Bound by Love
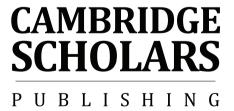
Bound by Love:
Familial Bonding in Film and Television
since 1950

Edited by

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

LAURA MATTOON D'AMORE

This book began as a series of papers prepared for the "Love, Marriage, and a Baby Carriage," area of the 2010 Film & History conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The larger theme of the conference was *Representations of Love in Film and Television*, which drew a broad cross section of interdisciplinary scholarship concerned with various perspectives on love as a thematic, and dramatic, device. Several of the authors contained herein responded to an initial call for papers that asked them: What does it mean to be *bound* by love? Sometimes, the bonds of love supply bliss, and sometimes they demand sacrifice. Sometimes, experiencing love saves people, and sometimes it kills them. Being bound by love often engenders moral responsibility; in other cases, it enslaves and imprisons the soul. How does *bonding*—the dramaturgical center of most narratives—complicate our understanding of "love"? And how do film and television represent that complication? Examination of the theme of familial bonds in film and television explores how the process of forming and maintaining those bonds complicates, revises, and reproduces ideas about love.

American mythologies—especially those presented in film and television—perpetuate love as the central narrative of one's life; the search for a connection forged by love permeates every facet of human existence, from our desire to be accepted, or our longing to be needed, to our fury at being rejected. Sometimes love is the stuff of happiness, fulfilling in every regard. But there are also times when loves makes us do things we should not do, sometimes it turns us into people we do not want to become. The commonality between love that satisfies and love that destroys is the bond between people who open themselves to the vulnerability of love. Human connection engenders responsibility to another, an unspoken and unbreakable requirement to remain involved, for better or for worse, in the lives of others.

The essays in this book are organized to interrogate the representations of familial bonds in film and television since 1950, engaging with a variety of social issues across multiple genres. Careful consideration of the

relationship between text and historical context is central to each author's perspective, and as a result this book navigates the changing terrain of American popular culture that has emerged over the past several decades. Especially salient is the way in which ideas of race, feminism, and social mores about sex and love have affected these narratives over time, and how the changing nature of these cultural issues in society has fostered how they are represented in film and television.

The subject of the American family has always been a central theme in film and television, and since the 1950s it has served to reinforce the heteronormative nuclear family. The chapters in this book explore how the nature of bonds and responsibility between family members creates a popular cultural dialogue about the changing nature of the American family over the past sixty years. The book is organized into three sections of thematic similarity: Learning Bonds of Love and Marriage, Troublesome Bonds Between Mothers and Children, and Deconstructing Family Bonds for the 21st Century.

Part One addresses the ways that ideas about family have historically been taught to audiences through the film and television programming that they consumed. In Chapter One, "Learning the Norms of Love and Marriage in Cold War Educational Films," Miranda Tedholm examines the means by which love is taught in three educational films: *Are You Ready for Marriage?* (Coronet Instructional Films, 1950), *Going Steady*? (Coronet Instructional Films, 1951), and *Jealousy* (Affiliated Film Producers, 1954). She examines the role of love and marriage in these films to assess what students were being taught about these social norms during the 1950s. Chapter Two, "Sisterhood is Too Powerful for Television: The Disappearance of Matriarchy and the Bonds of Women in *Wonder Woman*, " by Ruth McClelland-Nugent, examines the adaptation of the Wonder Woman family from comic form to television, arguing that the feminist separatism of the comic book proved difficult to successfully translate to the small screen. Chapter Three, "Bonding in the Air: Flight Attendants' Maternal Roles in Films from 1970-1992," by Carney Maley, examines how representations of flight attendants in popular culture positioned them as sexual objects, while also expecting them to perform maternal nurture. She argues that the airplane films of the 1970s and beyond simultaneously present flight attendants as lovers, adulterers, heroines, and damsels in distress. Finally, Margaret Tally explores the representation of young women who bear children outside of marriage in recent film and television narratives, in Chapter Four, "Reconceiving Conception: Changing Discourses of Teen Motherhood in Popular Culture," noting that while the dominant cultural motif for young women

in prior eras was to roundly criticize young women who conceived children "out of wedlock," recent representations of young women in film and television suggest that this status is becoming more ambiguous.

Part Two of this book interrogates the specific bonds between mothers and their children, in particular recognition of the ways that mothers are expected to love their children despite hardship. In Chapter Five, Linda Seidel argues that the portrayal of Patty Hewes (Glenn Close) in FX's *Damages* as a brilliant litigator but monstrous mother reflects persistent cultural anxieties about the roles of career women in an intensely competitive society. In Chapter Six, Sarah Arnold addresses the cross-cultural significance of categories of good motherhood, in "*The Ring* and *Ringu*: Naturalizing Maternal Self Sacrifice." In these films, mothers must learn from the past, and must learn from the errors and tragedies of historical, long dead, mothers. However, the natures of the lessons learned are culturally determined, dependent upon dominant familial norms in Japan and the United States. In Chapter Seven, Linda Levitt explores the mother's instinct to protect her child. "Of My Flesh: Mothering Evil Children in Hollywood Thrillers," Levitt argues that when evil children appear in thrillers and horror films, a mother's conflict between wanting to keep her child from harm and recognizing evil in that same child drives the narrative. Mothers want to believe the best about their children, and this chapter explores the mother-child bond in three Hollywood thrillers, and how that bond is manipulated, strained, and eventually shattered. And in Chapter Eight, "Navigating the Relational Minefield of Mother and Adult Son The Evolution of Dueling Protagonists in *A Raisin in the Sun*," Marissa Harris considers the empowerment of Lena in later versions of *A Raisin in the Sun*, tracing the representation of the relationship between Lena and her son Walter to the multiple historical contexts that have driven various iterations of the screenplay. Through the evolution of these dueling protagonists, we see a poignant picture of the tense relationship that can exist between mother and adult-son.

Part Three focuses on the most modern conception of the American family, interrogating the representations of twenty-first century families and family bonds in television. Chapter Nine, "Mothers Who Split: Guilt, Working Motherhood, and the Fantasy of Multiple Identity in *Heroes, The Incredibles, More of Me*, and *Nurse Jackie*," by Laura Mattoon D'Amore, defines the contemporary supermom in film and television as a working mother who is split—sometimes literally—by the demands of her multiple roles. In Chapter Ten, "I'll Take Our Family Over Normal Any Day: *Supernatural*'s Commentary on the Modern American Family," Nicole Friem breaks the show into thematic categories of Villains, Victims, and

Rescuers, and shows how audiences view specific family constructs in tandem with morals and messages about good and evil that are provided in each episode of the science fiction drama. In Chapter Eleven, Jennifer M. Fogel considers fathers in "Flawed Fatherhood: Domestic Masculinity and Missing Mothers on E*verwood*." Fogel uses the WB's *Everwood* (2002-2006) as a case study of the "missing mother" series, and examines the problems inherent in the domestication of men (within the family) when fathers try to negotiate and subsume the maternal experience in the domestic space. And lastly, in Chapter Twelve, "Television's *Parenthood*: Deconstructing Family Constructs in the 21st Century," authors Jennifer L. Stevens and Heather Glynis Bryant point out that while the modern family has dramatically changed since the mid-Twentieth century, popular television shows such as *Parenthood* find success by reaffirming traditional expectations about family values. By deconstructing the family constructs portrayed in *Parenthood*, the authors conclude that although there are underlying traditional family values that still permeate our society in the 21st Century, the unifying factor between all families is the inevitability of facing adversity and their ability to rise above it.

The essays in this collection interact with each other in useful ways, uncovering a sense of the tension between the representation of family in film and television since 1950, and the way that traditional ideals of love and family have remained strong in American culture. Though today's family may look quite different than it used to, and though today's younger generation might imagine norms of love quite differently than their parents did, many of the same patterns remain in terms of how love, marriage, and family bonds continue to be presented to us in film and television. Ultimately, that persistence concerns our cultural ideas about bonding, and how those bonds regulate and protect familial love. For better or for worse, our myths tell us, we are bound to our families.

PART ONE:

LEARNING BONDS OF LOVE AND NURTURE

CHAPTER ONE

LEARNING THE NORMS OF LOVE
AND MARRIAGE IN COLD WAR
EDUCATIONAL FILMS

MIRANDA TEDHOLM

Background and Overview

Schools are complex locations in which pedagogical, cultural, historical, and technological values intersect. By examining the school, we can learn how societies present themselves and seek to replicate and improve themselves. Examination of how cultural tensions and struggles are mediated, challenged, or represented to students can provide insight into how society understands these issues. One particular aspect of the school that provides insight into the culture that creates it is the body of educational media. Educational media, as part of a standardized curriculum, unifies diverse school experiences and contributes to shared cultural memories and experiences: by the mid-twentieth century, students in many disparate locations shared experiences with educational media, as the same films and textbooks were used in many places. One salient example of this phenomenon is the body of "mental hygiene" films produced during the Cold War. Unlike the educational films that dealt with academic subjects such as science, language, literature, geography and other subjects, these films did not easily square with published educational objectives, and sought to instill values and behaviors that were more difficult to assess than in traditional subjects.

Thousands of these films were made during the Cold War (Smith 1999). They were replayed for decades in classrooms until they wore out or were deemed obsolescent by school officials. Despite the fact that many of these films were destroyed, and little academic work has been done on them, they seem to share with the concept of obscenity the fact that most people know them when they see them. The mental hygiene films in

particular have established a notable place in cultural memory due to their low production values, heavy-handed and didactic narrations, and the rhetorical structure of their arguments. In addition to being points of ironic nostalgia, filmic clichés, and free or cheap stock footage for low-budget filmmakers, the mental hygiene films as an overall filmic body point to and reflect larger cultural anxieties in unexpected and interesting ways. The mid-century mental hygiene films are infamous for their low-budget vignettes, which functioned as best or worst-case scenarios for student behavior. Often, these faults of execution seem to undercut the values the films were ostensibly promoting.

In this study, I examine three films that belong to the dating and relationship subgenre of mental hygiene films. I do this by first critically reading each film text and then examining Toby Miller's concept of the well-tempered self in order to provide a deeper accounting for how these films worked and what pedagogical strategies they seemed to be using. The films under consideration are three classroom films that were produced in the 1950s for adolescents or young adults: *Going Steady*? (1951, Coronet Instructional Films); *Are You Ready For Marriage* (1950, Coronet Instructional Films), and *Jealousy* (1954, Affiliated Film Producers).

These films are representative of the "dating film" subgenre of films produced for classroom use after World War II: these films provided didactic do's and don'ts related to the topic of (heterosexual) dating and romance. These three films were specifically chosen because they represent three stages of relationships. *Going Steady?* represents teenage dating at the point in a relationship when the participants assess whether it is exclusive, and what that may lead to. *Are You Ready for Marriage?* represents the process of engagement and issues related to preparing for marriage. Finally, *Jealousy* depicts a marriage and its maintenance. Moreover, two of the three films (*Going Steady?* and *Are You Ready for Marriage*?) exemplify the style of one of the major mental hygiene film producers, Coronet Films. Therefore, this set of films is fairly representative of films that were actually shown in schools and traces a similar kind of relationship representation through several stages.

All three films seek to represent to the student viewers vignettes of young people facing dilemmas similar to the ones with which they dealt. The films feature young people discussing their relationships, how to classify them, and how to manage difficulties within the relationships. These films utilize filmic tropes such as music, flashbacks, voice-overs, and close-ups, and use these characteristics of theatrical films in order to instill specific virtues or preferred behaviors related to relationships. These characteristics are also used to make the films more interesting to the

student audience. They harness characteristics of mass entertainment in order to educate the masses.

Specifically, these films seek to educate their audiences in non-quantifiable, un-testable subjects, such as relationships. The films use audiences' tendencies to identify with film characters in order to present certain models of relationships and hold up specific types of romantic interactions as appropriate. The films use the nearly infinite power of the motion picture medium to instill in viewers a specific and narrow perspective on how relationships will turn out.

More subtle aspects of the films reinforce traditional gender roles and elide or dismiss differences within society. While a twenty-first century scholar would find the gender dynamics and values portrayed in the films to be unsurprising, the films encode their values in unexpected ways.

Finally, the films correlate with Toby Miller's concept of the well-tempered self, which I discuss at the end of this essay. By presenting images and an implicit call to change oneself, the films present an educational dynamic in which students are asked to change themselves based only on images in a film. They are asked not to adjust the society that produces the images, nor are they presented with critical views of relationships or behaviors. Rather than using the filmic vignettes as launching pads for discussions of serious issues, the films work on a mimicry basis, implicitly asking the viewers to do as they see in the films: to "mimic" the cultural "tones" displayed in the films. The implicit rhetoric of the films merely asks the students to be, or not be, what they see.

While the insights into the romantic values of the films are predictable, an examination of the subset of the films chosen for this study reveals unexpected things about the values put forth and recirculated by educational institutions, and provide implicit insights into mid-century thought about the work of the school and the potential work of film. For instance, *Going Steady?* emphasizes the woman's role in determining the limits of physical intimacy for pre-married couples. *Are You Ready for Marriage*? reveals the prominence of rationalist and psychological discourse in mid-twentieth century understandings of the self and of love. Finally, *Jealousy* presents an unexpectedly negative view of marriage, in contrast with the other two films.

It is important to note that all of these 16 mm films were produced for the educational market, and often shown in "coercive" settings. Eric Smoodin's 2004 *Regarding Frank Capra: Audience, Celebrity, and American Film Studies, 1930-1960* discusses the processes by which Frank Capra's films "became not so much the films of choice, but the

films chosen for a variety of audiences living in various degrees of confinement" (2004, 160). While schools are not spaces of confinement like the ones Smoodin discusses, the viewing context of coercion is similar. Due to the uneven power dynamic between students and teacher, the students had to watch the films whether they wanted to or not, and this may have produced reactions in keeping with their expectations about what the teacher wanted to see. Despite the films putting forth the idea of the well-tempered self and individual adjustment, their use within the classroom may have required a performance of publicly changing oneself, of tuning oneself on two levels: one, a visible external level in which one's behavior and response fit in with what was expected in the immediate viewing context, and another in which one tuned behaviors and beliefs in order to fit in with a larger social context.

However, what I am interested in here is *how these films* portray the idea of love: how they mediate and describe a passionate emotion, and package this idea for a (presumably) passionless classroom setting. I seek to examine how these films portrayed and defined the ideal of love, as well as their implicit and explicit messages about love and romantic relationships, and finally, how they shaped or re-shaped the student-viewers' perspectives on love. According to these films, what is love? How does one know when one is in love, and what should one do about it? What did the students who learned from these films learn about the responsibilities of a relationship? In an age of consensus and also of civil rights, how did religious or ideological variance fit into romance? What do these films define as a good relationship versus a bad one?

The Film Texts

The first film under consideration, *Going Steady?*, portrays the relationship dilemmas of Jeff and Marie, two hapless teenagers who must determine whether their relationship is exclusive, and if they are ready for this exclusivity. Although Jeff and Marie profess to enjoy each other's company, they appear surprised when others inform them that they are "going steady," which the film uses as a signifier for "an exclusive (heterosexual) relationship." The film opens with a title card that essentially spoils the film for the viewer, mentioning that the question (i.e., the question about whether they are going steady) is not answered for the characters, nor for the "you" addressed by the film, a move that aligns the viewers with the characters by creating a point of unity. You, the viewer, do not know and neither do these people portrayed in the film. This move also increases the credibility of the film to the viewers, ostensibly, since it

is a moment in which the film demonstrates a self-reflexive awareness of its own limitations. The acknowledgement of the audience in this way is a move towards realizing the more complicated situations present in the audience.

In *Going Steady?*, several people discuss their beliefs about the practice of steady dating: Marie discusses it with her mother, Jeff discusses it with his father, and finally, Marie discusses it with her friend. Each conversation shows the young people's attitudes shifting after discussing the relationship with someone they trust.

Marie's mother asks her if Jeff has "taken liberties," and Marie's friend cheerfully implores Marie to set strict limits with respect to the physical liberties she allows Jeff to take. This leads to a shot in which Marie looks into a mirror and states how repulsive she finds the physicality of the relationship: "it seems crude," she says, in response to her friend telling her that she just has to "know" when to stop petting. Compared to the rest of the film, which uses a static camera and straight angles, this shot is more visually interesting and recalls framing reminiscent of traditional Hollywood films, rather than of these low-budget educational films. The doubled image of Marie's face, concerned and drawn, aligns the idea of "going steady" with concern, frustration, and worry. This moment also indexes social anxieties about premarital sex, as Marie, the viewer's point of identification, aligns physical intimacy with crudeness. The shot of Marie's face in a mirror seems to imply the necessity for self-reflection regarding physical intimacy; it functions within the film as a warning to students to think carefully and examine whether they are experiencing true love or merely the effects of hormones. The positioning of the shot implies a concern for the self over those of the couple unit.

In another scene, Jeff's parents warn him to expect basically nothing from the relationship and to avoid "drifting into marriage," a peculiar phrasing that seems to align marriage with the idea of "drifting" into poor habits and company; a phrasing that implies a lack of agency in the practice of marriage. There is no mention of the physical aspects of the relationship, though his parents enthusiastically mention that they had each "gone steady" with a number of people prior to marriage. Jeff gives a soliloquy as he tries to figure out whether or not they are going steady, and during this speech, Marie's image is used again to establish a type of doubling as a montage of them together is intercut with Jeff's internal discussion. Her photograph is used as the backdrop of his memories of the "fun" they've had, such as walking hand in hand, roller-skating, or dancing. The frozen image of Marie, alone, is the background for Jeff's moving image memories of their good times together. This connects to the

previous scene in which Marie's doubled face functioned as an index of concerns for the self over concerns for the relationship.

"We sort of, well, we *SEEM* to get along," Jeff states. The hesitance in this utterance is not elided from this line; in fact, it is emphasized. The inclusion of "well" and his verbal emphasis on "seem" introduces doubt and the idea that perhaps Jeff and Marie might not always get along, or that disagreements are dismissed or diminished by the newness of their relationship and the strength of their infatuation. This statement also introduces the idea that perhaps because their relationship has been so casual, no disagreements have occurred thus far.

In *Going Steady*?, the idea of love or companionship is depicted as sharing in superficial leisure activities that are conducted in public, such as roller skating, and sharing in these activities with one person only. Love entails having "fun," but not *too much* fun, as represented by the dual admonitions to Marie not to allow Jeff to take "too many" liberties. It is important to note that these admonitions about the boundaries of acceptable intimacy are not presented similarly to Jeff. Essentially, the romantic relationship is presented as the institutionally or socially approved opportunity to partake in un-chaperoned public activities with a limited amount of physical pleasure, the limits of which are to be decided by the woman. The film implies that is the woman who will pay the price and be held responsible if these lines in the sand are broken.

The role of this film as one shown in schools complicates it, and the ways in which the film invites conversation are limited and fish for regurgitation disguised as discussion. The ultimate question the film poses is not "what do you think?" but "To what degree did you understand what we consider to be appropriate behavior, and can you recite these behaviors?" At its core, the film seems suspicious of high school romance and of "going steady," though the film does not posit any more acceptable alternatives other than going out with several people. The gravest social concern seems to be avoiding physical intimacy among young people, rather than any number of other concerns, such as avoiding issues in the relationship, determining when a relationship should end, resolving conflicts, and communicating effectively.

In *Are You Ready for Marriage?*, a young couple, who presumably have been going steady for some time, seeks the advice of a counselor to determine if they are, in fact, ready for marriage. This film is notable because it overtly depicts their love not just through what the characters say, but also through images of their physical encounters. Their love is shown through a steamy, yet relatively chaste kissing scene, which opens the film. Later, the characters profess their love through statements such as

"I just know I'm in love with Sue! Is that bad?" (to which Sue replies, "no! It's good!"). The film also espouses a litmus test of marriage readiness that has more to do with society approving of the relationship than any individual concern for the relationship's longevity and potential. The question of the title is asked not from one partner to another, or as a question to oneself, but from a counselor to a couple.

The youths, when asked, state that they know they're in love because they don't quarrel or want to date other people. The counselor, using various aids such as a poster and action figures, aligns the idea of love with maximum agreeableness and compatibility. He uses miniature people to represent the idea of "psychological distance." Moving them along a pegged board, which acts as a graph depicting psychological distance vs. time, the counselor demonstrates that time decreases psychological distance to the point that, apparently, in one's dotage one is nearly the same person as one's life partner.

The counselor repeatedly refers to Sue and Jeff's inborn male and female "perspectives on life," valorizing a biologically deterministic view of the relationship. Rationalist discourses and contemporaneous psychological approaches reinforce the idea of a heteronormative relationship, presumably with someone belonging to the same creed, an idea reinforced in the film by the counselor's repetition of how important it is to share important values with one's partner. This aligns the idea of love with nature, implying that love and marriage are a natural part of life, and adding credence and a non-denominational dimension to the counselor's advice. The counselor uses many visual aids and a variety of pop psychology terms to reinforce the idea that love means being similar to another person, though not similar enough to actually be the same gender. At one point, observing the counselor's emphasis on similarity, Sue exclaims, "But I don't want to be with a girl like me! I want to be with a man like Jeff!" Over and over again, the film visually depicts love as nearness and agreeableness, implying that a lack of arguing is equated with genuine intimacy.

The adviser in the film puts forth and supports the idea that love is created by maximum agreeableness and similarity, giving the adolescents a "Cupid's Checklist" of things to assess before marriage. The questions on this checklist include: Do they (the couple) come from similar backgrounds? Are they "real friends"? Do they truly understand the Meaning of Marriage (it is implied this has something to do with religion)? While eventually the characters in the film are able to answer all three of these questions with "yes," these questions seek to instill a pre-marital contract of similarity, banality, and agreeableness, and to discourage

intermarriage and miscegenation. The counselor's implicit promise is that this type of similarity and agreeableness will insulate the participants from the difficulties that can tear marriages apart, but unfortunately, the banality that pervades the film elides any mention of serious issues, such as financial disasters, illness or addiction, deaths of loved ones, or temptation and infidelity. The film seeks to change the world around it by denying these things and validating relationships in which these difficult things simply do not happen, or are, at best, not discussed.

Love, in this film, is a process or channel by which similarity is replicated. The young viewers are encouraged to seek out someone similar to themselves and raise smaller versions of themselves. Difference is implicitly discouraged. Young people are encouraged to be patient by the counselor's admonitions that psychological distance increases over time, and that those who have been together a significantly long time have hardly any "psychological distance" between them. This construct implies that young people should tough out bad relationships because it is only time that can cause people to grow together. The film reinforces the idea of marriage as a lifelong commitment.

The rationalist discourses espoused by the counselor realign the idea of love with practicality and nature. Love, in *Are You Ready for Marriage?*, is a natural next step, but only for people within relationships of which society approves. A more honest title for the film might be *Is Society Ready to Publicly Acknowledge Your Relationship*? In this film love is equated with marriage or the desire to marry, and true emotional attachment is expressed as a wish to get married, specifically, to someone of a similar or identical religion or creed. Although the film nods to the reality of lust or physical passion with the opening scene of the teenagers kissing, the adviser only glosses over "the physical aspects of marriage," and makes brief mention of the financial aspects of marriage.

Unlike *Going Steady*, there is no discussion of the "physical aspects" of an unmarried relationship, nor are there recommendations, however vague, for managing them. The ideal of the heterosexual relationship is represented as a willingness to avoid disagreement. Love is held up as the ability to always get along, although the specifics of what that may entail are not discussed or even mentioned. Love means banality and similarity, and the film's implications in this matter seem troubling if one considers the fact that love means a lack of arguing.

The final film under consideration, *Jealousy*, is the most complicated of the films under review in terms of both content and style. *Jealousy* follows one woman as she suspects and eventually accuses her husband of adultery. In contrast to the previous films, it occurs within the marital

home, rather than in an expert's office or in the parental home of unmarried people. *Jealousy* represents the domestic heterosexual space in a dark and stifling way, with much of the film occurring in closed spaces with dark, heavy curtains. This film defies the expectations for marriage as happiness that have been set up in the previous films. While it also puts forward the idea of compromise and agreeableness, it diminishes the woman's concerns and all but dismisses them as irrational, yet unsurprising, ramblings.

This film consists of a wife's internal monologue concerning her husband's late arrival home, her suspicions about it, and their subsequent fight. It also depicts her eventual discovery that he was telling the truth when he told her that he was just staying late at the office to perfect a new lipstick packaging device, rather than hanging out with the local floozy. I find it remarkable that the wife's suspicions are so easily allayed by one call from someone self-identifying as a coworker, since he so easily could be a confidante of a truly philandering husband. In this film, the woman's internal monologue is only interrupted by male voices of reason. Much of the film consists of images of the woman fretting and worrying alone, focusing on her impatient and neurotic body language as she paces, crosses her legs, peers out the window, and so forth. Instead of portraying an amenable partnership, marriage here is dark and lonely, an echo chamber of the (anxious) mind. Marriage exists only within the home and from the woman's perspective, which is encoded as neurotic and invalidated. Marriage is less of a partnership and more of a situation that exists only in the single-family bourgeois home, and its tensions can be alleviated only by modernity, as it is the telephone call from an outsider that allays the woman's fears. The mere title of the film, *Jealousy*, puts all the concerns about the marriage onto the woman and packages them as a mortal sin that is aligned with her.

Jealousy differs from the other films under examination in that it represents what could be seen as a worst-case outcome if the marriage so desired by the teenagers in the other films had come to fruition. In *Jealousy*, marriage is represented as an institution in which the male is correct and the woman's incredulity, ambition, and jealousy are the cause of the problems, when the objective viewer may note from the start that if the husband had simply communicated more, many of the problems could have been avoided. The wife's self-flagellating statements later in the film indicate that in this film, love is held up as a situation in which one person, preferably the female, alters her perception of reality in order to achieve an agreeable scenario in which she simply trusts her husband and his friend at their words. Here, love is neither patient nor kind; it is simply acceptance and re-tuning oneself to fit in with the presentation of reality performed by

the more powerful agent within the romantic partnership. The film presents an example of the tuning of the self.

In this film, the woman states the importance of "believing in" both her husband and herself, rather than believing in the relationship; the object of her jealousy is never actually discussed. She mentions, in passing, a middling acting career that she gave up for marriage; is she jealous of her husband's prestige at designing packaging for traditionally female cosmetics? She certainly doesn't seem jealous of the beauty parlor owner with whom she accuses her husband of sleeping. Could she be jealous of the couples in the other films, who, within the diegesis of the film, are still left with their untarnished and naïve ideals of marriage? The viewer never learns. *Jealousy* disturbingly implies that marital problems originate with female hysteria and can be solved only with the guiding voices of males. The film presents marriage as unequal and patently miserable. The woman is alone tending house for a man she believes capable of adultery, and on top of long days at the office, the man is hen-pecked and has to suffer accusations of adultery (or must concoct elaborate stories to continue his affair). The channels of communication depict the marital relationship as being filled with angry, accusatory noise from the female, and weak protestations from the male. There is no meeting of the hearts or minds, and very little empathy demonstrated. There is not even a nostalgic feeling toward romance, as the event of marriage itself seems to be associated with lost opportunities and a lack of personal fulfillment. Instead of depicting what could have been gained by the romantic partnership, the characters in this film fixate on the personal losses they incurred because they entered into it. In this sense, *Jealousy* seems forward-thinking in its depiction of people regretting having chosen marriage over careers. In contrast to *Going Steady?* and *Are You Ready for Marriage?*, a negative scenario is herein presented. Perhaps the emotional impact of this dark little film dissuaded some high schoolers from "drifting" into marriage.

While critical readings of these films are long overdue on their own terms, simply due to the reach, influence and penetration that these films had, I argue that a close reading of these films will enhance our understanding not only of postwar educational norms, but of *how* these norms were recirculated and mediated within these coercive settings. Toby Miller writes about "well-tempered, managed cultural subjects formed and governed through institutions and discourses" (Miller 1993, ix). This description aptly captures the dynamic of classroom films in general and these dating films in particular, which sought to tame unruly, sex-crazed individuals and turn them into "well-tempered, managed" subjects who would mate and in turn produce another generation of subjects.

The title of Miller's work, in his own words,

> tropes Johann Sebastian Bach's *Das wohltempierte Klavier* (The well-tempered keyboard) of 1722-44, which uses all the major and minor keys of the clavichord across two dozen preludes and fugues and is regarded as an exemplary exercise in freedom and stricture—produced from technique. […] The music is essentially an exercise in mutability, always within the domain of a polite, coordinated tone that does not jar and is consistent; it is a pedagogic work. […] Bach favored small adjustments to the system [in contrast to mean toning] that would find each key equally pleasant to the ear, even if none would have the mathematically perfect tuning available to certain digits under the existing method. (Miller 1993, ix)

In his work, Miller takes as a metaphor this method of "tuning" and applies it to the postmodern subject. The phenomenon of classroom films meant to instill character values is a particularly salient example of this process, as it requires subjects to be individually, if not mathematically, "tuned" to hegemonic cultural values such as heterosexuality, abstinence from pre-marital sex, and other values espoused by these mental hygiene films (e.g., conformity, agreeableness, honesty, good personal hygiene, respecting one's parents). The classroom films meant to produce this example through drilling and instilling in subjects a narrow set of beliefs via "small adjustments" to the larger system.

Rather than mathematical tuning, such as by standardized classroom quizzes and aptitude tests, these classroom subjects are urged to engage in small self-adjustments that would make each individual equally pleasing to the system that produced him/her, and would in turn produce the intended result: a group of people who espoused the same ideals as those who educated them had espoused. This group of people would perform as they saw in the example, rather than their natural proclivities, or, presumably, as prior generations, ones who had not had the opportunity to learn via film, had behaved. The films functioned as a link between present, past, and future because they were a solution grounded in past educational and social failures, and a solution implemented in order to prevent future social issues.

The result, one could argue, is the common perception of the 1950s as a banal and conformist time period. The drive to create these subjects led to the creation of documents that portray this time period as conservative, grey, and repressive. In light of the Cold War, and the prevailing fear of another postwar generation turning into a lost generation it was especially important that each subject be "tuned" to something approximating the acceptable values. As Smith writes, "[…] the mental hygiene classroom

film [was] a uniquely American experiment in social engineering, the marriage of a philosophy – progressive education – and a technology – the instructional film" (1999, 18).

Therefore, films were used in the classroom and produced to mimic the theatrical films student-subjects often saw, in the hopes of producing the desired type of citizen. Leisure practices such as filmgoing were engaged and transformed into a means of producing the desired citizenry, in an attempt that could be read as misleading. But instead of seeing engaging films or familiar stars, students were presented with these films in order to begin a process of self-adjustment.

Miller writes that "determinate indeterminacy […is] an ethical incompleteness, which cultural subjects are encouraged to find in themselves and then remedy" (1993, xii). The dating films all presented relatable vignettes of "everypeople" that the target audience would see in themselves, assuming, anyway, that they were heterosexual and/or longing for a committed marital relationship with a specific person. In these dating films, the ethical incompleteness works on several levels. It is implied that heterosexual is natural, and that students without a life partner may feel incomplete. Even if the students do not feel this way, depicting it via film would encourage them to feel an ethical incompleteness. The disparity between the student's own relationship ideals and behaviors and the ones seen in the film also called attention to the disjuncture between the filmic examples and their everyday, lived experience. The people are intended to be relatable not just because they are young, but because they are imperfect. They are unsure about what they are doing with their relationship (*Going Steady?*), unsure if they are ready to make a lifelong commitment (*Are You Ready for Marriage*?) or unwilling and unable to communicate effectively or value each other (*Jealousy*). While the people in these films are often caricatures, they point to real issues and features of genuine human beings in these contexts, such as the rashness of youth infatuation, or the tendency to assume the worst.

By presenting these "out of tune" examples, the dating films allowed for students to tune themselves to the values that resounded through the films, as they saw the disjuncture between themselves and the ideals described in the films. On the surface, the promotion of hegemonically valued romance and marriage practices is an important one for any society that seeks to continue for another generation. Encouraging adolescents to see their own indeterminacy and determine to correct it by creating media texts that promote these practices is an understandable, if problematic, approach to the self-preservationist thrust of society. Presenting issues related to dating and marriage in an attempt to thwart common issues for

the viewers' futures is another understandable, yet problematic, approach. Attempting to avoid the social issues related to premarital sex, out-of-wedlock birth, and unhappy marriages or divorce seems simplest if the strategy of prevention is used.

These films were used to mediate baseline values for the youth; they presented incontrovertible images and aural tracks of people who aspired for similar things in ways similar to the intended viewers. My argument is not to condemn these films nor their viewing practices, but rather, to illuminate the nuances inherent in this cultural phenomenon and use it as a means of examining larger issues about education and how media works within schools. There are greater implications at stake if character and social education works on a simply imitative or self-correctional basis. By reducing thorny issues related to interpersonal relationships into a lesson based on modeling, recalling, and imitating, students are done a serious disservice, one that could even have harmful effects on their future. Examining the outcomes of relationships in the generational cohort who was exposed to these films is one way of evaluating their outcomes. The increased divorce rate alone seems to imply that the films were not successful in the ways that the filmmakers intended; however, it is reductive to simply dismiss these films as effective or ineffective. Their actual effects on audiences are outside the purview of this study, but more work is needed to fully examine the audience reactions to these films, the overall educational context in which they were shown, and the contemporaneous evaluations of their efficacy.

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CHAPTER TWO

SISTERHOOD IS TOO POWERFUL FOR TELEVISION: ADAPTING THE WONDER WOMAN FAMILY FROM COMIC BOOK TO SMALL SCREEN, 1941-1977

RUTH MCCLELLAND-NUGENT

The *New Original Adventures of Wonder Woman* debuted in the United States during the United Nations' International Year of the Woman in 1976. Only three years had passed since the United States Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972. In that same year, *Ms.* magazine featured the comic book version of Wonder Woman on its debut cover, hailing her inside an irresistible role model (Edgar 1972, 52). Reading a description of the television adaptation of the comic book, one might think that it represented yet another triumph for the contemporary feminist movement. Its heroine, Princess Diana of the Amazons, is "Wonder Woman," a super-strong woman, physically and mentally superior to the men around her. She comes from a race of matriarchal superwomen; with her mother, the Amazon Queen, and her younger sister, Drusilla, Wonder Woman forms a complete family, one without need of men. Based on a comic book that was originally designed as "propaganda" for women's leadership, at first glance it might appear to extol feminist separatist culture (Daniels 2000, 22).Yet in execution, the *Wonder Woman* television adaptation failed to fulfill the feminist promise of its comic book source material, most notably in its portrayal of the Wonder Family.

In the first season, the adaptation paid lip service to the comic's original feminist text in its portrayal of the Wonder Family, but subverted the message via its camp sensibility, and, at times, a distinctly anti-feminist delivery. In the second season, the program became more serious, but reduced its portrayals of the Amazons and Wonder Woman's family;

by the third season, they did not appear at all. While a decreasingly campy tone (and Lynda Carter's choice as an actor to play the character seriously) allowed for some feminist reading of the program, overall the result was a far cry from the feminist origins of the comic book Amazons.

The original *Wonder Woman* comic was largely the brainchild of a middle-aged Harvard-educated psychologist, William Moulton Marston, assisted by artist Harry G. Peter and comic publisher M.C. Gaines. Marston, although academically trained in both psychology and law, spent much of his professional career working with popular culture, serving as a consultant for advertisers, an advisor in women's magazines, writing novels and self-help works. A keen observer of popular culture, Marston was interested in the potential for comic books to educate children; he jumped at the offer to create a super-heroine whom he hoped would change the way American readers thought about women (Daniels 2000).

Marston's creation was full of his own, somewhat eccentric, feminist thought. His ideas about gender derived largely from his own psychological studies. These included experiments in lie detection, in which his data led him to conclude that women were more truthful than men, contradicting the stereotype that women were deceitful manipulators. He also theorized about learning self-discipline by learning from others, coming to the conclusion that women tended to be good leaders because they were more caring than men. Believing that societies could be improved by the improvement of individual psyches, Marston concluded that learning to value the more loving, less abusive leadership of women would lead to greater social and political progress away from war and totalitarianism (Bunn 1997).

Drawing on these beliefs and his personal fascination with the myths of Greece and Rome, Marston developed his comic book Amazons, an all-female race from ancient times who lived on a magical island under the protection of the goddess Aphrodite. There they pursued intellectual and athletic excellence under the loving, authoritative Queen Hippolyte in a land where there is "no want, no illness, no hatreds, no wars" (Marston and Peter 1941, 22). Amazon scientists create such wonders as robot planes and a healing ray that cures all ills (Marston and Peter 1942, 152). Thanks to a combination of mental and physical exercise they are exceedingly strong. They study all languages and excel in all disciplines, enjoying frequent contests, and athletic competitions, cheering their princess on her visits back to Paradise Island (Marston and Peter 1942, 91-93). As champions of Aphrodite they staunchly oppose Mars, interpreted as the god of war and hate. In Marston's vision, Mars was portrayed as responsible for Nazism and other, masculinized threats to peace, while

Aphrodite represented the feminine principles of love and peace (Marston and Peter 1942, 147-153).

Motherhood plays an important role in the comic. This separatist feminist paradise included numerous mothers. The Queen sculpted Diana, her only child, from stone; Aphrodite miraculously granted the child life. This Diana would grow up to become Wonder Woman, entering the "Man's World" as both the superheroine and as her secret identity, Diana Prince. In one of Marston's scripts, we see other Amazon children—all girls—who welcome two "Man's World" orphans with enthusiasm and invitations to play at Amazon games. One of them says of their Wonder Woman doll, "she's the most beautiful woman in the world—except my mother!" (Marston and Peter 1944, 130). Motherhood is even key to criminal redemption in Marston's vision. Wonder Woman's major nemesis in the comic, Baroness von Gunther, is at first portrayed as a murdering Nazi psychopath who callously tries to run down two children with her car. However, the story soon reveals that the Baroness is herself a mother; the Nazis have kidnapped her child and murdered her husband in order to make her a spy. When Wonder Woman rescues the Baroness' daughter (and a number of other children) from a Nazi internment camp, the Baroness vows to reform, and under the careful tutelage of the Amazons her true, loving nature emerges (Marston and Peter 1943, 123-144).

The most frequently pictured family unit in Marston's scripts is Wonder Woman and her mother. They are in frequent contact via a "mental radio," a fantastic Amazon invention that allows them to see and talk to each other. Wonder Woman leaps into her mother's arms after a long separation, and values her wise counsel. (Marston and Peter 1942, 89-93). And finally, when mother Hippolyte learns that her daughter may be in danger, she secretly travels to the United States, bests Diana in combat, assumes the "Wonder Woman" identity, and saves her daughter from peril (Marston and Peter 1944, 23-36). Not only is she protective of her daughter, but she is strong, capable of as equally heroic feats as her famous progeny.

Marston's death in 1947 left the comic in the hands of Robert "Bob" Kanigher, who supervised a massive re-write of the series in 1958. In the new version, the all-female family is clearly presented as incomplete, as the Amazon's home is not a refuge from male treachery, but from terrible wars that killed off all the Amazon's men (Kanigher et al 1958, 193-195). In Kanigher's version of *Wonder Woman*, the Queen still longs for her long-lost consort, Prince Theno, who had been lost at sea. And rather than having been born without the aid of males, as she was in Marston's original version of the story, Prince Theno is alleged to be Wonder

Woman's father (Kanigher at al. 1964, 293-316, 381-393). Despite its incompleteness, Kanigher's Wonder Family was generally a happy, loving one, and he introduced important new members of the family who would influence the television series. His new stories introduced Wonder Woman as a toddler ("Wonder Tot") and a teenager ("Wonder Girl"). Eventually, these characters began interacting with each other as the "Wonder Family." Although the younger incarnations of Wonder Woman did not survive a 1965 re-write, the "Wonder Girl" identity and costume was transferred to an orphan girl named Donna Troy, who was then raised as Diana's younger sister on the Amazon's Island (Girdiano et al. 1969, 1-8). When the television series finally came to fruition, the Amazons and the Wonder Family incorporated elements from Kanigher's stories, including Wonder Woman's younger sister, and the Amazon longing for men.

But the series had at least two false starts before coming into full form. In 1967, *Batman* television series producer William Dozier commissioned a 5-minute pilot treatment, "Who's Afraid of Diana Prince," as a possible pitch for a Wonder Woman series. This version featured a clutzy young American woman, the bespectacled Diana Prince, who lives with a frumpy, nagging mother, and imagines herself as Wonder Woman when she looks in her mirror (Daniels 2000, 120). In the pilot clip, Diana's mother frets that Diana needs to get "a fellow." She continues: "How do you expect to get a husband flying around all the time? Isn't about time for you to decide to stand on a spot for a change? You don't know how it feels to be the mother of an unmarried daughter your age. Now the whole neighborhood's talking. Look at Lucille Maxwell, now she's 25 years old and got three kids already." When Diana protests that Lucille isn't married, her mother responds with "Details... Always details! Closely modeled on the campy humor and satire of *Batman,* this treatment entirely eliminated the Amazon mother and daughter of Paradise Island. It was not developed into a full-length series.

The Amazons reappeared, briefly, in a 1974 television movie. In this version, a blonde Wonder Woman, played by former tennis star Cathy Lee Crosby, was "an Amazon who barges into the outside world to track down lawbreakers and killers, using martial arts and her feminine wiles. She's Ms. James Bond" (*TV Time* 1974). Although this character came from a mysterious island of women, she had no super-powers, instead acting as a martial arts wielding sort of spy, and the ninety minute pilot used flashbacks to the island to flesh out the character's backstory with Amazon philosophy. Crosby, at least, hoped the series would have feminist potential: "I want to make Diana sensitive, not a caricature," she said in a newspaper interview, highlighting one of the lines from Diana's mother,

Queen Hippolyta: "the true strength of women is their sensitivity" (*The Evening Independent* 1974). Despite centering the Amazon's philosophy and their role in Wonder Woman's heritage, Crosby also declared this was "not a Women's Lib picture," softening this statement with: "But it's about time a woman is seen where she comes out on top" (Lewis, 1974). Whatever its feminist merits (or lack thereof), this treatment did not result in a continuing series, either.

The unease about the role of feminism in the short-lived series is apparent, however, from Crosby's remarks, and this ambivalence remains clear in the 1975 pilot episode of the next incarnation of the story, *The New Original Wonder Woman*. Firmly grounded in the look and feel of the 1940s comic, this Wonder Woman, played by Lynda Carter, was a dark-haired super-powered Amazon in a costume that closely mirrored the comic book version. Written by Stanley Ralph Ross, who had written 27 episodes of *Batman*, the pilot was campy (Daniels 2000, 140). Producer Douglas Cramer acknowledged that the program was very much influenced by the success of *Batman*, although it became less jokey as the series progressed (Carter and Cramer 2004). In sending up the original comic, it could not help but send up the Amazon matriarchy, turning Marston's feminist separatist society into antifeminist farce.

The 1975 television pilot adhered to the same basic plot Marston had used to introduce the character in 1941. An American Army Air Force pilot, Steve Trevor (played by Lyle Waggoner), is shot down over the Amazons' Paradise Island. The Amazons heal his wounds, and determine to send him back to the world of Men beyond. An athletic contest among the Amazons determines who will do so; this champion will be known as "Wonder Woman." In both comic and television program, the Princess Diana, who has a crush on the pilot, competes in disguise and wins the honor. Even the ultimate contest is the same: bullets and bracelets, an Amazon "game" in which one Amazon shoots the other with a gun, and the defending Amazon must deflect the bullet with her bracelets.

Despite the similarities of outline, in practice the television version sent up the Amazons as ditzy, sexually frustrated women with an imperious Queen who hardly seems the wise and loving Mother of the comic. For example, in the comic book, when the plane crashes on Paradise Island, the Queen is shown respectfully consulting with the Amazon doctor, who warns Hippolyta that the princess "acts rather strangely around that man." The Queen responds "So she is in love! I was afraid of that! You are quite right, doctor. I shall take steps immediately." The doctor responds "That would be wise. It's for the child's own good" (Marston and Peter 1941, 9). When Diana protests, the Queen tells her of

the Amazon's history. Marston's script closely parallels the Greek myth of Amazons being tricked by Hercules, but adds on his own mythology wherein the Amazons were rescued by the goddess Aphrodite, and granted their own island retreat (Marston and Peter 1941, 10-11).

By contrast, the opening of the television series paints the Amazons as naïve about the outside world, sexually frustrated, and hypocritical in their claims to sisterhood. The casting of veteran comic Chloris Leachman as the Amazon Queen certainly suggests an intent to satirize Amazon society. These Amazons do not have Marston's rich mythological backstory, but a much more vague tale of persecution, played for laughs. In the first episode of the new series, when explaining that men are not to be trusted, the Queen tells Princess Diana nothing of Hercules or Aphrodite, but simply says: "You're too young to remember when women were slaves in Rome, and Greece." As her eyes become dreamy and her voice sing-songy, she continues: "Then we found this Island where we could live in peace, harmony... sisterhood." At the word sisterhood, the Queen and the Doctor smile at each other, but the Queen breaks the moment with a harsh tone, and abruptly commands the Doctor, "BEGONE." The sudden turn towards command belies the claims of sisterhood; the interaction between the doctor and queen suggests, rather, a parody of feminist claims to sisterhood. The Queen's comic hypocrisy continues as she cuts off her daughter's defense of men with "I named this island Paradise for a reason—there are no men on it. Therefore it is free of their war, their greed, their hostilities, their barbaric masculine behavior." As she makes this speech, she bites her hands as she lingers over her description of men. The lust and sexual frustration that serve as the subtext to this scene are supposed to be funny; it is, however, a far cry from Marston's vision of happy matriarchy. It is perhaps closer in spirit to Kanigher's Amazons, who long for men, but the implications of hypocrisy and misandry are new.

The Queen also tells her daughter that: "We are stronger wiser, more advanced than all those people in those jungles out there! Our civilization is perfection!" Yet there is little evidence of this perfection; the television pilot leaves out much of the Amazon's wisdom and science. In the comic, the queen consults with the Amazon's "Magic Sphere," which shows her the story behind Steve's crash. She gets divine advice when the goddesses Athena and Aphrodite advise her that the Amazons must support America, which they call "the last citadel of democracy, and of equal rights for women!" The Queen decrees a contest to determine the strongest and fittest Amazon who shall "go forth to fight for liberty and freedom and all womankind!" Her daughter is forbidden to participate because "the winner