour’s (Wes Bentley) boldness in quitting his job on the spot, Lester decides to do the same, choosing instead to work at a local burger joint—the job he had as an adolescent. His self-directed regression is further demonstrated with his buying of a red 1970 Pontiac Firebird, the car he’s “always wanted.” Lester’s regression into adolescence is also a return to a specific time period—the youth culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is evidenced not only by his Firebird, but also by his pot smoking—an activity he enjoys while lifting weights in his garage and listening to Bob Dylan’s 1967 hit, “All Along The Watchtower.” Thus, not only is Lester no longer in keeping with the forward march of heteronormative temporality, he has also become an anachronism, “out of time” with the current (late twentieth-century) culture that surrounds him. Despite the film ending in his death, Lester’s movement backwards ultimately makes him feel more alive, waking him up from his self-induced coma as a suburban middle-class adult, and thus the oppressive stronghold of “chrononormativity.”

relationships (bromances) over heterosexual ones, still living in their parents' basements, or snobbishly fixated on a certain interest, all of them are espousing a way of life that challenges or rejects a temporality that is unequivocally heteronormative. However, immaturity and development or growth are not mutually exclusive; as several of the films discussed here indicate, one can possess a childish demeanor while still learning and growing from their experiences. In fact, a youthful attitude can provide the kind of open-mindedness and insight needed to become a well-rounded human being, much more so than mechanically checking off socially sanctioned standards of adulthood.

Chapter 3

Queering Female Adulthood: The Woman-Child in Contemporary American Film

Comparable to its male corollary, female immaturity and arrested development is also structured by a fear/desire dynamic, and thus fraught with contradiction and ambiguity within contemporary culture. As noted earlier, in postfeminist culture female life stages are continually framed “within the parameters of ‘time panic,’” so that there is increasing pressure put on women to get married, have children, and meet other markers of maturity in order to be recognized as normative female subjects (Negra 47). Indeed, women who do not meet these developmental milestones are viewed as abject “temporal failure[s]” who are “drifting off course from the normative stages of the female life cycle” (Negra 61). Ironically, however, while our culture wants women to achieve maturity through their fulfillment of marriage and motherhood on the one hand, they also want them to remain youthful and girl-like on the other (Negra 73). The latter is what Tasker and Negra refer to as “the girling of femininity” within postfeminist culture, where women of various ages are both referred to and/or treated as girls (18). The misogynistic agenda of this process of juvenilization works to diminish the power of mature and successful women, rendering them “safe” and innocuous within the public sphere (Projansky 43). In terms of representational culture, the “girling of femininity” is nothing new; as previously discussed, childish women had always “been a staple of Hollywood fil[m],” from the “Dickensian waif” in the films of D.W. Griffith to Marilyn Monroe’s “childish feminine innocence wrapped up in an adult body” (Vickers 61,72).

What makes the juvenilization of women different within the present media landscape, however, is that women are shown to be practicing ‘immaturity’ on their own terms. Although

not nearly as ubiquitous as her man-child counterpart, the woman in arrested development has also emerged as a cultural figure. In an article in *The Guardian*, Hermione Hoby (2012) takes note of a version of this “cultural archetype,” terming her “the girl slacker.” “On screen and on page, slackerdom has forever been a curiously male preserve, as if the glorification of idleness and a cheerfully non-aspirational attitude were dependent on an extra chromosome” (Hoby), she writes. Hoby, writing the article in 2012, observes a shift taking place within film, television, and print media, arguing that the image of a twenty-something adult “eating cereal, in [their underwear], in [their] parents’ basement” is no longer limited exclusively to the province of men (Hoby). Citing critic David Denby’s contention that “slacker-striver” has been the reigning male-female dynamic in contemporary comedy film, Hoby argues that the female underachiever offers a welcomed antidote to the tired stereotype of women as “prissy, humorless and overachieving...foil[s] to cheerful male apathy” (Hoby). Hoby credits the female slacker characters portrayed by Lena Dunham in *Tiny Furniture* (2010) (this article was published a month before the premiere of Dunham’s *Girls* [2012]) and Kristen Wiig in *Bridesmaids* (2011) as helming a cultural shift in which women are also allowed to be lost or stuck.

In an article for *The Huffington Post*, however, Lauren Duca (2015) questions just how permissible our culture is when it comes to women being arrested in their development or otherwise stuck in a period of extended adolescence. Focusing on the emergence of what she calls the “woman-child” in recent female-centered comedy-drama films, Duca argues that a significant double standard is brought to light when comparing this figure to her man-child counterpart. “While the man-child has flourished for decades,” she argues, “the [woman-child] finds it near impossible to garner sympathy” (Duca). Duca argues that the “likeability” of

“difficult” female characters (that is, those who do not adhere to normative definitions of womanhood) is an ongoing issue within the film industry, where audience sympathy is crucial to a film’s performance at the box office. Invoking *Bridesmaids* as an example, she notes how director Paul Feig had to strategize ways to make his “‘groundless female character,’” Annie, sympathetic, despite her self-pitying downward spiral (Duca). By contrast, Duca argues that the “antics” of cinematic immature men, such as excessive alcohol consumption, “are played for laughs and rarely, if ever, become dilemmas worthy of audience sympathy” (Duca). Within the woman-child film, however, she explains that excessive alcohol consumption is framed as genuine “substance abuse,” and the female characters are pathologized as pathetic screw-ups. “Something is set up as ostensibly wrong with the woman-child, while the male version is explained away with the idea that ‘boys will be boys,’” Duca writes, honing in on the “sexist double standar[d]” at play (Duca). She further explains that these prejudicial attitudes arise from “an enduring expectation for women to ‘have their shit together’” (Duca).

Duca argues, however, that while the unsympathetic traits of the woman-child are regarded as a liability by major studios, it is these very attributes that make the immature female character an empowering feminist figure: “the [woman-child] give[s] young women a chance to see a realistic representation of themselves on screen, and sort through the very real double-standards that pop up in comparison to the man-child,” she asserts (Duca). Echoing this sentiment is pop culture critic Anita Sarkeesian, who sees the “authentic” and “human” qualities of the female slacker archetype as “push[ing] towards a more feminist media” (qtd. in Hoby). Hence, in the closing statements of her article, Duca contends that the emergence of the “woman-

child across film and TV normalizes the messiness of this transitional time and helps remove the sexist stigma by which it is contextualized” (Duca).

While I do agree with Duca’s assessment that the increasing presence of the woman-child across media is helping to mitigate the “sexist stigma” attached to this figure, I find her statement problematic. First, the idea that the woman-child “normalizes the messiness” of being arrested in one’s development may be true, especially considering the popularity of a show like *Girls*, but why is normalization indicative of success? Why should we want to normalize something that can be productive in its feminist and queer potential? As Michael Warner elucidates in *The Trouble with Normal* (1999), normativity is not synonymous with political gain; in fact, its palliative effects can be the very cause of depoliticization. Thus, I would like to explore the political possibilities and potentialities of the woman-child as a deviation from the norm, as a figure who challenges the tenets and practices of heteronormativity.

Secondly, I take issue with calling the extended adolescence of the woman-child a “transitional time” (Duca). Terming it this way implies that the refusal to conform to dominant definitions of womanhood is merely a phase on the path to normative adulthood. Like the use of “normalize” above, “transitional time” is another way in which Duca assuages anxiety about the queer (that is, non-normative) identity of the woman-child, reassuring us that this figure’s

alternative “life schedul[e]” (Halberstam, *Queer Time*) is only temporary.³⁶ While some of the films discussed in this chapter do indeed present female immaturity as a transitional phase on the way to the destination of normative adulthood, many other films examined here do not provide clean resolutions or reassurance that these women will eventually conform to more traditional standards of femininity. In other words, some of the films present us with the possibility of heterosexual women living outside of the confines of heteronormative adulthood indefinitely. They dare to ask, what if embracing queer temporalities was not just a phase, but a way of life?

While I am not discounting that there are definite double standards at play when comparing the cinematic treatment of the woman-child versus the man-child, I am more interested in examining the ways in which the immature female has agency and power within her so-called arrested development or protracted adolescence. Thus, instead of focusing on how the woman-child is often pathologized as unsympathetic or pathetic in comparison to her male counterpart, I want to focus on how this figure challenges the tyranny of heteronormativity, how her immature subjectivity is ultimately empowering in its refusal of normative adulthood. As discussed in the methodology section, my close readings of the woman-child films will be anchored in theories of queer temporality, specifically Lee Edelman’s resistance against the hegemony of “reproductive futurism,” Judith Halberstam’s concepts of queer temporality and

³⁶ My argument here is indebted to Halberstam’s (2004) discussion of the tomboy. Halberstam argues that an acceptable form of tomboyism is one that is safely contained within the boundaries of heteronormativity, “within a narrative of blossoming womanhood” (194). In other words, “[t]omboy identities are conveyed as benign forms of childhood identification as long as they...promise to result in marriage and motherhood” (Halberstam, “Oh Bondage” 194). Tomboyism becomes unacceptable, however, when it threatens to extend beyond childhood into adolescence” (Halberstam, “Oh Bondage” 193). Like tomboyism, therefore, female immaturity and/or arrested development are considered safe so long as they are transitory phases on the trajectory to mature adulthood.

failure, José Esteban Muñoz's queer futurity, and Katherine Bond Stockton's theory of growing sideways in delay or stuntedness. All of these theories examine queerness as not just encompassing sexuality, but "as a way of being and living in the world" (DeAngelis 214), the latter of which applies to the films under study here, which feature heterosexual women. Moreover, the ways in which these theories position themselves against heteronormativity, whether in relation to time or development, make them ideal tools to demonstrate how female immaturity can be progressive, and even radical, in its queer and feminist politics.

The Woman-Child in Comedy

The *Bridesmaids* Effect

Perhaps it was only a matter of time before the bromance or bro-ensemble film was transposed onto a female-centered narrative. As Tania Modleski elucidates, the Apatow-produced *Bridesmaids* (2011) was, according to critics, "meant to create a female equivalent to bromances and especially to cash in on the success of *The Hangover*" (138). Paul Julian Smith (2011) also acknowledges the film's indebtedness to the "coarse farce" of the Apatow universe, most notably in an "instantly notorious" gross-out sequence in which the bridal party gets food poisoning from a cheap restaurant and subsequently defecate themselves while trying on gowns at a bridal salon (8). Despite its knowing nods to the man-child comedy, however, *New York Times* critic A.O. Scott argues that *Bridesmaids* must also be seen as "a milestone in the emergence of uninhibited, woman-driven nonromantic comedy" ("Cop Buddies"), evidenced by several female-centered comedies released in its wake, such as *The Heat* (2013) and *Spy* (2015) (both also directed by

Feig and starring Melissa McCarthy), *Sisters* (2015)³⁷, *Trainwreck* (2015), and *Bad Moms* (2016). However, as Modleski reminds us, “as is always the case when women appropriate male genres...debates swirl around the question of whether or not the film is a success or a failure in feminist—or at least woman-centric—terms” (138). This question is undoubtedly pertinent to a more recent appropriation of the bromance genre, *Mike and Dave Need Wedding Dates* (2016). In this film, the two female leads (Aubrey Plaza and Anna Kendrick) are shown to be “female mirror images” of the film’s eponymous bros (Schager 68), but taking their crudeness and immaturity to even more outrageous levels. While *Bridesmaids*’ appropriation of the man-child film is revisionist in its self-reflexive “mock[ery] of wedding rituals” (Modleski 141) as well as bourgeois (hetero)normativity in general, *Mike and Dave* merely takes the raunch comedy formula that is central to the boy-man film and transplants it onto its female equivalent. Acting like dim-witted “bros” does not make the Plaza and Kendrick characters progressive or radical, it only makes them complicit in a culture of misogyny and chauvinism that ultimately oppresses

³⁷ While Tina Fey’s “irresponsible mom” character in *Sisters* can certainly be considered a woman-child, both sisters in this film engage in a nostalgic regression to adolescence when they decide to throw a huge house party in their childhood home, which their baby-boomer parents are putting up for sale. Film critic A.O. Scott notes that the film is an amalgam of the party movie and the “party-as-movie” genres (“Sisters”), as demonstrated by its indulgence in juvenile hijinks and debauchery reminiscent of films like *Old School* (2003) and *The Hangover* (2009).

them.³⁸ Indeed, Manohla Dargis argues that the film's "profoundly troglodytic view toward women" is largely indicative of a film industry that is equally backwards ("Mike and Dave"), pointing to the inevitable murkiness that comes with searching for feminist potential in Hollywood comedy films.

Rejecting Bourgeois Normativity: The Power of Failure in *Bridesmaids*

Although a Hollywood film directed by a man, *Bridesmaids* gains much of its feminist impulse from star and co-writer Kristin Wiig, who Smith argues is the film's "true auteur" (8).

³⁸ The idea of a woman acting like a bro is the premise of Apatow-directed *Trainwreck* (2015), where an early montage shows Amy's (Amy Schumer) revolving door of one-night stands, and rather literally, as the camera cuts from one man to the next, each one of Amy's sexual conquests shutting her apartment door behind him (she has a no sleepover rule). Amy's 'masculinity' is further reinforced by her job as a writer for a men's lifestyle magazine—the homophobia and misogyny of such an operation evidenced by story pitches such as "You're not gay, she's just boring." However, unlike *Mike and Dave Need Wedding Dates*, *Trainwreck* is reflexively clever, self-conscious of the Apatow genre it is appropriating as well as the gendered double standards that come with the territory. For example, after the one-night stand montage, Amy addresses the audience in voiceover, touching upon the double standards that inevitably arise with female promiscuity: "Don't judge me, fuckers," she says unabashedly. "I'm just a sexual girl. I am fine. I'm in control." Her self-assuredness is also demonstrated when her boyfriend (Bill Hader) confesses to her that her drinking, pot smoking, and the idea that she has had innumerable sexual partners makes him feel uncomfortable. She replies level-headedly that she understands and that he should find somebody who makes him feel safe—Amy is unapologetically herself.

While the film has its feminist moments, however, its ending points to its ultimate conservatism. To win her boyfriend back, Amy decides to change herself. She throws out all of her booze and pot-smoking paraphernalia and begins watching basketball (her boyfriend is the medic for the New York Knicks). Then, to finally convince her boyfriend of her metamorphosis, she performs a dance with the Knicks Cheerleading squad (ironically, she quips earlier that the sleazy dance moves of the squad is going to cause women to lose the vote). "I wanted to show you I'm not afraid to fail," Amy says to her boyfriend, after she tries to impress him with the dance routine. But Amy has been failing all along; she has been failing normative femininity, with her binge drinking, and pot smoking, and revolving door of sexual partners. It is only after she literally performs femininity as a sexy cheerleader that she has convinced her partner that she is a 'real' woman, an adult who wants to be in a long-term relationship. *Trainwreck* reinforces Bowler's argument that despite the shift in the romantic comedy genre to more liberal attitudes towards casual sex and the foregrounding of female sexual desire, many of these films are ultimately reactionary in their ideologies (189).

For Smith, the unique strength of the film lies in its oscillation between “farce and pathos,” the latter of which is credited to Wiig’s ability to surpass caricature and embrace the “ordinar[iness]” (8) of a woman who is floundering. Modleski also observes the pathos central to Wiig’s character, Annie. Recall in the literature review Modleski’s invocation of Juliana Schiesari’s theory of melancholia, which contends that “the category of melancholia has been used to accredit and privilege men’s losses, grief, and sorrows,” while women’s “losses and grief are frequently relegated to the decidedly unromantic category of depression” (120). Thus, applying Schiesari’s theory to Annie, Modleski asserts that “[u]nlike the slackers in bromances, who could not care less about not having jobs and whose self-deprecation, when it exists at all, is matter-of-factly enacted by the protagonists, Annie feels like a failure in all areas of her life and finds herself verging on a breakdown. Her sadness and lack of self-esteem mark her as a depressive rather than a melancholic” (140). Modleski alludes to the feminist implications of Annie’s sadness when she points out that Annie’s rage, “acted out in physical antics rare for women in Hollywood films” lies beneath her depressive exterior (140). But what if Annie’s sadness and particularly, her failure, were themselves productive? How does Annie’s failure work to challenge heteronormative ideals of maturity and success?

In the opening sequence of *Bridemaids*, we are witness to Annie’s failure in the form of humiliation. She has slept over at her “fuck buddy’s” place (a breach of terms in their friends-with-benefits agreement) and he tells her rather tactlessly that he “really [wants] her to leave.” As she approaches the security gate to exit, however, she discovers that it is locked; thus, instead of going back to ask her ‘friend’ for help, she attempts to climb over it. Midway through her climb, unfortunately, the gate begins to open, and Annie is stuck, straddling the gate awkwardly as a car

waiting to enter looks on at her—the walk, or, rather, climb, of shame indeed. “You hate yourself after you see him every time,” her best friend, Lillian (Maya Rudolph) tells her concernedly, referring to her casual relationship. “And it’s almost like you do it because you feel bad about yourself.”

Annie does feel like a failure—she has lost her bakery business as well as her boyfriend and business partner. To make matters worse, she is forced to take a job at a jewellery store primarily selling engagement rings, so that her status as a single woman in her late thirties, and thus her failure to meet the standards of heteronormative adulthood is constantly being thrown in her face.³⁹ She soon loses this job as well as her apartment, and has no choice but to move back

³⁹ Wiig plays a similar character in *Girl Most Likely* (2012). In this film, her character, Imogen, fakes a suicide attempt after her boyfriend dumps her and she is fired from her job. After being hospitalized and put under psychiatric watch, she is released under the condition that she go home with a loved one—in this case, her mother (Annette Bening). Imogen’s regression is also class-based, as she leaves her upwardly-mobile life in New York City to return to her mother’s house in the gaudy and unsophisticated Atlantic City. Imogen’s mother is the very embodiment of Atlantic City—with her tight, glittery clothing and platform shoes. Moreover, her impulsive, free-spirited personality makes her seem more adolescent than adult, which mirrors Imogen’s regression into adolescence—thus, Imogen is forced to wear her clothes from high school and befriends (and sleeps with) a much younger man.

In *The Skeleton Twins* (2014), Wiig also plays a woman-child of sorts, Maggie, whose reckless behaviour is paralleled with that of her twin brother, Milo (Bill Hader). After a suicide attempt, Milo comes to live with Maggie and her husband, and we see how both siblings are stuck in cycles of self-destruction: Maggie is having an affair with her scuba diving instructor and is secretly taking birth control pills behind her husband’s back, and Milo is hung up on an old flame who happens to be his former high school teacher. “We’re both fuck-ups,” Maggie says to her brother bluntly, emphasizing the film’s preoccupation with failure, but also how failure can challenge the monotony of heteronormativity.

Wiig plays an immature woman again in *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2015). Here, she portrays an alcoholic who works as a librarian during the day and engages in drug-fueled partying at night, acting more like a peer to her teenaged daughters than a maternal figure. Her emotional immaturity is mirrored by her boyfriend (Alexander Skarsgård), who has an affair with her 15-year-old daughter (Bel Powley). Taking place in San Francisco in 1976, the film examines how a teenage girl navigates adolescence surrounded by adults who act like children instead of role models.

in with her mother. Attempting to show Annie the silver lining to her bleak situation, her mother tells her reassuringly that the upside to hitting rock bottom is that you can only go up from there. But Annie does not want silver linings or words of encouragement. This is demonstrated when Nathan (Chris O'Dowd), the man she begins dating, surprises her with baking utensils and ingredients one morning, knowing that baking is Annie's true calling and that it used to bring her a lot of joy. Annie, however, does not welcome his positive gesture—she does not want (or is not ready) to move forward: “You don't know me...and you don't need to fix me,” she tells him angrily, before storming out the door. While some would view Annie's negativity as self-pitying and childish, her anger and bitterness are also sources of counter-hegemonic power. “[W]hile failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair,” Halberstam argues, “it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life” (*Failure* 3). By “toxic positivity” Halberstam is referring to the way in which “positive thinking” in North America is held up as a cure-all for everything from cancer to financial crises (*Failure* 3). As Barbara Ehrenreich argues, “If optimism is the key to material success and if you can achieve an optimistic outlook through the discipline of positive thinking, then there is no excuse for failure” (qtd. in Halberstam, *Failure* 3). Within the “cult of positiv[ity]” (Halbertam, *Failure* 4), success is then a matter of one's attitude instead of the material “structural conditions” that make it easier for some people to succeed over others (Halberstam, *Failure* 3). Annie's failure to meet the requirements of heteronormative adulthood and her feelings of anger and self-pity thus offer a refreshing antidote to the vapid and often patronizing “North American affliction” (Halberstam, *Failure* 3) of positive thinking.

Annie's negativity and her failure to fulfill normative ideals of womanhood also work to challenge the tenets of heteronormative maturity and reproductive futurism, specifically marriage. After Annie's outrageous behaviour under the influence of a sedative gets herself and the rest of the bridal party kicked off a plane to Vegas for Lillian's bachelorette weekend (another failure), Lillian decides to put her wealthy, event-planning friend, Helen (Rose Byrne), in charge of the bridal shower and all other wedding planning instead of Annie, who is the maid of honour. Although she is determined to make it up to Lillian for her bad behaviour, Annie is outraged when she sees that Helen has not only stolen her original idea of throwing a Paris-themed shower, but that she has also upstaged her (yet again) by surprising Lillian with a trip to Paris as her shower gift (Modleski 140). Unable to hold it together any longer, Annie snaps and yells at Lillian for not realizing how utterly ridiculous and ostentatious the event is— "an event she and Lillian once would have mocked" (Modleski 140). In her fit of rage, she runs outside to the backyard and punches her arm through a giant cookie with the names of the bride and groom written on it, before destroying it entirely. She then knocks over all of the dessert trays and begins throwing them into an extravagant chocolate fountain. Unable to push the large fountain over, she dips her arms into it and maniacally splashes chocolate everywhere. *New York Times* film critic Manohla Dargis writes that *Bridesmaids* is "a movie that rejoice[s] in messy female behaviour" ("Deflating"). Annie's temper tantrum is the literal embodiment of Dargis' point, demonstrating the political power of unruliness. Through her childish temper tantrum, Annie is both challenging and rebelling against the codes of bourgeois femininity and decorum. Moreover, her trashing of the bridal shower is symbolic of the film's rejection and subversion of adulthood and heteronormativity, and specifically marriage and the wedding industrial complex.

As Halberstam would put it, Annie is “failing well” (*Failure* 24), she is “mak[ing] a mess [and] fuck[ing] shit up” (*Failure* 110). Thus, she is helping to dismantle the tyranny of normativity.

The film’s derision of marriage and weddings is further demonstrated in the gross-out sequence at the bridal salon mentioned above. As Modleski argues, “That the one big raunch scene takes place in an ultrawhite and gleaming bridal salon is part of the film’s overall mocking of wedding rituals” (141). Similarly, Smith writes that *Bridesmaids* “dumps on...marriage” (8), and rather literally, describing the bridal salon scene as “pooping on matrimony” (9). While the film ends with Lillian’s wedding and Annie pairing up with Nathan, heteronormativity does not get the final word. The closing sequence—in which Annie, Lillian, and the rest of the bridal party sing along to the hired band, Wilson Phillips—is interrupted by an abrupt cut to a home video by Lillian’s sister-in-law, Megan (Melissa McCarthy). Addressing the camera, Megan informs us that we are about to watch her first sexual encounter with the air marshall she met on the plane to Vegas. Instead of showing us normative sex, however, Megan and her partner incorporate food into their encounter in a way that is not sexy or sensual, but grotesque.⁴⁰ Recalling the discussion of Rubin’s “sex hierarchy” in the previous chapter (see page 192, note 23), Megan and her partner’s sex practice is considered “abnormal” or queer because it incorporates “manufactured

⁴⁰ Modleski argues that Megan, “the classic unruly woman,” can be seen as falling “into the category of the grotesque,” in that she “exist[s] not to be looked at but to be laughed at” (141). However, Modleski asserts that “there is more to [Megan’s] character...[than] existing solely to be laughed at, McCarthy owns the role: she is...a grotesque with subjectivity” (142). McCarthy plays variations of the “unruly woman” in her films following *Bridesmaids*, such as *Identity Thief* (2013), *The Heat* (2013), *Tammy* (2014) and *The Boss* (2016), where she displays what has become her signature “wild and anarchic strain of humor” (Brody). The juvenility of many of her characters and her physical comedy certainly lend themselves to the woman-child camp. *Tammy* in particular is notable for its capture of failure. The eponymous character loses her car, her job, and her husband (Dargis, “When Life Offers Lemons”), and, like Annie in *Bridesmaids*, seems to be continually failing at life.

objects” (in this case, two large submarine sandwiches). The fact that it is Megan’s sex tape, and not Lillian’s wedding that we see last before the closing credits reinforces the film’s counter-hegemonic position against heteronormativity, and specifically the maturity marker of marriage. Moreover, the scene further points to the film’s appropriation of male gross-out humour, with McCarthy as the “fat chick” character typical of these films.

The Woman-Child in Dramedy (Comedy-Drama)

“Direction-less Female Brooklynite[s]”⁴¹: *Frances Ha* and *Obvious Child*

The “directionless” female leads of both *Frances Ha* (2012) and *Obvious Child* (2014) are indebted to a long tradition within indie cinema of featuring “slacker” protagonists. Indeed, Richard Linklater’s *Slacker* (1991) is seminal to this tradition, paving the way for other indie films of this persuasion in the 1990s, such as *Clerks* (1994), *Reality Bites* (1994), *Kicking and Screaming* (1995, discussed in the previous chapter), *Chasing Amy* (1997), and *The Big Lebowski* (1998) (Malecka abstract). The “slacker philosophy” (Stone 6) espoused by these films are bound up with the “Generation X” sensibility of their time, one that is similarly “cynical, indolent, and...anti-establishment” (Lee 18). Christina Lee (2010) demonstrates the linkages between slacker culture and the postmodern characteristics of Generation X in her analysis of Linklater’s film: “The grimy bars, sidewalks, and crowded diners have become the mobile classrooms for a generation that has lost faith in tradition and social truths...Lacking the

⁴¹ In his review for *Appropriate Behaviour* (2015) (a film that is not part of this chapter’s analysis because it falls outside of my methodological parameters), Diego Semerene argues that Desiree Akhavan’s film, as well as *Frances Ha* and *Obvious Child*, point to the emergence of a genre (or, I would agree, a sub-genre of the woman-child film) he calls the “direction-less female Brooklynite” (Semerene).

necessary cultural capital to effect direct change, words and simple actions are all the youths in *Slacker* have to structure days that are reduced to fleeting moments” (137-38).

In fact, the moment-by-moment pacing of *Slacker*, organized by an episodic structure bereft of a traditional cinematic narrative (Johnson 20) is congruent with the aimlessness of the film’s central characters. Commenting upon Linklater’s preoccupation with the temporal, Rob Stone (2013) argues that the characters in the director’s films “often inhabit unique time frames, where their experiences of the here-and-now struggle to match hand-me-down nostalgia for the been-and-gone...[they] exist in a suspended state of contemplation and possibility, moving tentatively if at all and always on their own terms” (2). The protracted sense of time structuring Linklater’s films is reminiscent of those by Jim Jarmusch, another household name of the American indie film movement of the 1980s and 1990s, and whose *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984) is a “clear influence” on *Slacker* (Stone 58). Like Linklater’s film, the majority of *Stranger Than Paradise* is “devoted to inaction: to characters sitting around, listening to music, or half-engaged in saggy, desultory exchange” (Suárez 31). Indeed, the “distended temporality” of Jarmusch’s film is in keeping with the slacker subjectivities of its inhabitants (Suárez 31).

Frances Ha and *Obvious Child* can be placed within this indie film tradition of slacker cinema, as each of the films’ respective female protagonists are wandering in a liminal state between adolescence and adulthood, both of them resistant, in their own ways, to the prospect of growing up. It is *Frances Ha* especially, however, that is most indebted to the slacker genre, in terms of both its formal organization and narrative content. Like *Slacker* and *Stranger Than Paradise*, *Frances Ha* is broken up into several narrative episodes, each one marked by Frances’ change of address, indicated by a title card. Moreover, similar to Linklater and Jarmusch’s films,

much of *Frances Ha* is “devoted to inaction,” filling time with random musings between characters about life, art, and culture, as well as moments of lingering contemplation, when the film seems suspended amidst Frances’ quiet reflection. The film certainly possesses the kind of drawn out, “here-and-now” temporality characteristic of the slacker film, one that bespeaks a philosophy of living one’s life according to one’s own timeline, and on one’s own terms.

The queerness of *Frances Ha* is established in its opening montage of joyous female bonding. We see Frances (Greta Gerwig) and her best friend and roommate, Sophie (Mickey Sumner), do everything together. They play fight in the park, perform as street buskers, cook, contemplate and knit, stick their heads out of neighbouring windows so they can talk to each other while smoking, play a board game, do laundry, drink beer, and finally go to sleep in the same bed. Although their relationship is strictly platonic—Sophie jokes that they’re “like a lesbian couple who don’t have sex anymore”—the film is unequivocal in conveying to us that the real love story here is the friendship between these two women.⁴² “Tell me the story of us,” Frances asks Sophie, as if she were talking to her lover. “Again?” Sophie replies; it is clear that this has become somewhat of a routine between the two of them. “Alright, Frances. *We* are going to take over the world,” Sophie tells her friend reassuringly. “You’ll be this awesomely bitchy publishing mogul,” Frances replies; “And you’ll be this famous modern dancer and I’ll publish a really expensive book about you...and we’ll co-own a vacation apartment in Paris,” Sophie continues. “And we’ll have lovers, and no children,” Frances asserts. Their homosocial fantasy

⁴² Peter Bradshaw (2013) of *The Guardian* calls the relationship between Frances and Sophie a “soromance,” a play on the term “bromance” (Bradshaw). Director Noah Baumbach also frames the women’s friendship as a romance through the style of the film. The black-and-white cinematography and the romantic score that plays when the two women are together pays homage to The French New Wave and the black-and-white films of Woody Allen (French).

of the future is reminiscent of Muñoz's concept of queer futurity. "Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present," Muñoz writes. "Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds" (1), he continues. Indeed, Frances and Sophie's future projections of themselves speak to this "mode of desiring," one that imagines a way of being that goes far beyond their present circumstances. Moreover, their rejection of reproductive futurism ("We'll have lovers and no children") reinforces their embrace of an "imaginative life schedule" (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 1); their adoption of queer temporality is first conveyed to us in the opening montage, when the two friends frolic among the streets of New York like millennial flâneurs, or when time seems suspended in their idling around their apartment.

Frances' utter disinterest in a heteronormative future is further conveyed when she half-heartedly agrees to move in with her boyfriend, but then is all too eager to give him the excuse that she can't because she has to stay with Sophie until the end of their lease. Sensing her genuine disinterest in moving to this next level of their relationship, her boyfriend tells her, "maybe this isn't working," and Frances, assuming this means that he wants to break up with her (he actually doesn't), appears completely unfazed and even relieved, mumbling "sorry," before grabbing her jacket to leave. Frances exists outside of normative temporality; she is shown to be repeatedly out of step with "chrononormativity," that is, "the use of time to organize individual human bodies towards maximum productivity" (Freeman 3). This is indicated primarily by her lingering and lagging—her proclivity to stay behind or stay still, instead of moving (or rushing)

forward: “Hey, sorry. I’m so slow...I have trouble leaving places,” she sheepishly tells her boss (the head of the dance company she is apprenticing for) when she is still dawdling around the dressing room after the company’s dance performance. On another occasion, Frances’ mother bangs on the door of the bathroom when Frances is taking a bath: “Frances, how much longer?” she implores. Both instances are metaphors for Frances’ self-imposed stagnation, her difficulty in letting go of her adolescent-like twenties, and thus her inability to move in tandem with a heteronormative trajectory of adulthood. For example, she becomes upset when Sophie brings her boyfriend, Patch (Patrick Heusinger), to her dance performance, hoping it would be just the two of them, like it was before. Moreover, she expresses disappointment that Sophie can only grab a “quick drink” with her (she and her boyfriend have to be up early the next day to meet his parents) instead of staying out all night, like they are accustomed to doing. Finally, when Sophie tells Frances that she actually loves Patch, Frances doesn’t want to believe her. Indeed, she doesn’t want to accept that her best friend is becoming an adult, or, rather, leading the kind of heteronormative life they have for so long vehemently rejected.

Frances is also separated from heteronormative conceptions of maturity and success through her failure. When she doesn’t get hired to dance in the Christmas show with her dance company, she is forced to take a series of odd jobs at her alma mater, Vassar, where she stays in a dorm like a college student. Moreover, while at Vassar, she seems to be constantly getting things wrong, whether it is showing up for a dance class she is not permitted to take, being stopped by a park official for having a cigarette in a no smoking zone, or being late for her shift in the information booth at the university. These events reinforce the way in which she is often out of sync with the rest of the world—that is, her status as an anachronism. Her asynchronous existence

is analogized in a modest dance piece she choreographs and exhibits at a small theatre: she deliberately has one dancer not follow the rest of the group, dancing on her own time, with her own choreography, much like Frances herself. “I like things that look like mistakes,” Frances discloses to her friend, Benji (Michael Zegen), after he tells her that he liked her dance piece. Frances embraces messiness and imperfection, she embraces failure, and, in doing so, not only finds inspiration for her art, but she also finds herself. As Halberstam writes, “[t]he queer art of failure...quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being” (*Failure* 88). At the end of the film, Frances writes her name on the label to be used for her new apartment’s directory buzzer. When her name doesn’t fit into the display box, she folds the end of the label, displaying “Frances Ha” instead of Frances Halladay. Although a small gesture, it effectively captures not only how Frances defies the confines of normativity, but also the way in which mistakes or inaccuracies inadvertently challenge the tyranny of perfection and the oppressiveness of (hetero)normative ideas of success. Thus, Halberstam asserts that “there is something powerful in being wrong, in losing, in failing, and that all our failures combined might just be enough, if we practice them well, to bring down the winner” (*Failure* 120).

Like Frances, Donna (Jenny Slate) in *Obvious Child* also appears to be drifting in a liminal state between adolescence and adulthood. Moreover, she is also a struggling artist (a stand-up comedian) who does not subscribe to normative definitions of femininity. The latter is established in the opening scene, during her stand-up routine, where she talks candidly about the impossibility for any woman to have immaculate underwear by end of the day. “Whatever, I have a human vagina,” she says into the microphone. She then moves on to talking about how she used to hold in her farts when she first began dating her boyfriend. Donna does not hide behind

culturally-imposed ideals of bourgeois femininity. She challenges gender norms by talking openly about subjects (bodily fluids and functions) that are usually reserved for male gross-out comedies, or, indeed, male stand-up comedy.⁴³

Donna's mother (Polly Draper), however, is not amused with Donna's chosen vocation. She laments to her daughter that she is wasting her high verbal SAT score on telling jokes about diarrhea. "You're almost 30 and you don't know how to do your taxes," her mother continues, emphasizing Donna's perceived failure to be an adult. Moreover, her mother becomes increasingly anxious about Donna's lack of direction: "I couldn't sleep last night, so I made a spread sheet of all of your expenses, job opportunities, and miscellaneous tasks that I think you should focus on," she says to her daughter, hoping that her A-type personality might rub off on her. But Donna, like Frances, is not ready to move forward; she has just been dumped by her unfaithful boyfriend and, to make matters worse, the bookstore she is working at for her day job is closing. The bookstore—nearly obsolete in an age where it no longer belongs—becomes a fitting metaphor for Donna's inability to keep in time with a heteronormative trajectory of maturity.

However, Donna's failure to conform to traditional standards of adulthood becomes a source of radical subjectivity and a politics of refusal that is ultimately empowering, akin to her rejection of normative femininity described above. Donna's feminist politics are further demonstrated in one of her stand-up routines, where she both satirizes and deconstructs the idea of being a normative adult woman. She burps into the microphone, and then remarks, "I [did that] because I'm an adult woman...I've always wanted to be [an adult]...I've always wanted to

⁴³ Stand-up comedians Sarah Silverman and Amy Schumer certainly do not shy away from vulgar subjects in their comedy, also challenging the conception that this kind of humour can only be performed by men.

have like a bra, and blouse, and a schedule, like where I could just be at my house and just be like, ‘Oh my God, I’m running late!’” With words such as “schedule” and “running late,” Donna mocks the narrative of “time panic” that encapsulates heteronormative female adulthood. The film also challenges the oppressiveness of normative temporality through its rejection of reproductive futurism. This is demonstrated most pointedly (and literally) in Donna’s decision to have an abortion when she becomes pregnant after a one-night stand. When coincidental circumstances bring Donna and the man she spent the night with, Max (Jake Lacy), together again, she plans to tell him about her pregnancy and her decision to have an abortion, over dinner. But in an instance of bad timing, Max points out an elderly couple that are sitting behind them in the restaurant, and remarks on how heartwarming it is to watch the old woman read the menu to her husband. “I can’t wait to be a grandpa,” he confesses to Donna, his hopes for heteronormative futurity discouraging her from telling him the truth. Instead of indulging in the romanticism of futurity, however, the film presents abortion in a way that is neither pathologizing nor condescendingly sentimental. In fact, during one of her stand-up routines, Donna discloses to the audience that she is planning on having an abortion the next day, on Valentine’s day (another jab at the mythology of heteronormativity); she imparts the information in a way that is jocular but also candid and sincere, normalizing a subject that is not often openly discussed.

Following the abortion, Donna goes to Max’s house, where they sit on his couch and decide to watch a movie. Being Valentine’s day, Max comments that there’s nothing but rom-coms on television. “I just hate that type of film,” Donna remarks. “I don’t connect to it.” Here, Donna’s statement becomes a self-reflexive commentary on the film’s subversion of romantic

comedy conventions, and, by extension, heteronormativity. Thus, while the film is called “Obvious Child” (named after the song by Paul Simon), it is certainly not invested in what Edelman refers to as “the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity”—that is, the figure of the Child who “is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism” (Edelman 21). But neither is Donna the embodiment of the film’s title; although she likes to engage in silly and sometimes juvenile humour, Donna proves to be a strong and capable young woman, albeit one who does not fit into normative conceptions of female maturity.

Going Backwards and “Growing Sideways”: *The Lifeguard* and *Laggies*⁴⁴

In *The Lifeguard* (2013), journalist Leigh London (Kristen Bell) covers a story about a young tiger who was shackled to a radiator in a New York City apartment and left to die. Strongly identifying with the helpless animal, Leigh realizes that she herself feels trapped and depressed in an adult life she no longer wants to lead: her editor (who also happens to be her lover) is taking neither her writing piece nor their relationship seriously, soon leaving her as an afterthought when he asks another woman to marry him. Feeling utterly disillusioned, Leigh decides to return to her hometown and move back in with her parents to find herself again. When her mother (Amy Madigan) asserts that she must “contribute” if she wants to stay at home, Leigh decides to return to her minimum-wage high school job of lifeguarding at a community pool. Thus begins Leigh’s backward slide into adolescence.

⁴⁴ While *Laggies* is considered a romantic comedy and not a comedy-drama, I decided to place it in this section because of its parallels with *Lifeguard*, and also because of how well it lends itself to the concepts of “sideways relations” and “growing sideways.”

Leigh's regression is foreshadowed in an establishing shot the next day in town, when the camera focuses on two teenage girls walking down the street looking at their smartphones, and then again, when a group of adolescent girls brush past Leigh and her friend, Todd (Martin Starr), outside of the gallery where Todd works. Soon, Leigh, Todd, and their friend Mel, (Mamie Gummer), a high school Vice Principal, are hanging out with a group of misfit teens and smoking pot with them in the woods. After Leigh stands up for the group of teenage boys when they are hassled by police, she earns their trust and begins to seem more adolescent herself, as if their youthful recklessness were contagious. Indeed, Leigh and her friends all begin to indulge in a nostalgic return to adolescence: driving wildly in a field with the radio cranked, smoking pot with the teens again, and then going for an after-hours swim at the pool where Leigh lifeguards.

Leigh becomes close with one of the teenagers, Jason (David Lambert), whose father is the head of maintenance at the pool. Unlike the adults around her, Jason sees through Leigh's self-righteous facade; this is demonstrated when they are walking in the woods and Jason tells Leigh that he wants to pursue something outside of college. Leigh responds, "you can't just drift," even though she herself is doing just that. Jason stops, looks Leigh right in the eye, and then, with adult-like insight, tells her that she "seem[s] really sad." Outside of her parents, Jason is the first person to notice Leigh's true unhappiness, perhaps because he himself is unhappy—he wants to leave town as soon as he has enough money and start a new life in Vermont. Thus, despite their significant age difference (Leigh is nearly twice Jason's age), Leigh and Jason appear to be on similar wavelengths, their connection ultimately leading to an affair. Their intergenerational relationship can be described as engaging in what Stockton calls "sideways relations," that is, "relations that grow along parallel lines rather than upward and

onward” (Halberstam, *Failure* 73). In the first chapter of *The Queer Child*, Stockton draws on Henry James’ *The Pupil* to show how the relationship between the grown homosexual and the proto-gay child in the novella “function[s] as a substitute lateral relation” for two individuals who are both “saddled by society’s dictates of delay” (53). In other words, the homosexual adult and the proto-queer child are connected through their shared experiences of delay: the child is delayed by a society that will not allow him to grow up “until [they] say it’s time” (Stockton 6), and the adult is understood to be delayed “in his own approach to normal couplehood,” that is, in a state of arrested development.⁴⁵ Thus, Stockton argues that the man and the boy bond over their shared “painful delay,” growing sideways through their mutual suspension (53).

Leigh and Jason also engage in sideways relations with each other, sharing the experience of delay: Leigh, in her words, is taking “time out of her [adult] life” and Jason feels stagnant in the small Connecticut town he so desperately wants to escape from. Moreover, both of them feel oppressed by normative expectations and trajectories of maturity, albeit in opposing ways. Leigh feels like a robot going through the motions in her adult life in New York, so she avoids her impending 30th birthday by moving back home and regressing to adolescence. In contrast, Jason feels weighed down by his adolescence; he has no interest in finishing high school or going to college, he just wants to be financially independent so that he can finally live life on his own terms. Despite their differences, Leigh and Jason are “side by side” in their arrested states, “find[ing] the promise of a love growing sideways, at least for a time” (Stockton 53).

⁴⁵ As discussed in Chapter One, homosexuality and immaturity were consistently linked in both medical and psychological discourses. As Stockton points out, the term “arrested development” “has often appeared to describe the supposed sexual immaturity of homosexuals: their presumed status as dangerous children, who remain children in part by failing to have their own” (22).

Leigh is quick to remind Jason, however, that he should not take his youth for granted: “I know you think this town is bad and you need to leave, but I don’t think you realize how privileged this experience is,” she says. Indeed, the oppressiveness of heteronormative adulthood is demonstrated in the story arc featuring Mel and her husband, John (Joshua Harto). They have been trying to get pregnant for six months, and both of them are becoming increasingly stressed. John deals with the anxiety by micro-managing Mel (he monitors her alcohol intake as if he were her parent), and Mel decides to escape the pressure of adulthood by hanging out with Leigh, Todd, and the teenagers. At one point, Mel tells Leigh, “I’m so jealous of you.” When Leigh asks why, Mel responds, “because you get to be lost.” Like Leigh, Mel is tired of going through the motions of adulthood; she is bored with trying to live up to the standards of heteronormative maturity. Her husband, however, is not amused with her dabbling in adolescence, and chastises her for her regressive behaviour: “Newsflash—time moves in one direction,” he tells her sternly. Then, referring to their plan to have a family, he continues: “You have to promise me that you’re going to do this, ok? That the two of us are going to do this together and you’re not going to be drinking and smoking...we’re moving forward like two adult people do, ok?” For John, to be an adult is to move with the forward march of “straight” time, there is no room for moving backwards, or growing sideways. In response to her husband’s myopic outlook, Mel, responds, “I just need a little more time.” Thus, as Stockton writes, “...our futures grow sideways whenever they can’t be envisioned *as* futures—due to forceful obstacles, forms of arrest, or our wish to be suspended in the amplitude of ‘more,’ as in simply wanting more time, more pleasure, more leisure...even more destruction...” (52). Both Mel and Leigh are not ready to envision their

futures as normative adults. They both want more time to not only have fun and make mistakes, but also to figure out what they truly want.

At one point in the film, John calls Leigh a “pervert,” referring to her affair with 16-year-old Jason. Drawing on Freud, Stockton argues that the idea of perversion can also lend itself to discussing sideways growth and delays. “Perverts are ‘diverts’ one could say, who *extend themselves* or *linger*,” Stockton writes. “That is to say, perversions are characteristic of people who either extend themselves beyond the normal ‘path’ of copulation or linger at midpoints along the way—and both of these diversions appear to be sideways movements or suspensions in relation to the road of copulation to be followed” (Stockton 25). Thus, Leigh does indeed linger in her return to adolescence, in an attempt to postpone the inevitable arrival of her 30th birthday. But her digression also works to challenge heteronormative conceptions of female adulthood; by regressing to adolescence, Leigh is challenging regulatory discourses that want to keep her on a linear trajectory of maturity.

Towards the end of the film, however, Leigh is forced to grow up, or, to put it another way, return to adulthood. While searching for her cat, Moose, in the woods, Leigh and Jason come across the body of his best friend, Matt (Alex Shaffer), hanging from a tree, in act of suicide. Leigh instinctually tells Jason not to look and covers his eyes, trying to shield him from the trauma. In this moment, she sees him as a child who needs to be protected, assuming a maternal role as she tries to console him. She must assume an adult role again when she offers to be the one who informs Matt’s mother of her son’s death—an extremely difficult undertaking. Then, in a final gesture of her recovered maturity, Leigh gives Jason the \$1000 she won for a journalism prize so that he can finally leave town and go to Vermont. When he asks her why she

would do this for him, she replies, “Because you know who you are, and what you need,” something that she is still trying to figure out as an adult. While the film ends with Leigh reclaiming her repressed adult self and heading back to New York, it does not give us the reassurance that she is on a predictable, linear trajectory of maturity. In fact, in the final shot of the film, Leigh stares directly at the camera, in close-up, disrupting the seamless forward movement of her car on the road. This gesture points to her unwillingness to simply move forward, to mechanically go through the motions of adulthood.

Unlike Leigh in *The Lifeguard*, who is a successful reporter when we are introduced to her, Megan (Keira Knightley) in *Laggies* (2014) is already drifting from the outset, holding up a large sign advertising her father’s accounting business on a street corner. While Megan went to graduate school to get her marriage and family therapist degree, she developed imposter syndrome when she realized she wasn’t able to relate to her adult clients. As a result, she decided to stop counselling and work for her father as a walking advertisement until she figures out her next career move. Megan describes herself as being in a “weird, in-between place...[where she is] kind of floating.”

Indeed, Megan’s fixedness in that liminal space between adolescence and adulthood is demonstrated by her sometimes immature and silly behaviour. For example, entering the restaurant for her friend Allison’s (Ellie Kemper) bachelorette party, she childishly pretends to twist the nipples of a Buddha statue, making juvenile screeching noises. Moreover, during a dull bachelorette party game, she makes crass jokes which inadvertently insult the bride-to-be. While one may feel inclined to pity Megan and her inability to fit in with her ‘adult’ friends, the film astutely demonstrates that it is the heteronormative adult world that is truly shame-inducing.

Akin to *Bridesmaids*, bourgeois normativity and marriage in particular, is satirized and mocked in *Laggies*; it is exposed as both contrived and mawkishly sentimental. This is indicated most pointedly at Allison's wedding, when she and her husband exchange embarrassingly saccharine wedding vows ("I promise to be your baby's breath when we wake each morning" is one of such gems) and then, for their first dance, perform a pretentious, modern-style number to insufferable adult-contemporary music. Here, marriage is framed as both painfully boring and affected. Moreover, the film further demystifies the sacredness of marriage when Megan spots her father in a tryst with another woman at the wedding, immediately following her boyfriend Anthony's (Mark Webber) sudden marriage proposal. Thus, these events establish the film's critical and suspicious stance towards heteronormativity and reproductive futurism.

Attempting to recover from the shock of both her father's indiscretion as well as her boyfriend's unexpected proposal, Megan flees the wedding reception and drives to the nearest liquor store. Outside, a group of teens approach her and ask if she would be willing to buy them alcohol. She complies and ends up hanging out with the teens, even participating in the very adolescent activity of toilet-papering a tree on private property. Megan seems comfortable and free to be herself around the teenagers, confiding in them about how she doesn't feel like she is on the same wavelength as her adult friends: "Maybe actually, they're the ones that are telling the jokes and I'm the one that's missing them," she laments. In keeping with the film's framing of marriage as contrived and superficial, it also presents adulthood as an easily-imitated facade. Hence, a couple of days after the wedding, one of the teenagers, Annika (Chloë Grace Moretz) calls Megan and asks her if she could do her a favour and pretend to be her mother for a meeting with the high school guidance counsellor. Megan agrees, and quickly puts up her hair and wraps

her scarf into a sophisticated shawl—her outward appearance being enough to pass as Annika’s parent. But while Megan can look like an adult, she is in no way prepared to be one (in a heteronormative sense, that is). Thus, in an attempt to postpone her impending marriage to Anthony (he proposes that they elope to Vegas), Megan asks Annika if she can “lay low” at her house for a week, since she has already lied to Anthony that she is going to a week-long personal development seminar. Anthony is overjoyed when he thinks that Megan is taking steps towards becoming more self-actualized; it is clear that he has bought into the self-help/self-improvement discourses that are central to bourgeois, neoliberal culture, something that the film also openly mocks (Anthony’s excitement over what “visualization animal” Megan will be assigned at the seminar being a case in point).

Megan continues her nostalgic slide back into adolescence while staying with Annika. She does Annika’s makeup, and then they go to a high school house party, where Megan engages in the risky, adolescent activity of D.I.Y. piercing a boy’s ear. Megan’s friendship with Annika can also be constituted as “sideways relations,” as she becomes “side by side” or parallel with Annika through her “revers[ion] to a teenage life,” as Annika’s father puts it. “It[‘s] nice to hang out with somebody who cut[s] me some slack for a change,” Megan says, referring to how her friendship with the teenager allows her to just be herself, at her own pace, without the judgement and pressure of her adult friends. Moreover, like Leigh and Jason in *The Lifeguard*, Megan and Annika are connected through their shared experience of delay. While Megan is staying with Annika, she is deferring her impending marriage, and thus heteronormative maturity by procrastinating in a second adolescence. Annika is “delayed” by virtue of the fact that she is a

16-year-old girl who is not yet allowed to be an adult; she still lives under her father's roof and must abide by his rules.

While it would seem that Megan is simply wasting time, however, she also grows through her delay. As Stockton argues, “[s]ideways growth can be seen in the Wildean embrace of wasting time, which also sounds like unproductive expenditure” (243). Megan develops a sense of purpose by spending time with Annika. She becomes a kind of parental figure to her, but from sideways. Thus, instead of helping Annika from a top-down position of authority, Megan mentors Annika as an older and wiser friend. For example, she drives Annika to see her estranged mother and accompanies her during the visit. She also gives Annika advice about dating and relationships.

Like Megan, Megan's father, Craig (Sam Rockwell), also has a youthful spirit. Indeed, Rockwell reprises his role as the likable, witty man-child from 2013's *The Way Way Back*. Moreover, he empathizes with Megan's plight of finding her place in adulthood: “I never anticipated still having to find a place where I'd fit in by the time I was an adult either,” he confesses. “I thought you automatically got one once you had a job and a family. But it's just you, alone.” Here, Craig demythologizes the belief that superficial markers of maturity automatically grant you a sense of place or self. Furthermore, consistent with its demonstration of heteronormative coupledness as orchestrated and contrived, the film presents the romance that develops between Craig and Megan as organic and unforced, arising from a friendship between two people who don't feel like they fit in with the normative adult world. Thus, Megan and Craig bond through their shared embrace of childishness. In fact, their bonding in “play” is reminiscent of the 1930s screwball comedy, where “the companionate fun and friendship of [play]” is the

means of unifying the couple (Glitre 57). This is especially conveyed when they “sneak out” like a couple of teenagers to go for a drink, stealthily jumping over the fence so that the real teenagers (Annika and her friend) inside the house won’t notice. After their outing, they playfully sneak back into the house and have sex in the basement, again, as if they were adolescents.

Similar to Leigh in *Lifeguard*, Megan accepts the responsibility of being an ‘adult’ towards the end of the film, when Anika and her friends get into a car accident as a result of Anika’s friend, Brandon, driving drunk. As the only adult present, Megan takes the blame when the police arrive, and is temporarily arrested. While the film is conservative in that Megan’s new-found maturity and sense of self is framed by her entering into a relationship with Craig, their reconciliation is, again, based on a shared enjoyment of being playful and jocular: Megan leaves an interactive note attached to a box of wine on Craig’s doorstep, asking him to check “yes” or “no” in terms of whether or not he wants to try and make things work between the two of them. Earlier on, Megan tells Anthony that she can’t marry him and that she’s “dropping out” of their group of friends, unable to be part of a group whose only connection is that they are all meeting the same markers of maturity (marriage, having children, etc.). Thus, although the film does not wholly reject heteronormativity, it demonstrates that adulthood goes beyond simply checking milestones off a list, that being an adult does not mean one has to relinquish their adolescent spirit.

The Thirty-Something and Single Woman-Child: *Young Adult*

While television shows such as *Sex and the City* and pop songs like Beyoncé’s “Single Ladies” bespeak a culture that “repudiates the shame of being single and sexually active in

defiance of the bourgeois codes that used to be demanded of respectable women” (Arthurs 43), the single woman is nevertheless marked as abject and “coded as desperate” in her failure of heteronormative maturity (Negra 61). Negra points to Bridget Jones as “the pioneering figure of the new pathetic single woman,” a stereotype that would generate countless reality television programs which operated on the assumption that “single...women’s lives are empty, deficient, or not yet fully underway” (Negra 61). Indeed, comedian Margaret Cho discusses the abject status of the older single woman in her reflection on the spinster character, Iona (Annie Potts), in *Pretty in Pink* (1986):

She wears thrift store clothes and works at a record store, well beyond her youth, in a futile attempt to deny the inevitable, the fact that she must get married in order to move on, like the unfortunate ghosts of the unjustly murdered and unavenged spirits of the dead that must be shown the light, the portal to the other side, so that they might be guided to the afterworld and be released from their bondage here on earth. (qtd. in McCallum and Tuhkanen 7)

Here, the single woman becomes synonymous with death: her failure to participate in reproductive futurism (McCallum and Tuhkanen 7) denying her visibility and even subjectivity itself.

Screenwriter Diablo Cody’s *Young Adult* (2011)⁴⁶ seems to be self-reflexively aware of this culture of shame that surrounds the single woman, as its protagonist, Mavis (Charlize Theron), certainly fulfills the popular conception of the 30-something unmarried female as sad

⁴⁶ Cody continues her theme of the emotionally immature female in *Ricki and the Flash* (2015), starring Meryl Streep. In this film, Streep plays a 60-something musician who abandoned her family earlier in life to pursue her dreams of becoming a rock star. As it turns out, Ricki is not as successful as she wanted to be, playing in small bars and working as a cashier during the day.

and pathetic. In his review of the film, A.O. Scott writes that *Young Adult* “revels in the punitive spectacle of Mavis’s humiliation” (“Once a Prom Queen”), and indeed, it is difficult not to cringe at Mavis’s painfully delusional behaviour. But there is something else at work in these moments of embarrassment. As Sally Munt argues, “[s]hame is a force that acts upon the self, constituting social subjects who are marked and shaped by its interpellating propensities...We know from Foucault that where there is power there is also resistance, and in that vein shame is also *productive*, in socially unpredictable ways” (203). Hence, born out of Mavis’ shame and humiliation is the film’s defiance of heteronormativity, and its adamant refusal to be complacent in its hegemony.

The film’s resistance against heteronormativity is expressed through Mavis’ deep disdain for marriage and, especially, babies. When she gets a “Look Who’s Arrived” email from her high school boyfriend, Buddy (Patrick Wilson), with a picture of his new baby attached, Mavis scrutinizes the picture with subtle contempt and then decides to print it out. With little ink left in her printer, however, the picture of the baby comes out somewhat distorted, a small detail that reinforces the film’s larger project of deconstructing reproductive futurism and the figure of the immaculate Child at its core. The film’s devaluation of the Child as a “universalized subject” that controls and constitutes political discourse in the name of futurity (Edelman 11) is demonstrated in an exchange Mavis has with Matt (Patton Oswalt), an old classmate of hers. Wanting to dissuade her from trying to break up Buddy’s marriage, Matt reminds Mavis that “Buddy Slade has a life!” But Mavis is unconvinced, and obnoxiously yells back that “Buddy doesn’t have a life, he has a baby, and babies are boring!” Thus, Mavis’ remark challenges the ideology of children as the purpose of life, as the “telos of the social order” that ensures the hegemony of

heteronormativity (Edelman 21). “Can you imagine still living in Mercury? Trapped with a wife, and a kid, and some crappy job?” Mavis says scornfully to her friend, Vicki (Hettiene Park), referring to Buddy’s life in her old home town in Minnesota. “It’s like he’s a hostage,” Mavis continues, her comments conveying the idea that heteronormative adulthood is repressive and prison-like. In fact, later on, when Mavis’ delusion that Buddy is in love with her reaches near-psychotic heights, she tells Buddy that they can “beat this together,” as if his life as a family man were a deadly disease.

The film’s assault on heteronormative adulthood also extends to Mavis’ arrested development. When we are introduced to her, she is passed out, face down on her bed, surrounded by several empty liquor bottles. Rolling out of bed, she stumbles to the refrigerator and begins to chug a two-litre bottle of Diet Coke like a college student, presumably for her hangover. Alcoholism or destructive heavy drinking is often associated with the woman-child, as evidenced by films such as *Smashed* (2012), *Preggoland* (2014), and *Happy Christmas* (2014), all of which feature immature women who have varying degrees of a drinking problem.⁴⁷ Mavis is what one would call a “functioning alcoholic” (Scott, “Once a Prom Queen”), although this adjective seems questionable as we witness her increasingly delusional behaviour. Mavis’ emotional immaturity is demonstrated by her “pathological inability to let go of the past” (Scott, “Once a Prom Queen”). This is first conveyed to us when she sets off on her road trip to Mercury

⁴⁷ In *Smashed* (2012), Kate (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) and her husband, Charlie (Aaron Paul) are infantilized through their shared alcoholism. Their entire relationship revolves around binge drinking and the reckless play that comes along with it. Thus, the couple live their lives from impulse to impulse, like children; they don’t understand what it means to have limits. In a sense, their dangerous, self-destructive behaviour speaks to Edelman’s idea of living life in a way that negates futurity. When Kate decides to take steps to become sober (that is, a mature adult) however, her husband becomes increasingly resentful of her, as she is breaking the cycle of their codependent relationship. Indeed, immaturity loves company.

(to win Buddy back), and plays, on repeat, a song on a mixed tape presumably given to her by Buddy in high school. Her playing of the song over and over again in her car becomes a metaphor for her emotional stagnation, her incapacity to move forward from her adolescence. Indeed, even her job as a writer for a Young Adult (“Y.A. in industry speak”) book series keeps her tied to the teenage world. In fact, Mavis gets the majority of her writing material by eavesdropping on teenagers and young adults, often poaching their dialogue word-for-word. This appropriated dialogue is eventually used by Mavis in an exchange with Buddy, indicating how the boundaries between fantasy and reality have become increasingly blurred for her: “You’re my sun, my moon, and my stars,” she says to Buddy (mistakenly believing there is still something between them), a line that she had lifted earlier from a conversation she overheard between two teenage girls.

While one might pity Mavis’ pathetically delusional behaviour, the film makes it clear that it is the pressures of heteronormativity, its insistence on the “rigid sameness of identity” (Edelman 21), that may be partly to blame for her madness. The dark underside of heteronormativity is demonstrated by Matt’s story. He discloses to Mavis that he is permanently disabled as a result of being brutally beaten by jocks in high school who thought he was gay: “Those jocks...you used to blow during lunch, they shattered my legs, bashed in my brains, mangled my cock...then they left me for dead,” he tells her. The jocks that bludgeoned Matt are a product of “bro culture,” what Kimmel refers to when he discusses “‘The Guy Code,’ the collection of attitudes, values, and traits that together composes what it means to be a [heterosexual] man” (45). Kimmel explains that proving one’s masculinity according to this code is inextricably linked to homophobia: “Homophobia—the fear that people might *misperceive* you

as gay—is the animating fear of American guys’ masculinity” (49), he writes. “The single cardinal rule of manhood, the one from which all other characteristics—wealth, power, status, strength, physicality—are derived is to offer constant proof that you are not gay,” Kimmel argues (49). Thus, the violence done on to Matt is, ultimately, the violence of heteronormativity, and the fear of difference (that is, queerness) that it thrives upon.

The tyranny of heteronormativity is further demonstrated near the end of the film, when Mavis goes to Buddy and his wife Beth’s (Elizabeth Reaser) baby naming ceremony at their house. Feeling hurt and humiliated by Buddy’s rejection of her and thus having her delusional fantasy shattered, Mavis bitterly walks out to the front yard, drink in hand (she has already downed a few glasses of Maker’s Mark), where people have gathered. When Beth accidentally bumps into Mavis (although it looks like Mavis actually bumps into her on purpose), and spills sangria all over Mavis’ white silk blouse, Mavis snaps. “Fuck you! You fucking bitch!” she screams, becoming increasingly hysterical. Indeed, it is difficult not to see in her frightening instability traces of Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction* (1987), the iconic mad single woman. While Mavis is not boiling pet rabbits or threatening to kill Buddy and his family, however, she is nevertheless pathologized as the unhinged single woman.⁴⁸ One wonders what people are threatened by more: the fact that she is mentally ill or that she is an unmarried woman in her late thirties. The idea that she is both of these things makes her doubly abject. We see it in the way the other party attendees look at her—a mixture of pity and contempt—and we see it in the dark

⁴⁸ More than any other film discussed here, *Young Adult* definitely points to the double standard at play when comparing representations of male immaturity versus female immaturity. However, given the film’s satirical tone as a dark comedy, Mavis’ instability can be read as a commentary upon how mainstream society views the older, single woman as abject and “crazy.” Thus, as mentioned above, Mavis’ mental illness is, perhaps, largely a result of the pressures put on women in heteronormative culture.

red/purple stain on her blouse, like a scarlet letter marking her alterity. Continuing her public display of humiliation, Mavis resentfully announces to everyone that she could have had this exact same party (the baby naming ceremony) years ago:

Yeah, Buddy got me pregnant, at 20. And we were gonna keep it. We were gonna have a little baby, and a little naming party...and all of that. And then twelve weeks into it, well, I had Buddy's miscarriage...You know maybe, if things were just a little bit more hospitable down south in my broken body, Buddy and I would be here right now, with a teenager, and probably even more kids...

Mavis' forthright confession touches upon her failure of the heterosexual imperative, and thus her failure as an adult woman. Thus, Negra reminds us that motherhood is often "equate[d] with full womanhood" in contemporary culture (63). She further argues that the "social currency of motherhood" (Negra 68) is largely dependent upon the media's continued portrayal of "motherhood as salvation" (65): "In a range of films and television programs, in journalism, and in advertising, motherhood redeems, it transforms, it enriches, it elevates," she

writes (Negra 65).⁴⁹ With her “broken body” and mental instability, Mavis is spared this so-called transformational experience, but neither she, nor the film, wants her to be transformed. As Scott elucidates, the film “systematically demolishes a china shop full of shopworn sentimental touchstones...[including] the capacity of human beings to change, learn, and grow” (“Once a Prom Queen”). Hence, leaving the party in utter devastation, Mavis goes over to Matt’s house to seek comfort. Like Matt, Mavis has also become a social reject, and the two of them embrace in a shared acknowledgement of how it feels to be a misfit, ultimately sleeping together. The next morning, however, Mavis is back to her old narcissistic ways, indulging in Matt’s sister’s admiration of her as the big city girl who got out of their small town. Thus, while Mavis is still the emotionally immature woman we were introduced to at the start of the film, there is something powerful about her failure to conform to acceptable standards of mature femininity. In this sense, she is practicing a feminist politics that Halberstam refers to as “shadow feminisms,” that is, a form of feminism that embraces “negativity and negation” (*Failure* 129) instead of the “positivity [and] reform” associated

⁴⁹ The “social currency of motherhood” is the central theme of *Preggoland* (2014), where 35-year-old Ruth (Sonja Bennett) pretends to be pregnant in order to fit in with her friends as well as society at large. Ruth realizes how differently people treat her when they think that she is pregnant; as a pregnant woman, she possesses the cultural capital of heteronormativity, something that she lacks as a grown woman still living at home and engaging in an adolescent lifestyle. Indeed, the film points to the cultural superiority of the pregnant woman versus the single woman in contemporary culture. As Negra argues, “[i]n contrast to the time-beset single woman, the pregnant woman is often endowed with cultural permission to slow down and savor time. In a mainstream popular culture that frequently equates motherhood with full womanhood, pregnancy becomes ‘exemplary time’ when women look, feel, and are their best” (63). Thus, while Ruth is pathologized by her friends and family for “slow[ing] down” in her arrested adolescence, “taking her time” as a pregnant woman is allowed, and even encouraged. A similar theme is explored in *Smashed*, discussed above. Kate pretends to be pregnant after her first grade students witness her vomit into a garbage can during class. When a precocious student asks if she might be pregnant, Kate replies yes, as morning sickness is much more acceptable than being sick as a result of alcoholism.

with traditional conceptions of feminism (*Failure* 4). While Mavis would probably not self-identify as a feminist, her failure to conform to patriarchal norms of “feminine success” (Halberstam, *Failure* 4) (marriage and motherhood) certainly bespeaks a feminist philosophy.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, female immaturity and arrested development is structured by contradiction in our culture. While women are pathologized for not living their lives according to normative trajectories of maturity (Negra 61), they are simultaneously expected to stay youthful and girlish (Negra 73); indeed, the eroticization of girlish femininity has been one of Hollywood’s predominant fixations since the emergence of cinema itself (Vickers 55). When examining representations of female immaturity, it is almost impossible not to notice the significant double standards at play when we compare these representations to their male counterparts (Duca). Lauren Duca makes the argument that while the man-child has garnered acceptability as a stereotype in popular culture, the woman-child is often presented as unlikeable and deeply defected. While I do agree that it is imperative to acknowledge these double standards, especially in a world in which misogyny is so naturalized it often goes unnoticed, I believe it is equally important to focus on how the woman-child has agency, how her immaturity can be productive in its challenging of heteronormativity. The likability of these women is peripheral to how their refusal to conform to acceptable standards of maturity constructs a politics that is both feminist and queer. Thus, whether engaging in a temporality outside of the heteronormative life cycle (Halberstam, *Queer Time*), being failures in world where success is synonymous with heteronormativity (Halberstam, *Failure*), imagining other futures outside of “straight time” (Muñoz), or growing

sideways in stuntedness (Stockton), the women that populate the films discussed here demonstrate the power of their so-called immaturity. Moreover, in a culture that wants them to be simultaneously grown up and girlish, these women embody and practice immaturity and arrested development on their own terms, removing the stigma of these labels. In fact, they demonstrate that these labels are merely that—labels—and that their queer subjectivities and practices move beyond the oppressive confines of categorization and classification.

Conclusion

“I was never going to become anything but myself...
I was of the clan of Peter Pan and we did not grow up.”
- Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (2010)

The defiant refusal to grow up—that is, to acquiesce to (hetero)normative adulthood—is encapsulated in the musical number, “I Won’t Grow Up” from the *Peter Pan* musical (1960) starring Mary Martin in the title role. The scene begins with Martin parodying adult masculinity by wearing a top hat and telling the other boys in a stern, paternal voice, “a little respect there for your father!” Repeat after me!” Throwing the hat to the ground, as if to reject the masquerade of paternal authority, she walks jauntily in front of the boys who follow behind her: “I won’t grow up!” she sings, with the chorus of boys repeating after her. “I’ll never grow up/never grow up/never grow up/not me!” she then cries triumphantly, punctuating the end of the first verse. Here, the old-fashioned school lesson, in which the students must repeat the ideas given to them by the teacher, is playfully reworked; hence, instead of reciting multiplication tables or grammar rules—knowledge which is intended to prepare them for their future (“Just to learn to be a parrot/And recite a silly rule”)—the boys reject the logic of reproductive futurism by repeating the dictum, “I won’t grow up!” Indeed, if the figure of the child represents “the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity” (Edelman 21), then Peter and the other children ultimately repudiate this “compulsory narrative” (Edelman 21). As Stacy Wolf (1997) argues, “*Peter Pan* is an explicit rejection of heterosexuality. If the play equates growing up with becoming heterosexual, then Peter’s not wanting to grow up is precisely not wanting to be(come) heterosexual...He loves Never Never Land, the place of non-heterosexual homosociality” (507). Wolf explains that

Peter's rejection of heteronormativity is further consolidated by the fact that he is being played by a woman, Martin (507), who inflects a butch queerness into the role (500).

"Never grow up" as a declaration of refusal and resistance is at the crux of this dissertation, which has sought to demonstrate how immaturity can be a powerful form of subjectivity, one that challenges the "rigid sameness of identity" (Edelman) prescribed by heteronormativity in our culture. It is in this way that immaturity is, following Halberstam, a queer "way of being in the world" (*Failure* 2, 23). As I have repeatedly stated in this project, we must also be careful, however, not to view immaturity *tout court* as a site of progressive resistance (Halberstam, *In A Queer Time* 175); thus, the "culture of immaturity" that is central to homosocial bonding amongst groups of men is often one that is also "accompanied by high degrees of misogyny and homophobia" (Halberstam, *In A Queer Time* 175). As I write this, the issue of sexual assault has surfaced as a critical issue in the United States, one that is spreading like an epidemic across the country; every day, it seems, another powerful man in the entertainment, media, or business industry is revealed to be a perpetrator of sexual assault or harassment, the victims in the majority of these cases being women. That this wave of allegations has arisen during the Donald Trump presidency is hardly a coincidence (White). Indeed, just over a year ago at the tail end of his campaign, Trump himself was accused of sexually assaulting several women; it was also around this time that *The Washington Post* uncovered audio recordings of Trump boasting about how he gropes and kisses women, simply because he can. (White). While the relationship between Trump's abominable behaviour and that of the high-profile men involved in the current scandal is not one of cause-and-effect, one undoubtedly "set the stage" for the other (White). As Gillian B. White of *The Atlantic* asserts, "it's impossible to

contextualize the growing public outcry over sexual assault without considering the short distance, and largely unresolved tension, between Trump's 'you can do anything' attitude toward women and his subsequent victory over a female candidate."

I chose to include the above example because I think that it provides an effective and timely case study of the toxic potential of male immaturity. Recall Kimmel's conception of "Guyland," that "liminal undefined time span between adolescence and adulthood" that young men may inhabit indefinitely; it also constitutes the homosocial time-space in which men hang out with each other, free from the "sober responsibilities of adulthood" (13). While the space of Guyland may seem innocuous, Kimmel argues that its cultural dynamics of "entitlement," "silence" and "protection" reinforce and reproduce both ideological and material violence (59), most pointedly sexual violence, and the misogynistic rape culture that underpins it. The current epidemic of sexual assault allegations perfectly illustrates these cultural dynamics: powerful men feel entitled to do as they please, and they are not held accountable for their actions because of the culture of silence and protection that surrounds them—that is, a culture of fear and complacency. For example, those in the industry who stayed silent and protected Harvey Weinstein, despite their knowledge of his sexual misconduct. This culture of silence and protection characterizes the "boys club" of Hollywood, and, undoubtedly, the boys club of the White House, where men act like children safeguarding their sacred tree house. Indeed, Trump has become the ultimate man-child of our culture; Charles M. Blow of *The New York Times* describes him as a "[t]erroristic [m]an-[t]oddler...who knows nearly nothing, hurls insults, has simplistic solutions for complex problems and is quick to throw a tantrum" (Blow). Trump is a

constant reminder of how immaturity can be both toxic and dangerous. Thus, it is frightening to think that an individual with the social and emotional intelligence of a child is the head of state.

The above case studies (*Peter Pan* being the first one, and the dangers of the male culture of immaturity being the other) testify to what I have been arguing throughout—namely, that immaturity occupies a complex and contradictory position in our culture. While immaturity can function as a site of resistance to heteronormativity, it can also reinforce and reproduce these very structures. Thus, the ubiquity of the man-child in popular culture has normalized immaturity to such an extent that male immaturity has in many ways become another form of heteronormativity.

Review of Main Chapters

The contradictory character of immaturity is established in the first chapter, where I argue that male immaturity in the postwar era is characterized by a fear/desire dynamic, one that was consolidated through the interlocking discourses of communism, momism, and homophobia. In this way, while male immaturity (specifically the mama's boy) was pathologized through its connections to homosexuality and communism, it was also desired through its embodiment of a youthful, and rebellious masculinity.

After the first chapter establishes the historical context of male immaturity, the second chapter focuses on the contemporary figure of the boy-man or man-child. Tracing the various incarnations of the boy-man in contemporary comedy and dramedy films, I demonstrate (through theories of queer temporality) that while these characters challenge heteronormativity through

their rejection of normative regimes of time, many of them ironically conform to these dominant structures by the end of the film.

The third and final chapter focuses on the female counterpart to the immature male, the woman-child. While I acknowledge the double standards at play when comparing this figure to her male equivalent, I argue that it is more productive to focus on how the woman-child gains agency and power through her refusal of heteronormative adulthood. Through close readings of several incarnations of the woman-child in comedy and comedy-drama films, I demonstrate how immature female subjects—whether through their failure (Halberstam), their rejection of “reproductive futurism” (Edelman), or their “sideways” growth (Stockton)—are ultimately empowered.

Contribution

Male immaturity has been the subject of two book-length works: *Men to Boys: The Making of Modern Immaturity* (2008) by Gary Cross, and *I Won't Grow Up! The Comic Man-Child in Film from 1901 to the Present* (2016) by Anthony Balducci. The former is a socio-historical analysis of male immaturity that traces the emergence of the American boy-man across three generations, while the latter examines the cinematic archetype of the man-child in American film from the silent era to the present day. While Balducci's book is comprehensive in scope, it lacks both theoretical focus and academic rigour (it is published by McFarland, which is targeted towards a more non-academic readership). This dissertation fills this gap through a scholarly inquiry into the immature cinematic male, where I examine both the origins of contemporary male immaturity in the postwar era (linking this historical analysis to films of the

period), as well as provide a thorough study of the contemporary cinematic boy-man, rooting this latter analysis in theories of queer temporality (specifically those by Edelman and Freeman).

In contrast to male immaturity, there is a paucity of research on female immaturity within the fields of cultural studies and film studies; indeed, extensive research on this subject is virtually non-existent. While Halberstam alludes to female immaturity in her concept of “shadow feminisms”—that is, alternative feminist subjectivities and practices whose emphasis on “negativity [and] rejection” challenge patriarchal norms of success (*Failure* 4)—her work more generally encompasses immaturity as integral to queer identities and subcultures, or as a facet of failure. The idea of a feminine culture of immaturity is discussed by journalists Lauren Duca and Hermione Hoby (see Chapter 3), as well as Graham Vickers, whose *Chasing Lolita* (while not published by a scholarly press), is a comprehensive study on the culture of childish femininity surrounding and predating Nabokov’s novel (see literature review). Academic writing on the issue of female immaturity and culture, however, is scarce. Negra’s concept of the single woman as a “temporal failure” certainly encompasses the idea of immaturity, and her edited book with Tasker on postfeminism discusses the “girling of femininity” (see literature review), but neither works are focused primarily on immaturity proper. Similarly, in the realm of film studies, there is little research pertaining to this topic. Modleski alludes to female immaturity, or the figure of the woman-child in her discussion of *Bridesmaids* in a coda to her article (see literature review), and Kimberly Turner invokes Edelman’s *No Future* in an essay that discusses how the characters of the HBO series *Girls* are queer by virtue of their rejection of futurity, and thus through their childishness (see methodology section). I am indebted to Turner in my own framing of immaturity through queer theory. While Balducci includes a chapter on the childish cinematic

woman in his book on her male counterpart, there is no real analysis present, as the chapter is more of a surface-level survey of female immaturity in film, with an over-reliance on plot summaries. Indeed, an extensive study on female immaturity in film does not yet exist.

My chapter on female immaturity in film is an important step in filling this above lacuna, as it provides an in-depth examination of the woman-child in contemporary comedy and dramedy films, anchoring its analyses in theories of queer temporality. My application of Halberstam's concept of queer failure, and Stockton's theory of growing sideways represent an especially unique contribution, as these theories have not yet been invoked in relation to studies on female immaturity in cinema. Overall, this chapter gives visibility to the idea of immature femininity, which is often obscured by the ubiquity of male immaturity in our culture. Moreover, I demonstrate that the woman-child is not just an empty imitation of her male counterpart; on the contrary, she challenges the tyranny of heteronormativity through a feminist resistance to adulthood.

Recommendations for future research

The initial plan for this project included a chapter on television; however, I ultimately decided to exclude this section, as covering both male and female immaturity in cinema had already resulted in a work that was quite comprehensive, and extending my research to include a medium as complex and significant as television would have proven to be unrealistic. I still plan to focus on television in a future project, specifically immature women on television. As I have discovered through this project, immature (heterosexual) masculinity's connections to misogynistic and queer-phobic ideologies renders it rather limited in its potential to challenge or

resist oppressive norms. Indeed, as I have previously discussed, immature masculinity is, in some ways, already the norm (see Cross). Thus, I believe that a focus on immature femininity on television would be more productive in terms of further exploring the queer potentialities of immaturity in its resistance to (hetero)normative ways of being. I am specifically interested in examining the culture of immaturity represented on the television program *Broad City* (2014-), as the show “functions simultaneously as an extension and critique of the slacker-doofus bro-posse comedy” (Scott, “The Death of Adulthood”); thus, I would like to further examine *Broad City*’s status as both parody and satire, and the implications of this in relation to the show’s feminist opposition to heteronormative adulthood. Moreover, I am also interested in examining the immature single mother on contemporary television, and how this figure challenges the reductive trope of the “bad mother.”

A Final Note

In closing, I return to a queer/feminist meditation of never growing up. In her memoir, *Just Kids* (2010), Patti Smith recalls a childhood memory in which her mother scolded her to put on a shirt upon seeing Smith walking around bare-chested at nearly eleven (10). Smith remembers challenging her mother’s request, complaining that it was a hot day and neither her brother nor her younger sister were wearing shirts (10), but her mother continued to chide her: “Hot or not, it’s time that you started wearing a shirt. You’re about to become a young lady” (10). Recollecting her response to her mother, Smith writes: “I protested vehemently and announced that I was never going to become anything but myself, that I was of the clan of Peter Pan and we did not grow up” (10). Here, Smith thoughtfully links growing up with the oppression of

normative femininity, a connection that has been thoroughly explored in this dissertation. In the next paragraph, Smith writes of how unnatural normative femininity felt to her as a child, as she witnessed her mother's performative embodiment of 1950s womanhood (heavy perfume and red lipstick) (10). In declaring that she "was never going to become anything but [her]self," Smith rejects her prescribed gender role, finding comfort in the idea of being one of the lost children who stood alongside Peter Pan, who answered to no adult authority. If "growing up" means being confined to a trajectory of normative adulthood, Smith seems to be saying, then why should we grow up at all? Perhaps a more productive venture would be to ask, what if growing up could mean something different? Why should adulthood be limited to the tyrannical confines of "reproductive maturity" and "wealth accumulation" (Halberstam, *Failure* 2)? The time has come to redefine maturity and adulthood (Crawford 53-53). The time has come to reimagine growing up as never becoming anybody but ourselves.

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