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sex, lies, (drugs, violence, neglect, angst, suicide) and videotape: Defining the Contemporary Delinquent Film Cycle

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By

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B.A., University of Pittsburgh, 2011

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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By Tessa Ludin

This thesis attempts to define the contemporary (1990-present) juvenile delinquent film cycle. The delinquent film is a subgenre of the broader teen film genre and has often been connected most strongly to films of the 1950s. Films with delinquent film qualities and characteristics were made before and have been made since, and this thesis uses cyclical analysis to differentiate between and define JD trends throughout history. This broadens the scope of the delinquent film as a subgeneric category and allows for comparisons across time.

The first chapter uses information from the Motion Picture Production Code and its files on specific JD films to help make sense of the trend in the subgenre to reclaim and reinstitute order in the film's resolution. My argument is that, rather than seeing this as a decision made by the filmmakers, this is much more an outcome of the rules and regulations of the Code. We see this trend persist beyond the dismantling of the Production Code, and with that, I argue the second cycle emerges. Choosing to follow the films of the 1950s and 1960s faithfully, the films of the second cycle both end with the reinstitution of order as well as adopt a period-film setting in order to aesthetically mimic the earlier films. The thesis argues that this faithfulness actually acts in contradiction to the essence of the films of the first cycle, shifting the subgenre from the realm of the social problem film to a coming of age narrative. The third cycle emerges as a result of the boom in independent cinema of the late 1980s, and allows the subgenre to return to the volatility of the present while radically rethinking narrative and aesthetic motifs of the subgenre. The second chapter explores the second cycle in depth, comparing thirty-five contemporary delinquent films in order to examine their commonalities. The third chapter, through examining film reviews, box office statistics, MPAA ratings, and notions of the festival art film, looks to simultaneously use and question traditional concepts of film genre.

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Introduction

The overarching goal of this thesis is to define the contemporary juvenile delinquent film cycle and argue for its place within the span of the comprehensive JD film subgenre. Generically, the JD film is a subgenre of the teenpic, consisting of films involving dangerous, rebellious teenagers who cause trouble for authority. While it is most recognized as a cycle of films unique to the 1950s, I would argue the concept of delinquency represented in film began before that period and has certainly persisted since. It is a much more popular approach in cinema studies to focus on mainstream, coming of age teen movies as representative of the comprehensive genre, and therefore the emphasis on the cinematic portrayal of rebellious adolescents is often discussed as a counterexample to the norm. A small number of texts, on the other hand, are dedicated to delinquent films, and to those this thesis owes a great deal of appreciation.

I argue that the JD subgenre has gone through three cycles. The first cycle, most defined in the 1950s and early 1960s, saw a wave of films portraying dangerous youth, just as the concept of youth itself was emerging. Certainly before this time period a group of films, The East Side Kids series of the 1940s inspired by the stage's Dead End Kids, and the offshoot series of films starring The Bowery Boys, introduced audiences to rebellious kids, I believe, however, the subgenre was not fully formed until the 1950s. These 50s films at once appealed to young audiences and simultaneously frightened (and informed) their parents. Kids were wild and resistant to authority, and through shockingly realistic narratives like those of *The Wild One* (Laslo Benedek, 1953) or *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955), these films horrified adult audiences. Many of the early films were put through a rigorous production code censorship process,

particularly because of the dangerous power in being able to influence young, pliable minds, and therefore, the films of the first cycle traditionally end with reform and the reinstitution of law and order. The second cycle, which I argue began in the 1970s and reached well into the 1980s, was not confined to the production code's rules and regulations, but remained faithful to the subgenre's trends regardless. The majority of these films tell coming of age tales, narrativising the trials and mistakes associated with growing up, which are much less related to the social problem films' portrayal of a real threat to society. Still tied to the subgenre through the inclusion of outsiders, rebels and misfits as opposed to a 'typical' teen, this cycle shifted the subgenre from a space of contemporary relevancy to that of nostalgia. Post 1990, however, the third cycle emerged, bringing a fresh perspective to the JD film.

In defining the current cycle of the subgenre, an unwieldy list of nearly 70 films emerged in my research, but in order to pinpoint exactly what trends are appearing in relation to the previous JD film cycles, I have limited the films to a certain categorization. These categories both resulted as trends emerged during my viewings that revealed implicit categories as well as in an attempt to trim the canon down to a manageable size: 1) The films were made in the past twenty years 2) are American and independently produced 3) they are rated R, NC-17, or not rated 4) they are all feature length fictional films - some are nonfiction in the sense that they are retellings of true stories, but none are documentary films 5) the characters are teens, most often of high school age and 6) the characters are either violent themselves or put in violent situations. Essentially, something about the characters or the situations in which the characters find themselves have to be deviant or dangerous, and in an attempt to personally refrain from making

moral judgments, this is at the very least in relation to traditional teen film characters. With these guidelines, 35 films persisted, and in examining them, both variations on traditional conventions and unique trends emerged.

The first chapter of this thesis will give a brief historical foundation for this particular subgenre. Taking into account the precursory Dead End Kids cycle, I will touch more specifically on the emergence of the teenpic in the 1950s. The JD teenpic cycle and films existing within it have been discussed and analyzed by several film scholars, and I will use their texts to paint a clear picture of the subgenre. Briefly discussing the qualities of exploitation films, it will be evident as to why producers and studios would listen to class concerned audiences demands and develop two distinctive types of JD films. In order to understand why the films, while characterizing the rebellion of contemporary adolescents in two different ways, tend to end with the reinstitution of order and reform, I will both outline common rules of the Motion Picture Production Code and analyze their implementation in the production of several delinquent films. Once the Production Code dissolved, I argue teenpics of the second cycle retained both the reinstitution of order and the 1950s general aesthetic, and because of this, I discuss the way this impacted the social problem film quality of the original cycle. The strong emergence of indie cinema as a result of the success of the film *sex, lies, and videotape* (Steven Soderbergh, 1989) allows for an argument to be made as to when the current cycle emerged, and due to conventions of independent cinema, speaks to the changes in the subgenre during this contemporary period.

The second chapter of the thesis details the new trends of the JD film, three of them being the unresolved ending, camcorder aesthetics and school shooting narratives.

It also looks to understand how common conventions, those being sex, drugs, violence, absent parents and suicide, are rethought in this contemporary time. Implementing analyses of as many of the films of the cycle as possible in order to both demonstrate why they have been included and to strengthen the argument for the existence of this cycle, the chapter goes to great lengths to touch on as many trends as possible. The chapter intermittently discusses films outside of the genre to articulate how complex genre studies can be, and I attempt to demonstrate that, as arbitrary as genre may be, how important it is to develop a sound body of texts. While I would like for the relationship between the three cycles to be more nuanced, I attempt to offer, through this particular case study, how intricate cyclical studies can be – having to be strongly associated on some levels, cycles must also have disparate tendencies, and finding that balance is always daunting.

The third chapter addresses the implications of defining these films as a genre. They are typically, when discussed on their own, considered to be art films, and the categorization of art films as generic deserves attention and an element of persuasion. The idea of the art film does not necessarily align with teen films, as teen films mean a mainstream, teen audience, so the questions of audience, distribution and reception are addressed as well. While the argument is certainly debatable, I will suggest the contemporary cycle may be more true to the essence of the JD film than ever, taking ratings, censorship, modes of consumption and acts of rebellion into consideration. Defining this as a genre innately raises questions concerning traditional genre studies, and it is another goal of this thesis to possibly rethink certain ways of conceiving of genre in this contemporary age of festival films and independent cinema. Other traditional

elements of genre studies, those of Rick Altman and Thomas Schatz, for example, are applicable to this genre study (and perhaps all), and they will be implemented to further nuance this grouping of films and to think about where the cycle may be heading.

Chapter 1: History of the Subgenre

In this chapter, I hope to give a proper historical and industrial foundation for the contemporary JD youth film subgenre. First, I will introduce the already well-defined 1950s – 1960s cycle. Three films most important to the subgenre and this chapter are *The Wild One, Blackboard Jungle and Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), and they will be discussed throughout. To summarize the films: *The Wild One* tells the story of a gang, the Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, and their leader Johnny (Marlon Brando). The gang, along with their rivals, The Beetles, comes to a small town and inflicts chaos. Johnny falls for a girl, Kathie (Mary Murphy), and eventually order is restored. *Blackboard Jungle* follows a new teacher, Richard Dadier (Glenn Ford), at an inner-city school. Trying different techniques to get through to the rebellious students, in the end he must forcibly overcome the bad seeds in order to foster a positive environment. *Rebel Without a Cause* concerns three teens that can't seem to find their place at home or among classmates. Jim (James Dean), new in town, gets immediately taunted by Judy (Natalie Wood) and her friends. Although the classmates and Judy soon come to accept Jim, a car race between Jim and Judy's boyfriend results in a fatal car crash. Running from the police for a short period of time before their friend Plato (Sal Mineo) is accidentally killed, Jim, Judy and Plato contemplate adolescence and love. I will then briefly discuss the Motion Picture Production Code and specifically look at the impact the Code had on the production of those 1950s JD films. After, I will raise issue with the way JD films post-1950s are commonly discussed, and establish my argument for why these teen film subgenres need to be better defined. Finally, I will summarize the indie

film boom of the late 1980s and assert how the 'Sundance-Miramax' era allowed for a radical shift to take place within the JD film subgenre.

In his book *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenlization of American Movies in the 1950s,* Thomas Doherty broadly explains the emergence of the teenpic, writing, "The teenpic, then, begins around 1955, a product of the decline of classical Hollywood cinema and the rise of the privileged American teenager."[1] He does a fantastic job breaking the teenpic genre down into several categories and understands there to be four: The rock 'n' roll teenpic, the dangerous youth or juvenile delinquent teenpic, the horror teenpic and the clean teenpic. In establishing the JD subgenre, Doherty summarizes:

> Together [*Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause*] spawned a broader filmic category: the delinquent movie. "Dangerous youth" or "adolescent problem" pictures had been around, after a fashion, for decades. The Jazz Age saw *Our Dancing Daughters* (1928) and *The Wild Party* (1929); the 1930s had the Dead End Kids, collegiate "pigskin" pics, and a spate of germinal, non-Code exploitation films such as *Maniac* (1934) and *Reefer Madness* (1936); the late-1940s B movie had embraced violence-prone young misfits in stylish film noir such as *Gun Crazy* (1949) and *They Live by Night* (1949). The distinctive "dangerous youths" of the 1950s were juvenile delinquents, and like everything about the era's young people, they were more celebrated, better equipped, and in greater numbers than their predecessors. Moreover, judging from contemporary expressions of concern from parents, public officials, and the media, they were perceived as an authentic threat to the social order.[2]

While I certainly believe more can be said on the importance of the Dead End Kids films, in fact Amanda Ann Klein's *American Film Cycles* dedicates an entire chapter to the films and their imitators, for my purposes, I believe this adequately addresses the pre-1950s films. Their place in the subgenre is extremely important, but because the concept of the teenage audience didn't emerge until the post war period, it is best to consider this

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[1] Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s,*
[2] Ibid., 93.

both a distinctive pre-JD cycle unto itself and one that lead the way for the delinquent film subgenre. While it would certainly be beneficial to further discuss pre-Code films, I will primarily focus on the 1950s cycle from this point forward.

Besides the brief introduction of pre-Code JD films, Doherty's quote is particularly important in terms of his discussion of the threat contemporary youth posed against society. I find this to be a powerful tie between the youth portrayed in 1950s JD teenpics and their contemporary counterparts: for all that has shifted, this general uneasiness from adults regarding 'today's youth' has remained constant. For example, in the *Variety* review of *Rebel Without a Cause,* critic Robert J. Landry writes, ""Rebel Without a Cause" cannot escape comparison with Metro's recent "Blackboard Jungle." Each film depicts modern highschool student bodies as ruled by sadistic elements given to switch-blade knives, bullying and generally unpleasant notions of fun. There is in each a suggestion of pitiable waste of human material and promise. Finally "Rebel" may draw upon itself, as did the earlier release, outcries from academic, ecclesiastic and civil bodies."[3] Immediately showing signs of generic distinction in that Landry is drawing connections between what has now been historically treated as two of the prototypical JD films, his quote reveals his sense of the controversial potential across the board of *Rebel Without a Cause.* Contemporary films have been treated with similar fears in reviews, and these connections will be explored in the third chapter of this thesis. Landry adds, in relation to *Blackboard Jungle,* "The shock impact of "Rebel" is perhaps greater because this is a pleasant middle class community. The boys and girls attend a modern

[3] Robert J. Landry, "Film Review: *Rebel Without a Cause*," *Variety,* October 26, 1955, 6.

highschool. They are well fed and dressed and drive their own automobiles."[4] So, while Doherty does not analyze the JD film by theme or narrative trends like I subsequently will for the contemporary films in Chapter 2, he does draw an important line between two types of JD films that Landry seems to be introducing in his distinction between the teens in *Blackboard Jungle* and those in *Rebel*. It is important to first understand the status of the JD film as an exploitation film in order to grasp the pressures that called for two types of JD films to come into existence.

In defining exploitation films more broadly, Doherty writes, "A movie is said to "exploit" an audience when it reflects on screen the audience's expectations and values. The implicit corollary is that it does so in a particularly egregious and manipulative way through subject matter that is particularly accessible or disreputable."[5] He further discusses exploitation, writing, "As a production strategy, the 1950s exploitation formula typically had three elements: (1) controversial, bizarre, or timely subject matter amenable to wild promotion ("Exploitation" potential in its original sense); (2) a substandard budget; and (3) a teenage audience. Movies of this ilk are *triply* exploitative, simultaneous exploiting sensational happenings (for story value), their notoriety (for public value), and their teenage participants (for box office value)."[6] Because the teen audience was a new and exploitable generation in the 1950s, it makes perfect sense for a genre of films to be targeted toward them. At the same time, however, Doherty makes it clear that the teenpic was influenced by adult concerns as well, and argues for their influence on the portrayal of certain types of adolescent delinquents.

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Doherty, *Teenagers,* 5.
[6] Ibid., 7.

In creating two categories of the dangerous youth teenpics, Doherty looks to two types of socioeconomic teens portrayed – the middle class and the lower class. He finds that neither class was exempt from producing delinquent teens, writing, "The juvenile delinquent of the 1950s was a terrifying crime problem because he resisted a reassuring socioeconomic analysis, especially if (as was increasingly the case) he came from a fairly well-off background."[7] Doherty quotes the 1956 Senator Kefauver committee's *Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency* report, which writes, "For almost every case when you can demonstrate socio-economic depression in an area where a delinquent child lives, you can find a comparable child surrounded by luxury…if poverty is the cause of delinquency, we should be singularly free of it. We are not."[8] Because of the lack of distinction between whom delinquency effects, Doherty believes Hollywood made its own distinction between how each group was to be portrayed, writing, "If the disease that was juvenile delinquency knew no class bias, Hollywood nonetheless accorded one class preferential treatment. The unredeemable j.d. psycho sprang from the lower orders, the troubled but salvageable youth from the middle class. On screen, few suburban teenagers displayed the insane bloodlust of the urban street punk, and fewer still were held accountable when they did."[9] Doherty makes his own division between the two groups, attributing their different narrative trends and character portrayals to what middle-class audiences wanted to see.

Calling one group the 'softie' delinquents and the other the 'hard-nosed' delinquents, Doherty examines the differences between the two types of films. Relating

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[7] Ibid., 100.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 108.

the differentiation to audiences' demands, Doherty writes, "An affluent culture demanded alternative explanations for delinquent behavior. Borrowing from the wider social discourse on the subject, and calling into service a pair of classic oppositions in Western political thought, the j.d. films improvised two answers, one soft, one hard; one rooted in the philosophical lineage of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the other in Thomas Hobbes."[10] He argues that the former would be best exemplified with the film *Rebel Without a Cause*, the latter group by the film *Blackboard Jungle*; again this recalls Landry's *Variety* review. Relating these groups to a private and public problem, Doherty elaborates, writing, "The softie j.d. films feature young criminals more sinned against than sinning; these delinquents are cast as victims of a hostile home – not social – environment…they imply that there is something very wrong with the American – family – or, more precisely, American parents."[11] Being acted upon rather than acting out, these delinquents are given much more lenience in terms of their punishments. More important than the differentiation between the private and the public influence is the biased trend in JD films to resolve these two problems much differently; where one can be cured the other must be removed from society.

In his strongest and most powerful distinction between the two groups, Doherty summarizes:

> The dangerous young punks of the hard-nose j.d. films are energetic, creepy, and a genuine menace to the polis. Though a psychological explanation may be offered for their derangement, the emphasis is on caging, not curing, these sickies. *Blackboard Jungle's* Artie West is the immediate model…Incarnated most memorably by Dan Duryea in *Woman in the Window* (1944) and *Scarlet Street* (1945), Richard Widmark in *Kiss of Death* (1948), and Lee Marvin in *The Big Heat* (1953) and *The Wild One*

[10] Ibid., 100.
[11] Ibid., 101.

> (1954), these were psycho-sociopaths who were truly beyond the pale. They pushed old ladies in wheelchairs down staircases and threw coffee in their girlfriends' faces; they were not tragic heroes but terrifying scum who richly deserved their end-reel fates.[12]

Because of audience demands, two narrative trends emerged, which were trends with quite different character tropes and narrative elements. Where the middle class teens were good but misguided based on their home lives and needed to be reformed, the lower class teens were evil due to society and needed to be removed and put away. While these types of teens remain in contemporary films, the distinction is far less clear and far less definable. Through looking at the contemporary films and comparing them to these classic examples, it might actually not be socioeconomics but rather age that distinguishes the softies from the sickos.

For example, the delinquents Doherty describes as being presented by the films as irredeemable were often played by older actors. *Blackboard Jungle* is certainly a case that conforms to his argument, as Vic Morrow was only in his early twenties when he played high school villain Artie, but others were into their thirties, and looked it. Not only that, but some of the films he refers to are outside the period during which he claims begins the teenpic craze. This might bring about an understanding that JD films often present teens as victims of circumstance and impressionably innocent; assuming man is born good, these kids are not yet old enough to be evil. As an argument against both of those claims, Amanda Ann Klein's statement in *American Film Cycles: Reframing Genres, Screening Social Problems, and Defining Subcultures* about whether or not a teen can be reformed sheds light on the fact that it might not be possible to assign this to an easily defined category at all. She writes, "The possibility or impossibility of

[12] Ibid., 106-107.

recuperation in the teenpic is not always tied to class. Occasionally, affluence is depicted as a corrupting factor (a theme only hinted at in *Teenage Doll*). *The Violent Years* (1956, William Morgan) tells the story of Paula Parkins (Jean Moor- head), the leader of an upper-middle-class gang of remorseless teenage toughs."[13] Both teenage and affluent, it is clear that the differentiation is not as clear cut. Regardless of whether or not Doherty's distinction may benefit from a rethinking, what is important is that order prevails in all of the early JD films.

This generic motif of including different forms of resolution is an extremely important factor, and discussed by multiple scholars on the subject. Doherty writes, "Whatever the diagnosis, virtually all delinquent films revel in their portrayal of juvenile mayhem at the same time that they preach the ultimate squelching of the perpetrators. Like their generic predecessors from the 1930s, they seek to justify their picturesque violence and stylish villains with an end-reel comeuppance by the forces of law and order."[14] Law and order overcomes the tumultuous delinquents, controlling and dissolving their volatile behaviors. In his book *The Road to Romance +Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture*, which is concerned with delinquent films not only of the 1950s but also up to its publication date of 1990 (coincidentally exactly where I believe the strong resurgence of the subgenre begins), Jon Lewis draws the same conclusion about these films. Moving this idea past the 1950s onto the subgenre as a whole, Lewis, in the introduction to his book, writes:

> Of central importance to this text is the argument that despite stylistic, tonal, industrial, and by now even generational differences within the genre, teen

[13] Amanda Anne Klein, *American Film Cycles: Reframing Genres, Screening Social Problems, and Defining Subcultures,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 133.
[14] Doherty, *Teenagers,* 109.

> films all seem to focus on a single social concern: the breakdown of traditional forms of authority: patriarchy; law and order; and institutions like the school, the church, and the family. But while sociologists argue that the rapid succession of youth subcultures since the Second World War seem to have rejected the convention of authority *tout court*, the teen film has rather enthusiastically negotiated the reverse. By and large, the teen film presides over the eventual discovery of viable and often traditional forms of authority (for example: patriarchy at the end of *Rebel Without a Cause* [Nicholas Ray, 1955], law and order at the end of *The Wild One* [Laslo Benedeck, 1954], the charismatic elite at the end of *Heathers* [Michael Lehmann, 1989]) – in effect, the restoration of the adult culture informed rather than radicalized by youth.[15]

It is clear that these films, despite their threatening narratives and dangerous youths, end with resolution and the restoration of adults' convictions. While Lewis feels as though this is a trend across the entirety of the subgenre, I would argue its foundation comes from the rules in the Production Code (aka the Hays Code) and remained as a generic congruence until the emergence of indie cinema.

In looking at the rules and regulations in place during the Production Code, the censorship system implemented primarily in the mid 1930s lasting until the late 1950s, it makes perfect sense that these films would all conform to the same narrative resolutions. In his book *Sex and Violence: The Hollywood Censorship Wars*, Tom Pollard outlines a few of the major guidelines created by the Code, and with those alone one can see how, despite the fact that youth was rebelling against adult generations without an end in sight, films would resolve these problems. Three rules of the Production Code are important to note:

1. No picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standard of those who see it.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirement of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.

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[15] Jon Lewis, *The Road to Romance + Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture,* (New York: Rutledge, 1992), 3.

3. Law – divine, natural, or human- shall not be ridiculed nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.[16]

These three principles are reminiscent of the earlier, long list of 'Don'ts and Be Carefuls' that films must follow, broadly describing what the Motion Picture Production Code would constitute as a passable film; number 3 alone accounts for law and patriarchy to be implemented. Other rules, like, "Excessive and inhuman acts of cruelty and brutality shall not be presented. This includes all detailed and protracted presentation of physical violence, torture, and abuse," "[Sexuality or rape] should never be more than suggested, and then only when essential for the plot. They must never be shown by explicit method," and "Sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden," can assuredly have been strongly enforced in JD movies, considering the Code felt "the important objective must be to avoid the hardening of the audience, especially of those who are young and impressionable, to the thought and fact of crime. People can become accustomed even to murder, cruelty, brutality, and repellent crimes, if these are too frequently repeated" and "Many scenes cannot be presented without arousing dangerous emotions on the part of the immature, the young, or the criminal classes."[17] Pollard succinctly adds, "The Hays Code prohibited graphic depictions of crime and famously mandated that crime must never pay. In Hays Code movies, criminals must always suffer for their misdeeds. The Code banned depictions of drug addiction…the Hays Code prohibited "extreme brutality," but, like obscenity and profanity, it left those concepts undefined. Primarily, the code censored sexuality and profanity" and "[18] While the Production Code affected

[16] 'The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930,' http://www.artsreformation.com/a001/hays-code.html.
[17] 'The Motion Picture Production Code,' http://productioncode.dhwritings.com/multipleframes_productioncode.php.
[18] Tom Pollard, *Sex and Violence: The Hollywood Censorship Wars,* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009), 54.

every film and every genre during that time period, it seems as though this restoration of law and order is essential to defining the characteristics of the JD film subgenre of the 1950s. Specifically looking at the way censorship impacted *Blackboard Jungle, The Wild One and Rebel Without a Cause,* one can see what problems filmmakers faced in depicting youth as they intended.

Two brief excerpts from the Production Code Administration files of *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause* will shed light on the demands made by the Code's officials. In a letter from Code censor Joseph I. Breen to producer Dore Shary at MGM sent on September 20, 1954, one can see how strongly Breen influenced the tone of the film:

> The most important of these individual elements is the attempted rape of the teacher by one of the students. We feel that this is a particularly unsavory subject – a high school boy criminally assaulting a teacher – and one which is unsuited for inclusion in that type of entertainment envisioned as being accepted for general patronage. The second important unacceptable element is the over-all tone of viciousness and brutality which we feel exceeds the limits of acceptability from the Code standpoint.[19]

Reworking an entire plot point as well as its tone and portrayal, Breen is calling for a major change in the script in order to be 'appropriate' for all audiences. In reading a March 22, 1955 letter to Jack Warner from Geoffrey M. Shurlock, who took over the job as enforcing the Code in 1954, one can once again explicitly get the sense of the strict regulations of the code, this time in *Rebel Without a Cause*: "As you know, we have steadfastly maintained under the requirements of the Code that we should not approve stories of underage boys and girls indulging in either murder or illicit sex. We therefore

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[19] Joseph I Breen to Dore Shary of MGM, 20 September, 1954, *Blackboard Jungle* Hollywood and the Production Code Administration File, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

feel it will be essential to tone down the violence, if the finished picture is to avoid running into release difficulties, both here and abroad. The element of illicit sex, as indicated above, will have to come out entirely."[20] Again, the Administration is asking for a radical change in the script. These films are for teens, adding controversy and rebellion to the screen, and the Code undermines this intention. Jerold Simmons (and history, for that matter) sees that the Code could only do so much to diffuse the controversial aspect of these films, but certainly these films could have been even more extreme than their final results. In terms of *The Wild One*, looking to an article by Simmons will add more support to this point as well.

In his article "Violent youth: the censoring and public reception of *The Wild One* and *The Blackboard Jungle*," Simmons takes a historiographical approach in order to compare the censorship of *The Wild One* and *Blackboard Jungle*, two films with similar censorship and similar wide success. He begins by explaining that the censorship process happened at the script stage, explaining, "The Code office staff… always preferred to remove objectionable material at the script level and was reluctant to order costly changes once filming had been completed."[21] He first discusses the censorship process of *The Wild One*, noting Breen's outright rejection of the script:

> Breen's letter rejecting the script prompted a lengthy meeting four days later in which [producer Stanley] Kramer, [director Laslo] Benedek, and [screenwriter John] Paxton sought to convince Code officials Jack Vizzard and Milton Hodenfield of the merits of the project. Kramer used this opportunity to engage in some hastily devised damage control. He explained that Paxton's script had inadvertently omitted the central

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[20] Geoffrey M. Shurlock to Jack Warner of Warner Bros., 22 March, 1955, *Rebel Without a Cause,* Hollywood and the Production Code Administration File, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

[21] Jerold Simmons, "Violent youth: the censoring and public reception of *The Wild One* and *The Blackboard Jungle*," *Film History*, 20, (2008): 381.

> 'premise' of his film. That premise and the movie's central theme, he claimed, was supposed to be the redemption of Johnny, the leader of the Black Rebels.[22]

Essentially shaping the entire premise of the film, the Code office left Kramer and the team little room for negotiation. In order "to pacify the Code officials, [Kramer] promised to revamp the script in such a way as to eliminate at least sixty per cent of the 'hoodlumism'…Benedek and Paxton promised to add a preface condemning the violence, to strengthen the character of the local sheriff, and to focus the script more tightly around the theme of rejuvenation."[23] After applying the corrections to the script, and certainly after more back and forth throughout the process as shown through the extensive size of the Production Code File on the film, Simmons notes of the direct relation between the demands of the PCA and the final product. He writes, "Released in December 1953, *The Wild One* showed the PCA's imprint. The textual preface, added to pacify Breen and his staff, warned the audience…Much of the violence and fury of Paxton's original script had been removed, and a strong voice condemning the biker's lawlessness had been added in the form of the county sheriff, who arrives near the end of the picture to restore order."[24] Despite all of this, Simmons goes on to argue this film as well as *Blackboard Jungle* were perceived as controversial, and uses reviews and data concerning the films' being banned in areas to successfully support his claims. While certainly these films conformed adequately to the Code's and society's demands, despite the fact that they retained the ability to shock and disturb audiences, one can see, through the *New York Times* review of the film *The Wild One* by Bosley Crowther, how potentially unsatisfying the resolution of the film felt.

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[22] Ibid., 382.
[23] Ibid., 383.
[24] Ibid., 384.

Crowther, despite his finding that "A little bit of the surface of contemporary American life is scratched in Stanley Kramer's "The Wild One," which came to the Palace yesterday, and underneath is opened an ugly debauched and frightening view of a small but peculiarly significant and menacing element of modern youth,"[25] veers toward critical when discussing the film's resolution. He writes, "Although the reality of it goes soft and then collapses at the end, it is a tough and engrossing motion picture, weird and cruel, while it stays on the beam."[26] He finds this happy ending to detract from the overall power of the frightening chaos of the wild youth. Yes, he praises the film overall and does indeed find it to be gritty and disturbing, but comments like, "So long as the makers of this picture permit it to stay in the realm of graphic examination of the behavior and depredations of this mob, it is a powerful and terrifying survey…But unfortunately, the picture is not permitted to remain in these realms,"[27] make it clear that censorship negatively effected the film. In his article, Simmons takes the same review and only reads in it what he desires. His argument is that, while the censorship board felt the resolved ending adequately offset the dangerous and rebellious portrayal of youth and therefore could be released, reviewers and viewers were not convinced. Therefore, Simmons chooses to only argue that Crowther's couldn't get past the film's wild aspects. He wants the film to be perceived as dangerous, so his argument is weakened by his bias; the value of Crowther's review is *both* in its understanding of the film as complex and tumultuous and that the fake happy ending forced by the censors was not satisfying, and Simmons chooses to exclude the latter.

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[25] Bosley Crowther, "Two Films in Bow Here: The Wild One…," *The New York Times,* December 31, 1953, 9.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

Although it can be argued through Crowther's review of *The Wild One* that the reinstitution of authority felt slightly disingenuous, certainly these films left their controversial mark on audiences. Particularly because these are social problem films, the censorship makes perfect sense; it was important to be careful with what could be shown or let through when these films are dealing with such real, contemporary concerns. The social problem film aspect of the first cycle is very much linked to the Dead End Kids cycle of films, the precursor to the JD film.

One of the features that links the Dead End Kids films to the 1950s JD teenpic, besides the inclusion of rebellions adolescents, is their dealing with contemporary social concerns. Of the Dead End Kid cycle, Klein writes, "The appeal of the original Dead End Kids cycle is directly related to its exploitation of contemporary social problems, particularly the plight of urban youth. In the mid-1930s, increasing attention was paid to the links between urbanization, immigration, and juvenile delinquency."[28] In his article "The Social Problem Film," Charles J. Maland articulates just how important the contemporary time period is to the social problem film:

> It is a narrative feature film whose central narrative concern or conflict relates to or includes the presentation of a social problem. The social problem film also has a contemporary setting, though it may include scenes from the past that lead up to that contemporary setting and help to explain the roots of the problem…the social problem film is generally animated by a humane concern for the victim(s) of or crusader(s) against the social problem and, often, by an implicit assumption that the problem can be treated or even eliminated through well-intentioned liberal social reform.[29]

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[28] Klein, *American Film Cycles*, 62.

[29] Charles J. Maland, "The Social Problem Film," in *Handbook of American Film Genres,* Ed. Wes D. Gehring (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 307.

The original 1950s and early1960s cycle of JD films was, like Maland's understanding of the social problem film, very much concerned with the present.

Attempting to address and solve social problems and anxieties surrounding the cultures' rebellious teens, these films were very much set in the now. Take, for example, Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause.* What is so powerful about Jim, Judy and Plato's struggle is that it is so tied to their present state of internal turmoil. Jim struggles with what is likely a recent issue with his own masculinity, made more problematic by his father's submissive role as a husband and parent. Judy's particular moment is troubled because of her father's inability to cope with his daughter turning into a woman, and Plato's abandonment, happening at a time when he is old enough to take care of himself but too young to emotionally handle neglect, distresses him to extremes. These teens are rebelling, crying and screaming, and are alienated by their peers, parents or both precisely because their 'right now' is too much to bear. Judy's dad tells his wife, "She'll grow out of it; this is the age where nothing fits," but this age is here now, and no solutions are introduced by her parents to help her cope. When Jim, needing advice on how to come forward with mistakes he has made, asks his father, "What can you do when you have to do to be a man?" and gets the answer, "In ten years you'll look back on this…" he snaps. He screams, "Ten years! I want answers now!" The frequency with which Jim's father repeats a variation of 'some day this will all seem inconsequential' only highlights the relentless torment of the now. This preoccupation with the present, a common theme of JD films throughout the first cycle, is certainly strengthened by the present settings. Foresight is an impossibility, especially when an impending doom or unhappiness is the

only future offered, therefore the fact that these films are set in the present is crucial. Strange, then, is the shift in the subgenre that took place in the 1970s and 1980s.

While certainly films were made just as challenging and bold as *Rebel Without a Cause* in terms of the volatility of the now during the 1970s and 1980s, Paul Morrissey's trilogy of *Flesh* (1968), *Trash* (1970) and *Heat* (1972), *River's Edge* (Tim Hunter, 1986), *Suburbia* (Penelope Spheeris, 1983), *Over the Edge* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1979), and extremely importantly *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) for example, a trend began that retained the 1950s and 60s time period – youth films reflecting the aesthetics of the first cycle were given a nostalgic touch. *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973), *Grease* (Randal Kleiser, 1978), *The Outsiders* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1983), *Rumble Fish* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1983), *Dead Poets Society* (Peter Weir, 1989), *Cry Baby* (John Waters, 1990), *Hairspray* (John Waters, 1988), and *Stand by Me* (Rob Reiner, 1986) are all teen films with at least a touch of delinquent film edge, and all are responsible for taking the subgenre away from the horrors of the 'now' to a place of the nostalgic 'then.' The 'then' is why these films can be qualified as coming of age and *not* social problem films. We have precisely the hindsight Jim's father argues would lessen the burden for Jim, and it is difficult as an audience to feel either connected to their struggles or responsible for changing the social problems, as we know a future will come. Thomas Doherty briefly remarks on the nostalgia of these films, writing, "The paeans to 1950s and 1960s pop culture that so dominated film production in the 1970s and 1980s made perfect demographic sense. Teenpics about past teenagers could appeal jointly to the teenage audience of the moment and their nostalgic elder siblings and parents."[30] I

[30] Doherty, *Teenagers*, 193.

question, however, what this does to the way we define the trends in the subgenre. The 'now' is certainly only one component of the first cycle, but one on which I place a great importance. It is confusing, unpredictable, and there is something about it that is inherently frightening and dangerous. The then, even if it is portraying those same alienated sentiments, loses some of that power. The tendency to look back persists in contemporary teen film making, but I would argue those are both outside of the current cycle and the exceptions just like those few progressive JD films in the 1970s and 1980s. The current cycle shifted back to that extremely important present day setting, allowing the audience to relate their contemporary concerns to those of the characters. The liberties independent cinema allows for only strengthen the affective capabilities of these films, linking this period so strongly with the original cycle.

Along with the emphasis on the past, many films made after the original cycle were geared toward slightly order audiences, or at the very least dealt with older characters. Two of the most prominent films portraying youth, *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1969) *and Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969), centered on older, more mature characters to represent the counterculture. In his book *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen*, Timothy Shary goes into much more extensive detail on the rebellious films of the period during which I argue the second JD cycle falls, but does draw a similar conclusion. He writes, "The attraction to more politicized rebellion still permeated a number of films geared toward teens for the next few years. However, most youth rebellion films focused on college-aged characters, since campuses were a more fertile ground for political conflict than high school."[31] Also, rebelling with sex and drugs in a

[31] Timothy Shary, *Teen Movies: American Youth on Screen*, (London: Wallflower, 2005), 41.

slightly different way than contemporary delinquents, these teens posed more of a threat to the status quo than society at large, a detail in opposition to the films of the 50s and today.

Despite the fact that Doherty does an excellent job at detailing the teenpics of the 1950s, I feel as though the delinquent films made after that time period are not well attended to, and just this exploration of the shifts in the emphasis on the social problem 'now' reveals how different these cycles have been. Although John Lewis takes his book beyond the 1950s, I would still argue that the time period post 1950s and 1960s has not been well defined as a unit unto itself. Lewis takes a complex and inventive approach to understanding the delinquent film subgenre in order to shape his understanding of and arguments about teen films, and does this through breaking the entire genre down into thematic sections. His chapters include Alienation, deviance and delinquency, the politics of sexuality and gender, the politics of consumption, the apolitics of youth(ful) rebellion, and the regression into nostalgia; while I feel as though this is a tenacious take on the teen genre and genre in general and is in line with my personal approach to both, it is my opinion, however, that by failing to approach the genre through a cyclical analysis, Lewis misses opportunities for clear generic distinctions. Or, perhaps, as Lewis has already demonstrated with his discussion of *The Wild One, Rebel Without a Cause* and *Heathers* that the fundamental defining characteristic of the reinstitution of order has existed throughout his time period and therefore, because of the contemporary shift in that characteristic, only now demands to be discussed cyclically. Regardless, by looking at the way several scholars tend to lump more contemporary teen films together without taking into consideration subgenre characteristics or cyclical changes, it can be argued

that a more nuanced approach needs to be taken.

For example, Doherty takes a film and its conventions, *The Wild One*, and discusses how the genre has changed based on *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (John Hughes, 1986):

> Up against a parent culture that was ever more accommodating and appeasing, ever less authoritative and overbearing (not to mention present), the teenage rebel faced a problem *The Wild One* (1954) never anticipated. The adult villains in teenpics such as *Risky Business* and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) are overdrawn caricatures, no real threat; they're played for laughs. Since the late 1960s, the most fascinating trend in teenpics has been their palpable desire for parental control and authority, not their adolescent rebellion and autonomy.[32]

What Doherty seems to be doing is accusing the more recent films, *Risky Business* (Paul Brickman, 1983), *Ferris Bueller's Day off,* and *Breaking Away* (Peter Yates, 1979), of either satirizing the parental character or making his presence desired because of his absent. What he doesn't seem to account for is that these films are not 80s JD films. Undoubtedly this is something that Doherty knows and is drawing on these films for his own purposes, but because there are films that are much more tonally related to those of the early cycle than 80s teen comedies, this topic might benefit from a different analysis. While certainly there is something to be said for the shifting role of parental figures in JD films, an argument with which I would agree, it is problematic to use a teen comedy or coming of age drama to speak to the changes. For instance, one could argue the hapless murder the independent film *River's Edge* centers around is capable of ensuing due to this parental absence, and its JD status can be seen in the fact that it was marketed as

[32] Doherty, *Teenagers,* 196.

"The *Rebel Without a Cause* of the 80s." [33] If Doherty is discussing these films in terms of cultural prominence and arguing that the most popular teen films of the 50s and 60s do not resemble those made later, then his distinction is valid, but the argument is neither explicit nor all that valuable from my perspective, which is to link related films across time generically. For example, in the next chapter, the role of the parent in this contemporary time period will be extensively discussed.

Beyond making comparisons that do not feel entirely fruitful generically, when he writes, "Hollywood's teenpics since the 1950s and 1960s have reflected a distinct movement away from leather-jacketed alienation and countercultural rebellion toward well-scrubbed conformity and sexual restraint,"[34] I cannot help but be confused. His discussion of clean teenpics bares no resemblance to any discussion of leathered-jacketed alienation, so why does he now make a claim that all teenpics of the 50s shared a particular trend? While somewhat dormant, as discussed, at least some films made during the second cycle reflected that rebellion and alienation. The leather-jacketed alienation may have been all but for a time, now it is clear that, because of changes allowed through independent film production, it has not been forgotten.

1989's *sex, lies, and videotape*, while thematically unrelated to the youth film genre due to its lack of adolescent characters and concerns, is regarded as a film influential to all of American independent cinema. Its surprise Sundance, Cannes and box office success coupled with a narrative following little more than a patient exploration of four flawed characters, reshaped both economic and stylistic trends. In his

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[33] "River's Edge Official Trailer #1," YouTube video, 2:30, posted by "Movieclips Classic Trailers," October 5, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiKuO-dABjY.
[34] Doherty, *Teenagers,* 208-109.

book *Indie: An American Film Culture*, Michael Z. Newman considers the film to be the marked beginning of the 'indie' era, the period during which I argue the current JD cycle takes place. He considers there to be an end to the period as well, believing the end can be marked by "Disney's shutting of Miramax, which had been so influential over more than two decades in defining and promoting independent cinema, in 2010."[35] Independent JD films have been made since 2010 and it might be to soon to argue an end to a contemporary trend, but regardless, Newman finds the post *sex, lies, and videotape* period to be unique.

Differentiating independent cinema from the 'indie' era, Newman highlights the changes that took place as a result of the rise in popularity of the Sundance Festival. The financial success of *sex, lies, and videotape* meant, frankly, more independent films would be funded. Certainly the festival has become extremely popular and noted as an American film festival institution, and of this he writes, "The Sundance being canonized is largely that of the post- *sex, lies* period – in other words, the Sundance that proved to Hollywood that it was a worthy object of the attention as a source of potential investments to promise potentially substantial returns."[36] He adds, "The film is the turning point, the catalyst remaking a sleepy festival into a hot spot."[37]

Defining indie, he writes, "Most centrally, indie cinema consists of American feature films of this era that are not mainstream films. Its identity begins with a negative: these films are not of the Hollywood studios and the megaplexes where they screen, and

[35] Michael Z. Newman, *Indie: An American Film Culture,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 2.
[36] Ibid., 63.
[37] Ibid., 64.

are generally not aimed at or appreciated by the same audience segments."[38] While this accounts for the identity of indie cinema and the relatively outsider status of the films grouped within it, he does acknowledge that Hollywood now, because of the increased popularity of Sundance, has a hand in the industry. In further discussing the difference between past independent cinema and the indie era, he writes, "The specialty division, also known as the mini-majors, are divisions of Hollywood studios owned by media conglomerates and thus are not independent of Hollywood companies…Thus in the Sundance-Miramax era, the idea of independent cinema has achieved a level of cultural circulation far greater than in earlier eras, making independence into a brand, a familiar idea that evokes in consumers a range of emotional and symbolic associations."[39] Now a brand, indie films are enjoyed by a particular audience, aware of the association of indie cinema.

Charting the history of independent cinema more broadly, Newman introduces three modes most related to independent cinema, and argues they can still be seen in the indie cinema era. He writes, "Beginning in the 1960s, there is a new sense in which films can be determined independent. There are at least three major dimensions to this new entry in cinematic nomenclature: exploitation films, experimental or underground films, and art films. All of these are to some extent precursors to today's indie films."[40] I believe, by indie cinema reflecting aspects of all of these types of films, they are in line with generic categorizations due to their exploitation of popular conventions, in this case the subgenre's controversial portrayal of teens, creating a space for art films to comply

[38] Ibid., 2.
[39] Ibid., 4.
[40] Ibid., 25.

with the possibility of generic codification. I would argue the sudden surge of independent films allowed for the delinquent film to resurface in general due to their typically controversial topics which independent cinema embraces, can now be funded due to the success of the Sundance Film Festival, and because the films of the cycle adopt aspects of exploitation, experimental and art cinema, are quantifiable as a genre. Therefore, *sex, lies, and videotape* marked an important turn in both production practices as well as generic thinking in a new cinematic age.

This chapter has introduced, albeit briefly, the history of the JD film subgenre. Inspired by the popularity of the Dead End Kids films, the JD cycle fully formed in the mid 1950s. Prototypical films such as *The Wild One, Blackboard Jungle* and *Rebel Without a Cause* act as a lens to understand how censorship inhibited the films and possibly their plausibility, how the contemporary aspect of social problem films meant controversy persisted regardless, and the ways in which audiences shaped narrative trends. The chapter has argued that it may be beneficial, in order to understand the subgenre's evolution over time, to view these particular films using a cyclical approach. The next chapter will attempt to define the contemporary cycle unto itself, and will both illuminate formal changes and further advocate for a close analysis of a specific cycle of films.

Chapter 2: The Contemporary Cycle

Discerning the characteristics that define this particular cycle in the juvenile delinquent film subgenre (and any cycle for any genre) is quite delicate – the cycle must stay faithful to the essence of previous JD films but also must stray from their particular tendencies. Because these films are all concerned with troubled adolescents and the trouble of adolescence, the same narrative trends will exist, same themes will occur, but marked differences will articulate exactly why it is productive to taxonomically distinguish this current cycle.

Fundamentally, nearly all JD films are attempting to portray realistic problems (often actual true stories) concerning contemporaneous youth and youth culture. Because of this, these films strive for a certain added layer of realism. Of this, Amanda Ann Klein writes, "[An] important convention of the JD teenpic is that it must present "authentic" depictions of teenage subcultural activities in order to attract the capricious teen audience. Teenagers are not likely to support a film that purports to be about teenage life but portrays slang, music, or clothing trends that are completely out of date."[1] Because realism changes over time, however, an aesthetic and narrative shift is bound to take place. In this, I argue that the particular ways contemporary JD films achieve a layer of reality – explicit violence, sexuality and drug use (all involving teens), are faithful to reality up to and including the end of the films. This explicitness, this full disclosure, makes a lack of resolution appropriate. These qualities are, in my opinion, part of and important to the larger goals of the films – the nihilism, confusion and chaos of the present this cycle is portraying. Therefore, films that are striving to show, but

[1] Klein, *American Film Genre,* 121.

importantly *not* judge, the attitudes of juvenile delinquents do so through the narrative and formal implementation of explicit tropes. By examining the ways sexuality, drugs, suicide, murder, crime, and technology are working to establish the (paradoxical) brutality and banality associated with contemporary youth, due more largely and conceptually to their inability to see past their present condition, the complexities of the current JD cycle are apparent.

In this chapter, I will introduce the ways in which juvenile delinquent films are working to achieve a particularly realistic portrayal of adolescents. First, I will examine elements entirely new to the subgenre – unresolved endings, school shooting narratives, a pointed absence of the school setting and a parental figure, and camcorder vérité visuals, in order to distinguish this cycle from those existing previously. Then, I will tease out the changes made to the already established tropes, specifically sex, drugs, violence, angst and suicide, and how they are working narratively and visually to lend themselves to an entirely new resolution (or lack thereof). Throughout, I will interject analyses of films that are not part of the contemporary cycle as a way to distinguish specific qualities. While the discussion of each trope in terms of its narrative and visual function may seem repetitive, I feel as though this exploration is foundational to understanding the genre; the kids in these films are so far gone that their lives truly consist of little more than these morally abhorrent behaviors. The realism these films are attempting to achieve conveys the nature of contemporary (and past, for that matter) juvenile delinquents and their nihilism, irresponsibility and careless attitude toward their present lives, lives that, as a result, often have no future. This lack of resolution or coming of age is present in the

most exemplary films of this cycle, and is the most important defining characteristic of the subgenre.

UNRESOLVED ENDINGS

No better place to start than the end: Casper (Justin Pierce), having drunkenly raped an unconscious Jennie (Chloë Sevigny), wakes up confused about what happened the night before (*Kids* – Larry Clark, 1995). X (Johnathon Schaech) and Amy (Rose McGowan) drive away, for now evading both the police and the men who castrated and murdered Jordan (James Duval) (*The Doom Generation* – Gregg Araki, 1995). Robert (Ezra Miller), saturated by porn and YouTube and webcams and the internet, is filmed from behind by the perspective of someone's low quality cell phone camera. When he turns around, nobody is there (*Afterschool* – Antonio Campos, 2008). Alex (Alex Frost) finds Carrie (Carrie Finklea) and Nathan (Nathan Tyson) in the cafeteria freezer and starts to play eeny, meeny, miny, moe with their lives. The camera tracks back, hiding them from the frame (*Elephant* - Gus Van Sant, 2003). Candy (Vanessa Hudgens) and Brit (Ashley Benson) drive away in Alien's (James Franco) sports car after killing a house full of drug dealers. At a press conference for *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine, 2013) at the Toronto International Film Festival, Korine was asked about the morally ambiguous ending of his film. He responded, "That's what I wanted to do. I know that sometimes that's a controversial stance. I don't feel like it's always important to complete the circle. I feel like there's something nice about leaving a margin of the undefined… I didn't want for a certain type of audience to feel joy in watching them get caught in the end. Maybe that's what happens 30 seconds after the camera's over - maybe not. I just want them to exist in your minds and your dreams and be free. I don't

like telling everybody what to think; I don't like judging."[2] I would argue that this lack of judgment is a sentiment felt by the majority of the directors in this cycle; it will be demonstrated throughout this chapter how, through multiple devices, these directors maintain a distance from judgment.

As previously introduced, the classic examples of JD films conclude with the restoration of traditional, normative order. Amanda Ann Klein writes, "The containment, correction, reincorporation, or punishment of deviant teen behavior is almost always demonstrated via a visual tableau at the teenpic's conclusion."[3] For example, the wild boys of the road find a home. The Sharks and The Jets come together to carry Tony's body. Ponyboy stays gold. Mr. Stark vows to be a better father to Jim and heterosexual normativity prevails. Johnny leaves the town he and the Black Rebel Motorcycle Club invaded and order is restored. Summarizing these conclusions in such a simplistic way is reductive, but these stories are marred by the imposition of studios' desire for a certain type of ending. We have already seen through the exploration of the PCA files that these films intended to be bolder and more revealing, but I am neither familiar with the original scripts nor presumptuous enough to argue the forces behind these films would have implemented a fully surface level dark ending if they could have; dark feelings toward the films lingered in audiences, so certainly that was achieved through subversive elements regardless. But clearly, these films end with optimism and reform. The characters encounter violence, murder, crime, drugs, sex and parents who are tearing them apart, but order is restored. Because of the freedoms allowed by the boom of

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[2] "'Spring Breakers' Uncut Press Conference - Tiff 2012," YouTube video, 43:18, posted by "Luca Tarantini," September 20, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DleG6c90nOs.
[3] Klein, *American Film Cycles*, 129.

independent cinema in the late 1980s, however, a shift in what is shown and how it ends emerges.

This is the fate of the characters in the majority of the films in this cycle: order is not restored. Chaos and ambiguity prevail, even when the characters are morally deviant. Sometimes the bad guys win and the good guys die. Even when the film appears to end with law and order prevailing, the film continues to take a morally distanced standpoint. *Bully* (Larry Clark, 2001), for example, ends with the gang of murderers getting sentenced, fighting and bickering in the courtroom without realizing the very serious situation in which they now find themselves. Before the credits roll, director Larry Clark shows each individual character and the sentencing he or she receives. A far cry from the way many teen films reveal to the audience, with their freeze frames and white-letter text, what the future holds for their protagonists, films like *Stand By Me, The Sandlot* (David M. Evans, 1993)*, Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (Amy Heckerling, 1982)*, Animal House* (John Landis, 1978)*, Can't Hardly Wait* (Harry Elfont and Deborah Kaplan, 1998)*,* and *American Graffiti* are examples which implement variations of this teen film convention, *Bully* takes the custom and twists it to create pathos for these characters. Cutting to moments of each individual kid in the height of his or her youth - chewing gum and smiling to the camera, driving down the highway dancing, playing with a dog, lovingly hugging a brother - the film freezes and the customary white text flashes across the screen. In this case, however, the white text is of their sentences, revealing their time ranging from seven years for Heather (Kelli Garner) to death by electric chair for Marty (Brad Renfro). A narrative that essentially ends with the restoration of order through the arrest of these murderers continues toward ambiguity by using the formal convention of

classic teen film endings to ask the audience to mourn the loss of their coming of age potential. While it may seem strange to start this chapter at the end, I think keeping this in mind, one can understand what all of the elements of the films are working toward. The nihilism, the violence, the sex, the drugs, the depression are so narratively central and visually present that a restorative ending would be unauthentic, and the lack of judgment on these teens would make it less likely.

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

In this section, I will explore the new school shooting film as well as touch on the broader concepts of why teens act out. While the reason I will address, revenge for bullying, is responsible for the behaviors not just of the violent school shooters but also some of the drug addicts, suicidal teens and the sexual deviants, I would like to only remark on that in this section as a representation of the whole.

American school shooting films are almost entirely unique to the time period of this cycle, and because of the undeniable impact The Columbine High School Massacre has had on American culture, it is not surprising that several films have been made about that very subject since the events on April 20, 1999. I would argue that, while the narrative inclusion of school shootings in this cycle's time period may not have been a direct result of the Columbine Shooting, the popular visual and narrative portrayal of it is. By first looking at the romantic, gothic school shooting dream sequence in the pre-Columbine film *The Basketball Diaries* (Scott Kalvert, 1995) compared to the security camera style of films like *April Showers* (Andrew Robinson, 2009) and *Zero Day* (Ben Coccio, 2003), the camcorder style of the films *Bang, Bang You're Dead* (Guy Ferland, 2002) and *State's Evidence* (Benjamin Louis, 2006), and the narrative centrality of the

shootings in *Elephant* and *Heart of America* (Uwe Boll, 2002) it is clear a shift took place.

The film *The Basketball Diaries* is not a school shooting film as much as it is a period piece, true story exploration of the life of Jim Carroll (Leonardo DiCaprio), a boy who becomes addicted to heroin. A dark, disturbing coming of age film set in the 1960s with a positive ending, one where eventually Jim gets clean and in reality became a famous writer and musician, *The Basketball Diaries* is slightly outside the thematic realm of the contemporary cycle. Before this resolution, however, Jim spirals down a dangerous path of drug abuse, prostitution, robbery and violence. Always disenchanted with school, save the fact that he gets to play on his school's basketball team with his few friends, Jim has trouble with his teachers and his classmates. In this particular scene, Jim has a dream about shooting his teacher and classmates. In slow motion, he emerges from a cloud of smoke down the hallway of his school. Realistic only in the sense that it is portraying a dream, sounds are heightened and warped. Jim stomps toward his classroom with purpose, kicks down the door and shoots his classmates. His few friends maniacally laugh and applaud Jim for his actions, and the entire sequence remains in slow motion. The camera adopts canted angles, the rifle fires off unrealistic, fantastical sparks, and a general sense of fantasy persists. The sequence is bracketed off as a strange dream moment and has absolutely no impact on the rest of the film's narrative. Brutal, yes, but certainly not true to reality.

Films made after the massacre, however, fall into the realm of the cycle and adopt a much more realistic aesthetic due to the fact that many school shootings are actually caught by security cameras. For example, *April Showers*, a nonlinear film about the lives

of those affected by a school shooting, only shows the shooter on security cameras. The static, distant, unmotivated quality a security camera possesses is intrinsically realistic. Security cameras are not associated with fictional films but rather the capturing of reality for practical, security purposes, and introducing that visual into a filmic narrative aids the film in achieving realism. *Zero Day* uses a similar technique, showing their entire, quite long shooting spree from the perspective of security cameras with the audio from a 911 operator, as well as showing the days leading up to the massacre through their own camcorders.

The film *Zero Day* is considered a 'found footage film,' disguising the fictionality of the narrative through the false notion that what the audience is watching is actually a real video diary. Andre (Andre Keuck) and Calvin (Cal Robertson) play two high school students who devise a plot to inflict mass murder on the first day the temperature falls to zero degrees. The film shows Andre practicing assembling a rifle, the boys egging the car of their enemy, as well as a handful of disturbingly routine, preparatory activities leading up to the shooting; this video diary recalls the alleged, infamous 'Basement Tapes' made by the Columbine killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Films like these directly incite images of real school shootings, all too present in the minds of the American people. The trend in JD films' inclusion of camcorders will be further analyzed in a subsequent section, its importance made clear through the fact that even more school shooting films adopt this aesthetic style.

Although not explicitly as impartially linked to real school shootings caught by actual security cameras as the security camera footage films, many school shooting films also achieve a gritty realistic quality through the use of camcorders. Like Cal and Andre,

many teens in these films choose to film themselves before or during their violent shooting sprees. In *Bang Bang You're Dead*, the film's protagonist Trevor (Ben Foster) gets suspended from school for threatening to bomb the football team. Constantly filming himself and his bullying peers, Trevor utilizes his camera's ability to capture his bleak reality in order to show just what goes on behind closed doors at school and home. He films people being thrown into trashcans, attacked in bathrooms and films his father verbally abusing him. Trevor's diegetic camera exposes his motivation to those who punished him, and does it in enough time to change his mind about bombing his school. *State's Evidence* similarly uses camcorders as video diaries, but like virtually every other film in the genre, does not end positively.

Initially the film is a camcorder/suicide film; Scott (Douglas Smith), for no other reason than boredom, decides to kill himself on camera. He tells his friends and, instead of trying to dissuade him, they decide to join him. When a classmate named Tyrone (Andrew McFarlane) beats up Scott's friend and suicide pact comrade Patrick (Kris Lemche), however, the film shifts into a school shooting narrative. Although Patrick, in his final monologue after shooting nearly a dozen classmates but before killing himself, blames just about every aspect of society for the prevalence of school shootings, it is evident that the impetus for his spiral into madness is the tormenting by Tyrone. Patrick films himself first raping and murdering a little girl in a convenience store and later forces his friend to film his shooting rampage, almost directorially saying, "Rick, are you getting this?" This blurring of the distinctions between reality and film is quite intense; Patrick seems almost torn between his exclamation, "This is not the fucking movies!" and his psychological distance from the crimes by acting like it is, indeed, a fucking movie.

State's Evidence uses the camcorder to be both visually true to life as well as explore the impact oversaturation of media can have on someone's relationship to reality in general – a topic that will be explored in the next section.

While not all school shooting films achieve a layer of realism through visual means, other films gain their authenticity through their narrative centrality of the day of the shooting. *Elephant*, save its brief jumps back in time through shifting camera perspectives on singular events and its one quick but important flashback scene, chooses to show the massacre almost as if in real time. The film opens at the beginning of a school day, follows several students around different parts of the school's open campus, and capitalizes on the banality of a high school day. A calm before the storm, the film's mundaneness is extremely real and disturbing considering the plot of the film. Like *Elephant*, *Heart of America* also primarily takes place on the day of the shooting. By spending the majority of the film exploring several characters rather than one character over a longer period of time, the film is able to capture the impact a school shooting has on many lives.

In terms of the rationale given for why these students are committing mass murders, it is almost entirely, as already mentioned, related to bullying. The aforementioned films *Elephant*, *Bang Bang You're Dead, Zero Day, State's Evidence*, and *Heart of America* all specifically choose to incite sympathy for the killer(s) through including scenes of bullying. While these films often look to other factors as well, drugs and abusive/absent parents for example, it is apparent that the main factor contributing to these acts of terror is school related abuse.

For example, the film *Heart of America* includes an extremely disturbing bullying

scene to help understand the actions of one of the killers, Daniel (Kett Turton). While it is not completely clear who will be the murderers until the end of the film, especially considering the film includes several troubled teens, Daniel is quite obviously going to take part. In the end, it is not his best friend Barry (Michael Belyea) who joins him but rather a drug addict named Dara (Elisabeth Rosen) with whom he had no previous narrative connection. In a flashback[4], we see Daniel defiantly taking an 'off-limits' shortcut to school. His best friend Barry tries to get him to stop by reminding him that they only have two weeks of school left, a foreshadowing of Barry's passive character and ability to see past his present state, but Daniel says, "I take shit from these ignorant mother fuckers who shouldn't even be allowed to wipe my ass much less kick it over and over again...This crap's been going on since the first fucking grade. What's our legacy, we saw we came we got pissed on weekly? Fuck that. I don't know about you, but I'm gonna walk where I wanna walk, Barry. And if you had an ounce of respect for yourself, you'd walk with me." Daniel walks through the football field past a group of classmates who bully him on a regular basis, and Barry follows closely behind. The gang refuses to let them pass, symphonic metal begins to play nondiegetically, and the four boys verbally attack both boys. They push them on the ground, throw rocks at them and taunt Barry when he begins to cry. The camera heightens the violence through its hand held motion, adding movement and commotion to the chaotic scene. One boy holds Daniel down and slices his forehead and forces Barry to eat feces. The film intermittently cuts to the present day, made clear through the device of showing flashbacks in black and white, and Daniel walks to the last day of school with defined purpose. Sound bridges connect the

[4] The flashbacks are shown in black and white, a device not unique to *American History X* (Tony Kaye, 1998), but I would argue the Kaye film stylistically influences this film directly.

two scenes, aurally make it clear that Daniel's motivation for killing his classmates is their unyielding bullying. The film drags out this flashback, cutting back to it several minutes later, prolonging our relationship with the bullying and therefore giving us an idea of how much time these boys have been dealing with being bullied throughout their lives. Assuredly the most disturbing moment in any bully sequence in the cycle, the climax of the torture results in Daniel and Barry physically exposed. Their aggressor taunts, "You're obviously not show-ers, let's see if you're grow-ers. Get it up." The film cuts to them walking into their respective houses and the embarrassment reads on their faces, too embarrassed to talk to their (abusive in the case of Daniel) parents. Soon after this attack, Daniel comes to Barry with his plan.

Elephant, too, through the one flashback in the film, briefly shows the more violent of the two killers, Alex, being bullied. The camera slowly pans left through a classroom, fluidly moves in a backwards motion and therefore pans slightly right, and a boy throws a wad of wet paper at someone. Unsure of the target, it is startling to the audience when the camera whips left rather quickly as the ball is thrown and we see Alex completely covered in chunks wet paper. The wall behind him has been hit, and he gets hit once more during the few seconds the film lingers on his dejected gesture, a gesture very similar to Daniel's when his aggressors sexually abuse him through forcing him to get an erection. The passive distance the camera takes throughout the film is slightly charged in this scene when the traditionally unbiased camera uses the violent motion of the pan to increase compassion for Alex. The film cuts to him in the bathroom washing the filth off, and cuts once more to him walking into the cafeteria. He walks around and strangely begins to take notes, so strangely that a girl asks him, "What are you writing?"

He responds, "It's my plan." She confusedly asks what the plan is, and he responds, "You'll see." Although this sequence is extremely brief and the only time we flashback to a time before the day of the shooting, clearly *Elephant* directly links the one instance of bullying to the moment Alex decides to murder his classmates.

The inclusion of scenes of bullying to understanding the motivation behind, but not to justify, these murders is an example of these films maintaining an impartial distance from judgment. While it has been demonstrated how the camera and editing devices are used to heighten a certain sympathy for the killers, it is not done in order to rationalize their actions, but rather to understand their points of view. The nonlinearity of the flashback troubles the argument that *Elephant* and *Heart of America* achieve narrative realism, but I would claim that the decision to privilege the killers with a background story only strengthens the idea that these films maintain a separation from implicit judgment. The security camera device found in several of these films both demonstrates the clear distance the camera takes from sympathizing with the actual murderous acts as well as acknowledges the camera's ability to see these shootings in the same way real shootings are portrayed on news sources.

THE CAMCORDER – A SYMBOL OF A GENERATION

While it has already been discussed how crucial the film *sex, lies, and videotape* was to independent cinema as a whole, beyond that and importantly for the purposes of this section, *sex, lies, and videotape's* inclusion of a diegetic camera and video footage for intimate, non "filmmaking" purposes established a major filmmaking trend. Mediating fiction film with the popularity of prosumer and consumer quality camcorders, director Steven Soderbergh created a layer of reality not traditionally associated with the

cinematic apparatus. Taken to the extreme, this camcorder-as-a-representation-of-reality effect is most notably used in horror films like 1999's *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez), however, I identify this as a major aspect of contemporary JD films as well. Camcorders function in many more complex ways than merely as a representation of reality, and I will explore them in this section. By examining how the image shot through the camcorder creates a distinguishable visual that invokes a sense of reality, the way camcorders function to shift the subgenre back to the original 1950s cycle's portrayal of a modern youth plagued by the inescapable 'now,' how camcorders are used to speak to the negative influence of reality television, the internet and media on contemporary youth, and how both the problematic now and negative influences create an alienation that is captured by the camcorder in a unique way, one can come to understand how a seemingly simple object may act as a totalizing representation of juvenile delinquents in contemporary cinema. When considered together, these complex functions generate a particularly charged emotional response.

Visually, images created with a camcorder, specifically because of the motivation for their presence, are very much in line with the argument that these films are attempting to portray youth culture realistically. By placing the apparatus within the diegesis and using that lens as the frame of the film, if either for brief scenes like *Totally F***ed Up* (Gregg Araki, 1993), *Nowhere* (Gregg Araki, 1997), *Bang Bang You're Dead, Ken Park* (Larry Clark and Ed Lachman, 2002), *Mean Creek* (Jacob Aaron Estes, 2004), *Havoc* (Barbara Kopple, 2005), *Afterschool, Trust* (David Schwimmer, 2010), and *The Bling Ring* (Sofia Coppola, 2013) or as the majority or entirety of the film like *Zero Day*, *State's Evidence, Jimmy and Judy* (Randall Rubin, 2006), and *Archie's Final Project*

(David Lee Miller, 2009), the grainy visual quality produced by a lower than professional camera and the reality of the world within the film is directly linked. As a result, a verisimilitude, despite how extreme the film's world is, becomes imbedded in the mind of the audience directly by way of the apparatus. For example, the film *Jimmy and Judy (2006)*, with a title unmistakably tied to the JD subgenre through its evocation of the characters in *Rebel Without a Cause*, is entirely told in a found-footage style, meaning every scene of the film is created by an acknowledged camera placed within the world of the film.

In the film, college drop out and psychologically imbalanced Jimmy, infatuated with high school outcast Judy, constantly films everything. The two embark on a revenge murder spree road trip, leading them to a drug den, a commune, and eventually their deaths - *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967) meets *Easy Rider*. The film begins with the sound of a camcorder turning on and warming up, and only after several seconds of black does an image appear. Out of focus, we see the frame adjust to give form to a blurry object. A man looks into the camera and therefore directly at the audience and says, "Jimmy we've discussed this. You can't tape our sessions; it's not allowed. Does your position make you feel powerful? Filming people makes you feel like you're in control of the situation, doesn't it?" The man, presumably his therapist, gets angry and attempts to forcibly remove the camera from Jimmy; the action reestablishes the diegetic location of our visual source, calling attention to the camera through a direct correlation between movements of the characters fighting over the power to hold the camera and the jumpy visual that we see as a result. From the first frame and line of the film, the presence of the camcorder is made known. Diegetically attached always to a human with

his own motivation, the camera becomes paradoxically more evident to an audience than in traditional cinema and anthropomorphized through the fact that we know the motivation of its operator. The camcorder places us centrally within the world of the film, adding a proximity to the characters unattainable by an unacknowledged camera.

The camcorder not only serves to portray youth realistically, but also, through its constant innovation, serves to portray *this particular* youth realistically. The contemporary aspect of these films, meaning their taking place in the now of their filming, is quite important to the cycle and its social problem film status, and the evolution of the camcorder's technological advancement over the twenty year period of the cycle helps to demonstrate this. For example, in 1993's *Totally F***ed Up,* Steven has, by today's standards, a rather large, bulky Sony CCD-TR55 analog camcorder. Sony's CCD-TR55 was introduced in 1989, and was the most up to date Sony camera during the time period of the filming. In 2002's *Ken Park*, Ken has a smaller, sleeker silver digital camera with a flipscreen. George in 2004's *Mean Creek* has an even smaller, even more portable device. By 2008's *Afterschool*, characters, living in the age of YouTube, are using the smallest of cameras in cell phones and webcams. The fact that these films take place in the present a crucial element in defining this cycle within the span of the subgenre, considering it takes the subgenre back to the original cycle's portrayal of a contemporary teen.

The camcorder also functions as a visual and symbolic allusion to some of the specifically contemporary forces influential to the experiences, attitudes and actions of teens – reality television, the internet and media generally. Chronologically, the first film of the current cycle, Gregg Araki's *Totally F***ed Up,* makes extensive use of

confessional style documentary footage shot by Steven, an aspiring filmmaker. In terms of narrative, Araki explains, "The narrative (what there is of it) follows the interconnected experiences of six racially-diverse young queer friends – aspiring filmmaker Steven (Gilbert Luna), his loyal artist bf Deric (Lance May), terminally bummed Andy (James Duval), skater-dude Tommy (Roko Belic) and trendy dykes Michele (Susan Behshid) and Patricia (Jenee Gill). As Steven and Deric's relationship comes undone and Andy falls in love with a sexy, edgy stranger named Ian (Alan Boyce), life becomes more and more complicated for the adolescent sextet."[5] Speaking to the camera at the start of the film to explain why he is interviewing and filming his friends, Steven says, "I'm Steven and I'm making this video, well because I want to show things the way they really are because you really don't get to see that in TV and the movies." Again privileging the diegetic camcorder with a higher level of reality, Steven's camera is able to reach into a specific, unknown world. Araki's goals are similar to Steven's, writing, "The essential impetus behind the film was the desire to portray a way of life, a sub-subculture which is totally ignored by both the mainstream and the conventional gay media – to represent the unrepresented…I wanted real teenagers, I wanted them to be all different colors."[6] While the function of the camcorder is to show life as it is for gay teens, formally it is difficult to disassociate confessional style direct addresses from MTV's 1992 show *The Real World* (created by Jonathan Murray and Mary-Ellis Bunim, 1992 -).

Innovative in the way, similar to how Graham (James Spader) films women's discussions of sexuality in *sex, lies, and videotape*, the reality show uses the camera as a

[5] Gregg Araki, DVD booklet, *Totally F***ed Up,* 1993, DVD.
[6] Ibid.

space for 'real' young adults to directly discuss their life experiences, *Totally F***ed Up* plays off of this convention. The documentary, although made with good intentions, in fact is the cause of heartbreak for Steven and Deric. Deric finds a 'confessional' interview Steven makes discussing his infidelity, and the pair breaks up. Deric soon gets jumped and badly beaten while alone one night, his life on a downward spiral ever since seeing the video. While this does not directly speak to how *The Real World* is a negative influence on contemporary youth, it certainly touches on the harm this confessional technique may have. Araki sees a connection between his film and the show, for better or for worse, explaining: "Formally, the picture's use of an exploded, free associative narrative and direct to camera address is as radical as 60s French New Wave (or its ripoff, 90s MTV)."[7] One can imagine this film's rethinking of Jean-Luc Godard's *Masculin/Feminin* (1966) for a modern audience as little more than visual changes reminiscent of 90s MTV. Both about a group of friends told in 15 fragments, Araki changes the time, characters and place, but not the idea of adolescent anxieties, concerns and narrative free form. Where Godard transitions between his 15 fragments with the sound of gunshots,[8] Araki alters the transition to the sound and image of television static. The significance of this should not go unnoticed as a way the film calls attention to the influence of media on both the filmmaking practice and contemporary youth's relationship to reality. The film undoubtedly remarks on consumer culture, television and society (it is influenced by Godard, after all), and appropriating the gunshot sound with TV static makes a case for a negative association with technology.

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[7] Ibid.
[8] *Masculine Feminine: a film by Jean-Luc Godard,* Ed. Pierre Billard, (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 9.

Beyond the abrupt bombardment of static that introduces the 15 fragments, the film addresses consumerism in general within the mise-en-scene. For example, at one point in the film, Andy wears a bold graphic tee shirt with the words 'I blame society' paired with an image of a revolver; just the right amount of New Wave subtlety. On two separate occasions, characters stand under huge billboards that compose almost the entirety of the frame; these giant structures dwarf the characters, who in turn often have to be shot in depth in order to contain the entire advertisement, which very much speaks to the alienation of these teens. Almost always outside of commercial or social establishments - a car wash, an Arby's and Hollywood Cemetery, for example, the outsider stigma associated with both homosexuality and adolescence is formally represented. Not to mention, the ultra low budget, guerilla style shooting of this film meant that the production itself was banned from filming within these places and space.

Through the use of camcorders, *Afterschool* makes additional connections between the media and its negative influence on contemporary youth, and looking closely at the film's slow, methodical approach to uncovering the extent to which the internet can affect a character will illuminate this concept. To this point, director Antonio Campos says, "I don't know what the final result is or the outcome of this sort of new technology. There's access to any sort of video or anything you can imagine…the idea of the film is not just an American one, it's a generation that's growing up with access to any kind of image they want. What's different about it than say going to the movies or watching TV, is that what you're watching is a piece of life."[9] The film not only addresses the fact that

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[9] "Director Antonio Campos-Afterschool," YouTube video, 3:16, posted by "Filmcatcher1," November 20, 2008, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSF7d9OGJKg.

the clips within the film are a piece of life, but also the way that an oversaturation of 'real' life images impacts how a boy sees his own reality.

Narratively, *Afterschool* is a film about a boarding school student, Rob (Ezra Miller), and what unfolds when he accidentally films the deaths of two of his female classmates overdosing on drugs laced with rat poison. While its film influence is, like *Jimmy and Judy* and *Totally F***ed Up*, textually evident in this case with the inclusion of a teacher named Frederick Wiseman after the cinéma vérité director of documentaries such as *High School* (1968), its stark, impassive and at times cold stylization is in a category of its own. The film begins with a buffering icon and a montage of unrelated internet video clips – a baby laughing, girls fighting in a hallway, a boy wiping out on his bicycle, Saddam Hussein being hanged, a cat playing piano, injured soldiers in the Middle East, and a pornographic clip. The film cuts to the computer screen on which these clips are being watched, and we see the pornographic video on a smaller screen. The screen also contains a webcam image of a boy filming himself (later we find he was masturbating) while watching the porn. This is Rob, and the fact that we first see him on a screen is an important representation of the character as a whole. Rob likes to watch little clips online, so much so that it begins to infiltrate into his own life.

For example, in the pornographic film that he watches, the girl is surprised when she is briefly choked by the man filming her. The man filming is also the one with whom the girl has sex in the clip, creating more of a 'sex tape' authenticity than that of a produced pornographic film, again an example of these films trying to address relationship between the camcorder and the pieces of life it is able to capture. Later in the film, Rob has joined the video club to be closer to the girl he likes, Amy (Addison

Timlin), and he, too, briefly chokes her after they kiss and films it. The visual is strikingly similar, both men hidden behind the lens of the camera, and a clear correlation between Rob's internet watching and its influence on his own actions emerges.

Life imitates internet once again when Rob and his roommate Dave (Jeremy Allen White) fight in the hallway, temporally taking place after Rob films the deaths, which is filmed by a classmate on low quality cell phone camera and posted online. 308,009 views later, Rob's 'Prepschool Fight' is no different from the girl fight he and Dave watched together earlier in the film. The film's nondiegetic camera maintains a constant distance from the world of the film through stationary shots that often fragment bodies, therefore these active shots filmed through diegetic cameras heighten their affecting capabilities. Here and throughout the section I appropriate the term nondiegetic to represent the traditional camera we typically associate with cinema in order to make the distinction between the camera outside the world of the characters and the diegetic camcorder.

The blurring between life and an online world culminates with the last shot of the film, where Rob, who has become distanced from Amy, Dave and essentially the entire school due to the effect the deaths of the girls have had, is shown studying in the library. A still close up on the back of his head lingers for nearly two minutes. Rob slowly begins to turn his head right, appearing to sense the presence of someone behind him. He stops and slightly shakes his head, wary and conflicted of his suspicion. His curiosity wins out, and he turns his head to peer at what's behind him. An abrupt axial cut leads not only to a slightly farther distance but a shot from an entire different apparatus - a low quality cell phone. Because of the convention already established

through contemporary cinema that tells the audience that a person within the diegesis has created this shot, we are surprised when we see, through a reverse shot, that nobody is there. *Afterschool* uses our expectations to remark on the psychological impact technology and the internet specifically have had on this boy. Rob is unable to disassociate reality from the web, and by leaving us with this strange moment of Rob sensing something that isn't really there, the film itself lingers in the mind of the audience. With this negative association between society, television and the internet and their impact on adolescents featured in both *Totally F***ed Up* and *Afterschool*, it is not surprising, then, that additional films would appropriate the camcorder for extremely dark purposes.

Ken Park is an example of the repurposing of the camcorder to show death and violence in JD films. The film begins by following a red headed boy (who we later learn is named Ken Park) skateboarding around a town, leaving 'no skateboarding' signs in his carefree wake. He walks through a parking lot while holding his skateboard and spits, and by now, we know we are watching the protagonist of a Larry Clark film: he's a young boy, rebellious, crass, and skateboards. We follow him to a skateboard park and watch with interest as he performs a few tricks then sets his backpack down atop a cement hill. Other kids are skating around him as we see Ken in medium close-up pull a camcorder out of his backpack, flip the screen around, turn it on and set it down to capture himself. The film cuts with a match on action to the perspective of the camcorder, a close up of the boy's hand setting it down and then reaching into his backpack. Another match on action cuts back to the nondiegetic camera, which shows Ken pulling a gun out of his bag. He readjusts the camcorder to assure that it will capture him, and the film cuts back

to its perspective. Ken, in profile, looks to the distance, yet lacks a strong contemplative gaze. Back to a medium shot from the point of view of our traditional camera, Ken glances left then right, looks straight ahead, the camera cuts in to a straight on medium close-up, and he grins widely. The film cuts back to the POV of the camcorder, then once again to the medium-close up, the nondiegetic song ends and Ken pulls the trigger. Our assumed protagonist has just killed himself and filmed it, splattering blood all over his camcorder, and the credits haven't even finished rolling.

Ken Park is just one example of a popular trend in contemporary JD films: to present kids who film their deaths. Instead of filming their experiences, families and friends in order to preserve a time on which to look back fondly, how camcorders function traditionally, these kids film their suicides and suicide attempts. Dark (James Duval) carries his camcorder wherever he goes because he believes he will die "in a spectacular plane crash, fire or chemical explosion," and he wants to film it as a cool record of his death in Gregg Araki's *Nowhere*. Trevor (Ben Foster) in *Bang Bang You're Dead* methodically sets up his camcorder while he ties an extension cord around his neck, preparing to capture his (unsuccessful) suicide. The same general suicide narrative takes place in *State's Evidence*. One can guess what Archie has chosen for his final project, in *Archie's Final Project*. Archie makes mention of the fact that he has been filmed by his parents his whole life, and his emotional state and attachment to his camera as a result is not that much different from Mark's in *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960). *Trust*, too, has an on-camera, specifically a camera phone, suicide attempt. *Trust*'s inclusion of the motif is arguably the most causally linked; Annie is suicidal because she was seduced online and through texting, and subsequently raped by her suitor. Her classmates find

out, leading to cyberbullying by her peers. It makes sense, then, that Annie would recognize the negative impact the device has had on her life, implicating it in her death. This trend is unfortunately quite linked to reality; in 2008, a teenager in Florida filmed his suicide on a webcam while 1,500 people tuned in to watch. *Mean Creek* as a final example is possibly the richest film to examine in terms of a negative repurposing of the camcorder's association as well as the way the film makes the camcorder indispensible to the narrative.

Mean Creek begins from the point of view of a camcorder placed on an object outside, possibly a park bench or ledge, by a large thirteen or fourteen year old boy named George (Josh Peck). He looks into the lens and then runs toward a distant basketball court, resulting in a long shot of the boy playing basketball by himself. The camera is situated so the basketball court composes only half of the frame, while the other half is some grass and a small school building, giving the film an unpolished, imperfect frame evidently composed by an amateur. A small boy named Sam (Rory Culkin), shown first only in torso, walks from the right passing in front of the camera, blocking the view of George for an inconsequential amount of time. He fully leaves the frame, but a moment later enters from the left looking directly at the camera. He grabs it with curiosity, shakily handling it, and brings it close to his face. In the background George screams, runs and attacks him. The camera flips from Sam's hand and lands on the ground, capturing George pouncing and swearing at him as a crowd gathers. George tells him, while continuing to punch, that he already told him to never touch his camera. The film cuts back and forth between the POV of the camcorder and a nondiegetic handheld camera looming above the boys. Before he walks away leaving Sam bleeding

on the ground, George tells him he will kill him if he ever messes with his camera again. From this first scene, the camcorder is directly correlated to bullying, violence and dangerous threats. It also clearly holds an unhealthy power over George, who we find treasures his camcorder for its ability to show exactly what's inside his mind.

Because of what George did to Sam, Sam's older brother Rocky (Trevor Morgan) devises a plan to exact revenge by leaving him stranded at a creek. The boys and three of their friends, Marty (Scott Mechlowicz), Millie (Carly Schroeder) and Clyde (Ryan Kelley), take George out on a boat trip under false pretenses, making him think they want to be his friend. While throughout the day the group finds themselves actually having an ok time with George, more sorry for him than anything else, when he finds out about their lies he becomes irate. Taunting Marty about his father's suicide by first calmly saying then aggressively shouting the phrase, "his daddy splattered his brains, all over the wall," George distresses the group, and the tension created by the confinement of the small boat only adds to the acrimony. Unable to take George's refusal to stop any longer, Rocky pushes George away from a visibly crazed Marty. George trips and falls into the creek, and the film cuts from the handheld camera that has been filming the scene thus far to the view from George's camcorder. It is still attached to his hand, and thrashes along with him. George is able to come up for air, but from the sound of his cries, he cannot swim. He bobbles up and down several times while the group watches as if almost paralyzed with an inability to register what is happening. While Marty tells him that this is what he gets for messing with him, the rest appear almost prophetically mournful. Suddenly, while underwater, the camcorder smacks George in the head. It now floats slightly away from him and captures the image of his bleeding body, sinking with him

toward the bed of the shallow creek. The gang realizes too late that he isn't coming up, and their efforts to jump in and save him are for naught. Where the camcorder is associated with George's rage in the first scene, here it is partially responsible for his death.

In the final sequence of the film, Sam has gone to the police to tell them what has happened. Already resigned to the fact that he will have to live with this forever, he goes forward aware that he will most likely be punished. In a most brilliant move, the film cuts from the perspective of a nondiegetic camera to a police camcorder being used to film his testimony. The sheriff asks Sam if his brother was in control at the moment he pushed George, and after the sheriff steps out for a moment, Sam looks directly into the camera and says "I've never seen him more out of control in my life." The simplest of curiosities, to play with George's camcorder, has led him to this unbearably dark moment, and the integration of a camcorder in this is painfully tragic. On no occasion in this film does the camcorder have a positive association.

From its presence in the first film in the cycle to the most recent and nearly a dozen in between, it is clear that the inclusion of camcorders in these films is not minor in the least. This section argues that the camcorder may be regarded as having quite layered implications in the JD subgenre. Simply, its diegetic position adds a layer of realism to these films. More complex is the way it aids the films in speaking to the negative impact the constant bombardment reality TV, the internet, video games, media, etc. have on teens. Teens therefore feel this natural impulse to film themselves, and can because of advancements in technology, but because they are so oversaturated by images and ads, porn and garbage (coupled with, of course, bullying, drugs, absentee parents and failing

educators – all elements that will subsequently be discussed in this chapter), all they seem to have left to film is murder and suicides. They might be mad as hell, but they don't expect their videos will inspire people to scream out of their windows; if they thought something would change, they probably wouldn't kill themselves in the first place.

ABSENCE AND NEGLECT

A major trope of the JD subgenre throughout its existence is exploring the tumultuous relationship between figures of authority (parents, teachers, reform school wardens, psychiatrists) and young adults. The generation gap, the 'parents just don't understand' mentality, is a common element found in many JD films. In their reinstitution of authority, the parents come around to try to understand their kids, the teachers often have a profound effect on students, and the reform school wardens and psychiatrists work toward breakthroughs. Overcoming the problems of not being able to understand why kids are acting out are many of the narrative conflicts and resolutions. The current subgenre takes this theme, and by not including the parents, school, or teachers, the films are able to rethink the narrative and end without resolution.

For example, the total absence of parents, or absence until its too late, is common in contemporary JD films. *The Bling Ring, Kids, Mean Creek, Havoc, Brick* (Rian Johnson, 2005), and others all *pointedly* have an absence of parents. For example, *The Bling Ring*, a film following a group of teenagers who rob the rich and famous, rarely shows any of their parents. The ringleader, Rebecca's (Katie Chang) father lives in a different state and her mom is always away working, leaving her to rebel without the threat of consequence. Mark's (Israel Broussard) parents pop up now and again, blissfully naïve about the happenings of their child. Not until the end when the police are

coming do we see Chloe's (Claire Julien) family. Sam's (Taissa Farmiga) parents left her and Nicki's (Emma Watson) mom is totally ignorant to how delinquent her daughter is, fuelling Nicki's own blindness to her bad behavior. She smokes black tar heroin in one scene and acts like a perfect heroine in the next; the film does not present her as vindictively deceptive, but rather as if she doesn't think what she is lying about is all that bad. It is not as if these kid are conflicting with their parents and that is why they are rebelling; their parents are totally out of their lives.

Arguably the most discussed film of the cycle, Larry Clark's *Kids* is controversial specifically for the lack of adult figures. To summarize the film, *Kids* is a 'day in the life' of a group of young friends in New York City. Telly (Leo Fitzpatrick) spends the day (successfully) trying to have sex with virgins, Casper drinks and gets high, Jennie and Ruby (Rosario Dawson) get tested for STDs, and Jennie spends the rest of her day looking for Telly, her one time and only sexual partner, to tell him that he unknowingly gave her HIV. Jennie passes out at a house party after taking drugs before she gets the chance to tell him, however, and he presumably transmits the virus to a girl he's been propositioning all day. Of the film, Clark says, "*Kids* was about the secret world of kids with no adults around and no parents around."[10] In the film, we see one parent and about twenty different kids. There are virtually no adult figures in the entire film. These kids, and really they are extremely young actors, drink, do drugs, fight, and disrespect strangers, and have nobody there to tell them to stop.

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[10] "Larry Clark discusses "Ken Park"," YouTube video, 13:20, posted by "lethalpanther2," March 21, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4KbaQY7BGs.

Brick blatantly excludes parents of the film's teenagers from the entire film as well. The film follows a high school student, Brendan (Joseph-Gordon Levitt) who is attempting to solve the mystery of his ex-girlfriend's disappearance. A modern hard-boiled drama, Brendan finds that she was caught up with the wrong crowd. The title refers to a brick of cocaine that was connected to her and cut 'bad', centralizing drugs with the narrative as well as her disappearance. While the film is about high school cliques, because the characters are given mature identities, adult figures are almost completely left out of the film. Brendan only mentions his parents when talking to his school's assistant vice principal: "No more of these informal chats! If you have a disciplinary issue with me, write me up or suspend me and I'll see you at the parent conference." This is a veiled threat partially because Brendan knows he won't do anything *and* because he knows his parents are totally irrelevant. The fact that the only adult Brendan talks to is the assistant vice principal is appropriate: neither the principal nor the vice principal, this man clearly holds little power, representing adults as a whole. The film also avoids the actual school rather ironically, and the absence of the school setting us common in these films as well.

In *Brick*, Brendan and his classmates are at school, at their lockers, in the library or the auditorium, but never in the actual classroom. Their lockers are outside, even further distancing them from a space of actual learning. The same goes for *The Bling Ring*: only inside the school before the kids begin their criminal activity merely serving as a space for the characters Katie and Mark to actually meet, the school is nothing more than a backdrop. The kids hang out on the steps, but when they begin to walk toward the school at the end of these scenes, the film cuts temporally to after-school activities.

While *Afterschool* does include scenes within the classroom, the title certainly speaks to the real action happening *after* school and to reinforce this, all of the teachers are shown fragmented or totally out of focus. The rather famous actress Rosemarie Dewitt plays one of the teachers, but without the credits it would be completely impossible to know. We hear her voice and see her legs, torso and chest, particularly because that is how Rob sees her, and never see her face in focus. The way teachers are portrayed, that being not at all, has come an extremely long way from the traditional JD films' inclusion of teachers.

Arguably a subgenre all to itself, the coming of age high school film often uses good intentioned teachers to facilitate a change: a teacher steps in and not only fills an educational void in delinquent, failing teens' lives, but teaches them life lessons traditionally taught in the home. The film *Blackboard Jungle* is the prototype of this narrative, and certainly exposed audiences to dangerous inner-city schools. *Stand and Deliver* (Ramón Menéndez, 1988), *Dead Poets Society*, *Dangerous Minds* (John N. Smith, 1995), *Freedom Writers* (Richard Lagravenese 2007), *Teachers* (Arthur Hiller, 1984), and *To Sir With Love* (James Clavell, 1967) all follow this trend. While some of those examples take place during this current cycle, I do not see this as a continued trend during this time period. *Dangerous Minds* represents a coming of age film found in the hood film subgenre and *Freedom Writers* has little to none of the dangerous edge found in *Blackboard Jungle*. Beyond those, the trend really has not continued. The majority of these films show positive adult influences who do not give up on helping students work toward a positive future, and are completely in opposition to how contemporary JD films are functioning. The few independent films that do included adult figures in mentoring

roles tend to humanize adult figures, giving them their own flaws - *Half Nelson* (Ryan Fleck, 2006) and *Short Term 12* (Destin Cretton, 2013) are examples of this.

When contemporary JD films do include parental figures or teachers, they function as abusive forces responsible for the teens' delinquent behaviors. For example, Larry Clark's *Ken Park* was made as a response to the film *Kids*. In an interview he says, "It's a companion piece to *Kids*. When I made *Kids*, everybody said, "Where are the parents?" and I said, "Wait for *Ken Park*.""[11] In another interview he says, "My idea was that it's about kids who get none of the emotional needs fulfilled by the adults around them, and the adults are using them to fill their own needs, whatever they may be, so they get nothing."[12] Beyond just parents who don't understand, these parents are radically abusive to their kids. For example, Shawn is having sex with his girlfriend's mom; Peaches' father forces her to marry him; Claude's father tries to have sex with him. This is Clark's response to those who simply believe the problem in *Kids* is solely that the parents aren't around. That's certainly a problem, but through *Ken Park*, Clark argues that things might be even worse when they do get involved – damning if they do damning if they don't.

Where *Ken Park* examines what happens when parents are around, I believe the school shooting films replace the coming of age high school films. In this case, when we do see kids actually in the classroom, we often see them murdered by a classmate. Totally rethinking the space of the school from one of education and hope into one extremely dangerous, contemporary JD films appropriate the setting for their own

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Michael Martin, *The Nerve Interview Larry Clark*, September 6, 2006, http://www.nerve.com/content/the-nerve-interview-larry-clark.

purposes. In *Heart of America*, for example, we see an extremely unfair teacher who grades harshly because of his own personal failures, and we see him killed by one of his students. It is not as if these films are presenting totally vindictive students who come in and murder the teacher who is trying to help them. That teacher just no longer exists. By eliminating the parent, school, teacher and the like from these films, or rethinking them as horribly abusive and dangerous, contemporary JD films both continue to present the causes for teen rebellion and do so in a nonjudgmental way. If these films continued to present teachers and parents who want to help or change, the unresolved ending would shed a negative light on these kids, which the films do not want to do.

SEX, DRUGS, AND VIOLENCE

While the inclusion of sexuality is not unique to this contemporary JD cycle, sexuality was often implied or, if shown, consensual and fragmented through editing, now sexuality is often explicitly shown and in service of demonstrating the brutality of the lives of the delinquents in these films. One particularly brutal way sexuality is used to further narratives while also reinforcing youth culture's nihilism and disregard for the future is the prevalence of rape scenes. For instance, several JD films use rape as both a way to demonstrate the brutal behavior of delinquents and the brutal experiences they have to endure, as well as to drive the narrative in a certain direction. By looking at the way films use rape as a narrative as well as an aesthetically realistic devices in *Bully, Girls Town* (Jim McKay, 1996)*, Mysterious Skin* (Gregg Araki, 2004)*, Kids* and *Havoc*, a better sense of the genre can be gained.

Narratively, rape is essential to films like *Bully, Girls Town, and Mysterious Skin.* Rather than exist as part of the plot but not crucial to it, the plot of these films center

around and are furthered through rape. *Bully,* for example, is a film that uses rape as a rationale for murder. One of the most disturbing films in a group of disturbing films, *Bully* is a true story tale of revenge. Bobby Kent (Nick Stahl), a twenty year old who lives at home and works at a deli making sub sandwiches (as does, with a similar disinterest, Neil (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) in Gregg Araki's *Mysterious Skin*), is the film's villain *and* victim. He forces his best friend Marty (Brad Renfro) to strip in gay clubs, physically abuses him, rapes (it is not explicitly shown) Marty's girlfriend Lisa (Rachel Miner) and also rapes Lisa's best friend Ali (Bijou Phillips). This scene, taking place roughly thirty minutes into the two hour long film, is almost unbearably graphic: initially Ali is interested in having sex with Bobby, having performed oral sex on him in the past, but once he forces her to watch a pornographic video of two men engaging in sexual acts, she becomes disgusted and tells him to turn it off. Bobby doesn't take no for an answer, however, and we watch as he pulls her hair and physically overpowers her to force her to watch, flips her over to forcibly penetrate her and then smacks her in the head until she sobs, "you're the best I've ever had." While Lisa's stupidity and self/Marty-obsession initially results in her unintentionally cruel indifference toward Ali's claim of rape, in the next scene she uses the rape as the excuse for her big plan: to get everybody together to kill Bobby Kent.

Revenge for rape is similarly the theme of *Girls Town.* The film begins in slow motion with a girl, Nikki (Aunjanue Ellis), stoically walking down a New York street. We hear what presumably she is thinking: muffled cries and the low voice of a man telling her to be quiet, layered on top of sirens and chaotic club music. In school she gives a speech about being accepted to Princeton and wanting to major in African Studies

and Creative Writing, but only a few days later she commits suicide. The remaining hour of the film revolves around Nikki's three friends finding out about her rape and taking revenge on the men who have wronged them. They vandalize the car of Emma's (Anna Grace) rapist, pawn the television of Patti's (Lili Taylor) abusive boyfriend, and finally attack Nikki's rapist.

Mysterious Skin's narrative inclusion of rape is much more emotional than the rest of these film because, rather than sidestep the psychological impact of the trauma through suicide or immediate revenge, the film tells the story of what happens to two boys who are molested during childhood. The film begins in 1981 when the boys are eight years old.[13] Neil (Chase Ellison), already identifying as homosexual by that age, is coerced into having sex with his male baseball coach (Bill Sage). It is presumably in response to this, then, that Neil grows up to be a prostitute by age eighteen. He retains a heartbreakingly confused fondness for his time with 'Coach,' taking pride in being his favorite. In a telling moment, Neil pleasurably sticks the finger of a client in his mouth, directly linking back to when Coach did the same to him. Brian (Brady Corbet), on the other hand, repressed the memory of when Coach and Neil raped him (his repression of child abuse and his generally shy and reserved temperament are quite similar to Charlie's in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Stephen Chbosky, 2012)), thinking instead that aliens abducted him. While Neil spirals into a dangerous and violent lifestyle of unprotected sex and brutally depicted rape, Brian spends the film trying to find out what happened to him when he was a little boy. He finally finds Neil and is told the truth, and

[13] The only film of the cycle that takes place in a distant past, *Mysterious Skin*'s utilization of this device works to further emphasize the impossibility of a future for the characters. Always stuck in the past, unable to go beyond their assaults, the time period only strengthens this bleak outlook.

the film ends with the boys sneaking into the house and embracing on the couch of their rapist. Two boys take two different life paths, undoubtedly impacted by what happened to them when they were eight years old.

Kids has, like *Bully* and *Mysterious Skin*, an unbelievably graphic rape scene. I pinpoint this as exemplary of the explicitness adopted by these films due to the fact that this rape scene, one of the last scenes in the film, is shown in a five minute long take. After the tragedy of Jennie not finding Telly to tell him about her virus, Casper rapes Jennie's limp unconscious body. Clark does not relieve the audience of a second of the horrific act, an extremely disturbing example of how films in this subgenre are unrelentingly explicit. Casper lethargically rises, whispers "Jennie wake up," and when she doesn't, he grazes her breasts, kisses her, she sleepily knocks him away, and he begins to unbutton her belt and pants. He positions her body like a rag doll - folding her legs and later hands over his shoulders, uncooperative due to their intrinsic tendency to fall down limply. Casper whispers with genuine sincerity, "don't worry Jennie, it's me Casper. Don't worry Jennie" and thrusts into her unconscious body. She makes confused and uncomfortable whimpers, and he continues to forcibly violate her. Folded in an appallingly barbaric way so that her sock covered feet touch her hands and head, she barely audibly whispers, "no don't," but he ignores her plea. Clark maintains the same medium shot length throughout the scene, merely panning up and down slightly. The film does cut once to a shot that includes both the rape and a sleeping boy in the frame, but quickly cuts back to the original distance. Jennie moans more loudly, but Casper silences her as she quietly begs for him to stop. The room is dim, the actors are both clothed and awkwardly blocked in a way that conceals their bodies and the camera

is framed relatively far away, but this all only reinforces the cold, realistic quality of this scene.

Not only do many films narratively and aesthetically revolve around rape, several of them touch on the also troubling cultural problem of individuals not fully understanding what constitutes rape. Lisa's reaction when Ali cries to her "the fucker just raped me" is one shared by too many: "Shit Ali make up your fucking mind. I told you he was kinky." Once Lisa decides to use this as one of the many reasons for murdering Bobby, she uses the phrase "just about raped," implying her misunderstanding of what does and does not constitute rape. In *Girls Town,* Emma vulnerably tells the entire story of how she was raped to her friends, when Patti interjects, "Emma, Emma shit you go into a car like that with a guy…what do you expect...That's just the reality…Look you just don't get in that situation in the first place." Yes the girls choose to fight back against their oppressors, but it remains to be seen if Patti ever changes her misconceived perception of rape. *Havoc* has potentially the most problematic understanding of rape due to the fact that the audience is forced to adopt this "you asked for it" mentality.

In the film, bored, rich girls Allison (Anne Hathaway) and Emily (Bijou Phillips) seek out trouble in central Los Angeles. They get involved with Hispanic drug dealers, hoping to get into their gang. At a motel party, the gang members tell them they can join, so long as they roll a die and sleep with the number of men the die lands on. Allison, the main protagonist, conveniently rolls a one, while her best friend rolls a three. They both go to a room with two beds, and simultaneously begin their initiation. Allison chooses to go to bed with Hector (Freddie Rodríquez), the man she's been flirtatious with

throughout the film, but in the middle of it, decides she cannot continue. Emily, on the other hand, is adamant that she will do it, getting mad at Allison for asking her to stop. Allison leaves the room, and two men enter. What was once consensual becomes a gang rape, plain and simple. Emily cries out and makes them stop, physically racked by shakes and dry heaves. Allison breaks in, consoles her, and the girls leave. And then something strange happens; Emily tells the police she was raped, and Allison is shocked. To her parents she says, "They're gonna press charges? But they didn't! We were the ones!" As an audience we are expected to sympathize with Hector as he is arrested and rejoice when Allison tells Emily's parents that she wasn't actually raped. She says to Emily, "You didn't tell them about the dice," and later says, "we asked for it." Their boyfriends go downtown to seek revenge on those who were not arrested, and the film ends with the ambiguity of gunshots. Essentially, the film argues if Emily hadn't asked to be raped and then lied about it, nobody would be getting shot. The misguidedness of Lisa and Patti is one problem, but *Havoc* adopting this reprehensible notion of "we asked for it so it's not rape" is quite another. Two other motifs of the JD film, violence and drugs, are narratively centralized and explicitly so, and a close analysis of them, while certainly fruitful, would essentially be repetitive of this sexuality section. Contemporary JD films, as discussed, really are about little more than sex, drugs and violence.

To be brief with drug use and violence as the previous exploration of sexuality is working similarly, a common narrative among contemporary JD films is one of drug dealing and doing, charting the risks and dangers of the illegal world of drugs. Films like *Afterschool*, *Alpha Dog* (Nick Cassavetes, 2006), and *Brick* are all specifically about drug dealing and what dangers result from the illegal world. In these films, all narrative and

important plot points are specifically results of drugs, just like many narrative elements in other films are the results of sex. For example, *Afterschool*, as already discussed, tells the story of a young boarding school student, Robert, who early on in the film witnesses the overdose of twin classmates. Robert is not a delinquent as much as a bystander who witnesses the corruption at his school, acting as a distanced protagonist through his position as the cameraman for the school. We see that Rob's roommate was the one who dealt them the drugs, and we watch as the rest of the film deals with the aftermath of their deaths, exploring Robert's engagement with filming and his difficulty relating with others to the deaths.

Other films are so explicit with their drug use that they become almost instructive. *Kids* includes a scene of kids step by step rolling a blunt while at a skate park. As a boy makes it, one offscreen says, "Break it, scrape it, lick it, dump it, smoke it." The scene, and the film itself, is so believable that producer Christine Vachon mentions in her book *Shooting to Kill: How an Independent Producer Blasts Through the Barriers to Make Movies That Matter*, the fact that she is constantly asked whether or not kids were actually doing drugs and drinking in the film. She writes, *"Kids* posed the biggest challenge. What was hard about it – and what's hard on any low-budget film that uses a vérité style – is maintaining a sort of controlled chaos. Lots of people think that the young actors in that movie were really drinking beer and smoking dope. I couldn't control what they did when they left the set, but once they came onto it, my answer was and is: No drugs – legal or illegal."[14] So realistic people thought it was indeed real, JD films push the explicitness of drug use to an extreme. Aside from this, the documentary-

[14] Christine Vachon, *Shooting to Kill: How an Independent Producer Blasts Through the Barriers to Make Movies That Matter,* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 160.

realism of the film, which has little to no discernable plot, reflects the general tendency toward art cinema these films take. Again, in an attempt to be true to the darker sides of life, these films depict these acts negatively.

In these films, the drug use very rarely has positive implications; it is not as if these films glorify the act as a positive or fun influence on kids. While some films merely present the activity as part of contemporary youth behavior through explicit scenes, others show the horrors associated with drugs. Often, drugs are linked to depression or bad behavior, but not in a way that blatantly condemns it in a judgmental way. For example, in *Heart of America*, one of the school shooters thanks her meth dealer for getting her high early in the morning of the attack, saying "I couldn't have done this without you." In *Thirteen* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2003), protagonist Tracy (Evan Rachel Wood) acts out by cutting and using drugs directly in relation to her mother disappointing her. We can assuredly say nobody thought Spicoli was trying to numb the pain of abandonment and bullying through marijuana use in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. By remarking on the prevalence of these activities, one can see how central to these films the act of delinquency truly is. Either the narrative is centered around and furthered through drug dealing or drug use, or the use of drugs has a particularly strong presence and often directly related to outside factors such as problems at home or with society in general. By examining the centrality of drugs in many of these films as well as the way many films directly link the already defined external factor to the use of drugs, once can see the strong importance the motif of drug use has in the subgenre.

Like sex and drugs, violence is centrally narrative and graphically portrayed. *Bully* revolves around a murder plot, similar to the classic JD film *Crime in the Streets*

(Donald Siegel, 1956), but in this case the murder actually takes place and it is graphically, overwhelmingly explicit. We see the kids swamp Bobby, stabbing him several times, slicing his stomach and throat and smashing his head with a baseball bat. Gregg Araki combines extreme violence with rape in two of the three teen apocalypse films and his later film *Mysterious Skin* – Jordan and Amy are raped and he is then killed in *The Doom Generation*, Polly (Sarah Lassez) is smacked, thrown face first into a coffee table before being raped, leading to her suicide in *Nowhere*, and Neil is forced to snort cocaine, spit on, attacked to the brink of unconsciousness with a hammer and a baby shampoo bottle, and raped. Before the attack Neil runs to hide in the bathroom, and the invasion of the space and rape in the shower echo not teen movies but rather the horror films *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) and *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). Similarly, Tate (James Ransone) murders his grandparents with a *Psycho*-esque kitchen knife in *Ken Park.*

Certainly sex, drugs and violence are present in JD films throughout the subgenre's history. What is new, however, is the extremely explicit nature; violence, sex, and drug use are not implied, but rather shown in entirety. Considering this is the trend that has taken place in all of cinema over the past several decades it is not as if this is particularly surprising, but it is an important distinction to make in the subgenre in order to account for why trends have shifted. Not only that, but to focus on characters over plots, plots which concern little more than sex, drugs and violence, one can explore the fact that the current cycle is linked more closely to art cinema than the traditional narrative cinema in which classical JD films exist.

ANGST AND SUICIDE – THE SMITHS SPECTRUM

One of the most common ways contemporary JD films demonstrate their emphasis on non-resolution and the inability of characters to conceive a time beyond that of their current despair is through suicide. While I concede that suicide is present across the board in teen films – *So Young, So Bad* (1950), *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977), *Dead Poets Society* – it often is done by a marginal character or takes place in the narrative early enough that the film can resolve it's implications. I would like to, through the band The Smiths,[15] create a spectrum that follows my understanding of the degree to which a film can be considered a true representation of the angst associated with contemporary JD films. Looking at the different roles the music of The Smiths plays in *Pretty in Pink* (Howard Deutch, 1986), a film representing neither a contemporary film nor a JD film, The *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, a JD film made during the contemporary cycle but outside the subgenre, and Gregg Araki's *Totally F***ed Up* and *The Doom Generation*, two prime examples of contemporary JD films, a connection between the films as demonstrative of teen angst as well as a divergence in genre emerge.

Pretty in Pink is a classic 80's teen movie that, despite its more raw portrayal of teen life, evades any juvenile delinquent consideration. Molly Ringwald's Andie is a bright girl literally from the wrong side of the tracks who falls in love with a 'richie' named Blane (Andrew McCarthy). For many, however, the heart of the film is Duckie (Jon Cryer), the relentless but loveable lapdog of Andie. He loves her, of course, but she only sees in him a best friend. The film is very much concerned with class differences and the implications of class beyond high school; Blane and Andie cannot find common

[15] The Smiths represent both the time period in which these films take place (mid 80s and impactful to at least the mid 90s) and the angst sentiment.

ground among their friends and Duckie, according to Andie, has trouble coping with the future. She says, "I propose that you're deliberately flunking your courses so that you can stay in high school…you're not always one to face things…the future." While she is not explicit about what this entails, one could certainly imagine Duckie's reservations about the future when he will most likely turn out similarly to Andie's unemployed father (Harry Dean Stanton). So Duckie, despite his blasé attitude and constant sense of humor, has a few reasons to be angst ridden. Examining the particular scene that includes music by The Smiths specifically exposes Duckie's sadness.

Prior to this scene, Blane and Andie have a romantic yet contemplative country club date in a secluded barn. They kiss, the camera zooms in to a close up of their embrace, and soft romantic music plays. And then the film cuts, with a nondiegetic sound bridge of chimes, to an upside down hat surrounded by thrown about playing cards. The camera pans up and focuses to reveal Duckie sitting on his bed. Cutting to a medium long shot, his entire bedroom is in frame; his beige room is only colored by black spray paint graffiting his walls. His mattress sits on the floor, his one piece of furniture is an old chair, and his carpet is spotted and stained. One can barely hear The Smith's 'Please, Please, Please Let Me Get What I Want'[16] over the sound of the rain. In the song, Morrissey begs "See the look I've had can make a good man turn bad, so please, please, please, let me, let me, let me, let me get what I want this time…Lord knows it would be the first time." An hour into the film, this sudden vulnerable exposure into, what has been up until now, a relatively surface character, is rather heartbreaking. One who has appeared so full of color and life has been washed away as if by the rain

[16] The Smiths, ""Please, Please, Please, Let Me Get What I Want," by Johnny Marr and Morrissey, B-side to "William, it Was Really Nothing," Rough Trade, 1984.

falling outside his bedroom. We remain this distanced from him for the remainder of the brief (20 seconds) scene: he stretches out on his bed, appears to fight back tears behind his sunglasses, and then folds his legs up to both make himself small and possibly warm in his emotionally and physically cold space. Nothing is said, but the mise-en-scene and diegetic music lay bare to the audience the sadness in which Duckie resides.

And yet, Duckie has a happy ending. Although he does not win Andie's heart, he catches the eye of a pretty girl (Kristy Swanson) at the prom, as well as us: Duckie is privileged with screenwriter John Hughes' auteurist touch - a breaking of the fourth wall. Not only does Duckie find someone, but he also reminds the audience, through the self-referentiality of looking directly into a nondiegetic camera, that he is merely a character in a film. The theme song for the film, 'If You Leave' by OMD[17] plays diegetically, and with lyrics about seizing the moment, it further emphasizes his hope. Any worry we had for Duckie's emotional state is quickly dismissed.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower, an adaptation of the 1999 book by the same title, tells the story of a sweet but emotionally troubled boy named Charlie (Logan Lerman). Set in the early 1990's, the film traverses the ups and downs of being a high school outcast. The summer before the plot of the film takes place, Charlie's best friend commits suicide, leaving him entirely alone on his first day of his freshman year. He becomes friends with a group of kids, however, and they introduce him to fun, also known as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975), drugs and music. Charlie, influenced by his crush Sam (Emma Watson), hangs posters of The Smiths on

[17] OMD, "If You Leave," in *Pretty in Pink Soundtrack,* 1986.

his walls and makes a mix for his friend Patrick with 'Asleep'[18] on it…twice. The temperament and status of The Smiths perfectly matches Charlie – indie outsiders, The Smiths' music is emotional, methodical and understated. A character deeply susceptible to emotional stimuli, certainly the music of The Smiths fuels his sadness and angst. Where Duckie's relationship with The Smiths was to heighten a more a momentary sadness, Charlie's is much more representational of him as a whole. This totalizing angst is most apparent when his repressed memories of molestation are released from his subconscious and he becomes suicidal.

However, like Duckie, Charlie has a happy ending. While his depression was far reaching enough to get to the point of blatantly being suicidal, Charlie get's psychiatric help. In a moment emblematizing his desire to live and experience life, Charlie stands in the back of a pickup truck as his best friends drive him through Pittsburgh's Fort Pitt Tunnel in the final scene of the film. In a voice over reading of a letter he has written to an anonymous friend, he says, "But right now, these moments are not stories. This is happening. I am here and I am looking at her, and she is so beautiful. I can see it: this moment when you know you are not a sad story. You are alive and you stand up and see the lights on the buildings and everything that makes you wonder. And you're listening to that song on that drive with the people you love most in this world, and in this moment I swear we are infinite." Importantly, the song is not by The Smiths, but rather it is the optimistic (if just for one day) 'Heroes' by David Bowie.[19] Writer/Director Stephen Chbosky, through giving his relatable character a happy ending, is certainly trying to help

[18] The Smiths, "Asleep," by Johnny Marr and Morrissey, B-side of "The Boy with the Thorn in His Side," Rough Trade, 1985.
[19] David Bowie, "Heroes," by David Bowie and Brian Eno, in *Heroes,* RCA, 1977.

and give a voice to a young audience. Of his decision to make the film PG-13, he said, "A 13-year-old kid can get my book pretty much anywhere. [They can get it] from the library; they don't have to get permission to buy it from a bookstore. For all the reasons the book has done good for those kids, I wanted them to have the same access to the movie."[20] This quote speaks volumes about the relationship between rating and genre audience, which is something that will be considered when discussing defining this genre as a whole in the next chapter. While *Pretty in Pink* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* capitalize on The Smiths' angst but move past it toward happy endings, Gregg Araki's *The Doom Generation* and *Totally F***ed Up* not only explicitly define themselves as angst films (*The Doom Generation* was made by The Teen Angst Movie Company and *Totally F***ed* Up is depicted, through opening titles, as being "More Teen Angst" from Gregg Araki) but also relate The Smiths to teen suicide.

*Totally F***ed Up* begins with a newspaper headline: "Suicide Rate High Among Gay Teens." The short article introduces a study showing that 30% of teenagers who kill themselves are gay. It also foreshadows the rest of the film's focus on gay relationships by discussing two gay teens that committed suicide when their families tried to move apart. Soon after this introductory image, we see the group of gay teens whom we follow throughout the film sitting on the side of a dead end road discussing the topic of suicide pacts. Michele (Susan Behshid) says, "There's this movement in like Yugoslavia - these teenagers, I think they're called like The Black Death Cult or something, they've gone on this like suicide kick…They started offing themselves and the state officials don't know

[20] Stephanie Merry, "Stephen Chbosky talks 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower'," *The Washington Post,* September 20, 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-09-20/lifestyle/35496153_1_ezra-miller-wallflower-stephen-chbosky.

what to do about it…But the best part is they get their inspiration from like Joy Division, The Cure, The Smiths…So now all their parents are banning their kids from listening to the groups." Before they can discuss it further, a group of flamboyant guys walk past them and elicit a new topic. This banning links back to the cluelessness of parents; their thinking that if they take away the music then they will take away the suicidal thoughts is incredibly misguided. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* does touch on suicide with Charlie's best friend similarly to this inclusion of suicide pacts, but *Totally F***ed Up* actually ends with the suicide of one of the film's protagonists.

After his boyfriend break up with him, Andy (James Duval) is distraught and despondent. In one of the 'confessional' interviews for Steven,[21] he tells a story about a seagull: "I saw this seagull on the freeway once flying really low, close to the traffic. It got sucked in by the vacuum created by all the speeding cars. It couldn't fly out. Cars were all slowing down. It was flapping its wings like mad, exhausted. Terrified. It tried to keep from getting splattered like a bug on some trucks front grill. It just couldn't get out of the way." This allegorical monologue begins as an interview but becomes a voice over when we see shots of Andy walking around town aimlessly. He looks at his speed dial but chooses not to call anybody, drinks alone, walks around a video store and finally we return to the initial interview. The next day he goes to visit Deric to see how he is feeling after having been assaulted in an alley, but when Deric asks him if he wants to talk about his breakup he responds, "Not much to say, you know? Got burned. My poor little fucking heart got broken. BFD." When he does decide to reach out to a friend later, nobody picks up the phone. Frustrated, Andy downs a giant glass of scotch and pours a

[21] I'm planning on writing about this film in the camcorder section, so I am assuming that I will have introduced the plot/characters already. If not, it's an easy fix.

second. This time, however, he adds some floor polish and drain cleaner. He stumbles to the backyard, spits up blood, and falls face down in a swimming pool. We cut back to another of his interviews, this time watched by the friends who survived him, and he says, "All I really want is to be happy for like one second. To be able to look around and not just see shit. To say hey, it's a beautiful day. I want to enjoy life while I'm still young enough to appreciate it. I mean that's what it's all about, right?" This posthumous video is in stark opposition to Charlie's monologue, especially due to the fact that we know Andy did not achieve this basic human desire for happiness. Charlie feels totally alive; more than alive, he feels infinite. Andy wants so badly to be happy, and yet he takes his own life.

The Doom Generation, a fast paced, comedic film about a group of teens on the run from the police, makes another explicit connection between The Smiths and suicide. Near the end of the film, Amy, X and Jordan are driving to avoid being caught by the police for their multiple crimes. In between conversations of bestiality and threesomes and the time Jordan and Amy lost her mom's car, a song on the radio makes Jordan think of his friend. He says:

> This song always reminds me of Scooter...he was like my best friend all through high school. One day he brought a gun to physics class and told everyone he was gonna shoot himself in the bathroom. Then he did…Scooter was so sad all the time. Me and him used to sit in my room getting stoned listening to The Smiths. Like he was over the night before he killed himself. Right in the middle of 'Unloveable'[22] he just started crying like crazy. He was really into The Smiths.

[22] The Smiths, "Unloveable," by Johnny Marr and Morrissey, B-side to "Bigmouth Strikes Again," Rough Trade, 1986.

Araki makes another direct reference between The Smiths and suicide, again linking them but not explicitly arguing that their music elicited something within the kids like the Yugoslavian parents did, distinguishing their music as heightened emotionally.

Gregg Araki films, exemplary representations of the contemporary JD film subgenre, take angst as far as it can go. The kids in these films are depressed, and unlike Duckie's brief sadness or Charlie's more in depth emotional instability, they actually end their own lives. Andy gets his heart broken, so he drinks a giant glass of bleach. Yes, Charlie's friend kills himself like Jordan's, but fundamentally, by including the story of this at the beginning of *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the film is working away from that suicidal mentality. *The Doom Generation*, on the other hand, builds toward Scooter's story, for it comes near the end. It is the tone that resounds throughout, therefore it is not shocking for the film to conclude with Jordan's brutal murder.

Contemporary JD films have depressed, unstable, psychotic and angst-ridden teens, and instead of giving them an entirely happy ending, often times they remain that way in the end. Some commit suicide, some remain in their treatment facility (*Manic* (Jordan Melamed, 2001)), others end ambiguously. In the audio commentary for the film *Thirteen,* director Catherine Hardwicke addresses the way the film ends. Having a massive panic attack after all of the destructive behaviors caused by her friendship with a 'bad girl' have caught up with her, Tracy is consoled by her mother and is shown in slow motion spinning on a playground roundabout releasing a much needed scream. Instead of showing Tracy reintegrating with her old friends, getting good grades again etc., Hardwicke ends it ambiguously. She says, "We chose to end the movie with this scene because we realized that nobody's life wraps up in a neat bow. This kid is thirteen and

she's gonna be fourteen and fifteen and she's just gonna have more and more stuff thrown at her." As easy as it would be to present films with characters that overcome their emotional problems, these films choose to simply end where the characters currently are, as destructive as that might be.

TART – A NUANCED DISTINCTION

With the tagline 'Sex, Drugs and Study Hall,' *Tart* (Christina Wayne, 2001) seemingly situates itself as a contemporary juvenile delinquent film. Delilah (Bijou Phillips) steals cocaine from the man her mom is having sex with, Cat's (Dominique Swain) boyfriend William (Brad Renfro) steals from her and his friends and has sex with strange older men, and eventually William kills Delilah with a rock in the woods when she threatens to reveal all of his secrets. Typical delinquent film behavior. And yet, *Tart*, because of its non-parodic allusion to classic teen films, dated time period and aesthetic, tendency to imply rather than be explicit with sexuality and finally its reinstitution of authority, places itself outside the realm of the contemporary JD cycle. Rather, it may distinguish the qualities that remain from the traditionally less obtrusive coming of age JD films.

Tart opens, in retrospect, nonlinearly – an establishing shots of an unidentifiable wooded area cuts to a girl in the backseat of a car being driven by a crime scene. She looks to the police action, through a rain-covered window, as her voiceover narration says, "Are you there? Can you hear me? I want to talk to you – try to explain how everything got so fucked up." The films title appears on the screen and immediately following, a more traditional establishing shot, brownstones in New York, appears. While the film doesn't inform the audience through text on the screen, we have now gone

back in time several months. Spottiswoode and His Enemies' moody track 'Nice Girl'[23] replaces the melodic score and we watch as a fragmented body gets ready for the day. We see an arm pull through a sweater; a skirt being buttoned; a shoe tied. Finally we see the face of the girl, the same as the one in the car, as she puts on eyeliner. The film feels more grey than pink, but undoubtedly Duetch's *Pretty in Pink* is a source of inspiration for *Tart.* The allusion is not a parody like Araki's *Nowhere,* but rather a device of a film both wanting to mar the polish of mainstream films and one relying on classical teen film conventions. This film, despite its darkness, is nothing more than a coming of age tale like Andie's.

Another aspect of the film that places it in a different category is that, for a reason rather inconsequential, *Tart* takes place in the late 1980s. As mentioned, many of the truest JD films utilize a contemporary time period and visual aesthetic in order to further emphasize the present-ness of their characters. They have the best camera equipment, newest cell phones, take the popular drugs, often listen to new music, use the internet (for porn and to order guns), and watch popular television shows. This acts as a way for the audience to relate to the attempted realistic quality of the characters and to deny them the ability to view the film with a nostalgic mindset. Contemporary JD films aren't attempting to show audiences how kids *were*, they are showing how kids *are*. And for that matter, an emphasis on the present denies an immediate connection to the future. Where there is a past there is always a future, but the same does not go for the present. Therefore, *Tart*'s decision to take place in the past inherently links the film to the idea that our protagonist has a future; the nonlinearity of the opening sequence tells us that she

[23] Spottiswode and His Enemies, "Nice Girl," in *Spottiswode and His Enemies,* Kumpelstiltskin Records, 2000.

survives whatever trauma she is mentioning, and the time period increases the chance that this film has a coming of age narrative. One cannot come of age if one does not have a future adulthood to reach.

Specifically relating to the new take on classic trends, this film lacks the explicitness by which pure JD films are defined. In this cycle, sex is often presented in its entirety. Not only that, but it is often a sexual experience traditionally deemed socially reprehensible: masturbation, threesomes, pedophilia, pornography, orgies, rape, etc. When Cat loses her virginity to William, it is depicted as a fairly traditional sexual experience. After the fact, she appears to regret her decision, but it is perceived as more of mourning for a loss of innocence than anything else. Dominique Swain lacks a youthful face, unlike the girls in *Kids* and *Afterschool* for example, so the scene is utterly normative. In an extreme long shot, William seduces Cat in the hallway of his dealer's house. Frankly, when JD sex scenes take place, they are rather cringe-worthy; for being so explicit, they tend to lack an erotic quality. This is why, I believe, these films are far from being as 'pornographic' as many criticize them to be. In *Tart*, however, the brief seduction scene is reasonably sexy. The distance creates a desire for more proximity; the spotlight on the couple highlights their figures; the nondiegetic music is French and alluring. He picks her up, she throws her head back in pleasure and they move even farther into depth onto a bed. The seduction scene lasts only a moment longer, and then cuts temporally to sexed up Cat wrapped in a bed sheet. Save the astoundingly bizarre, brief scene between Delilah and her dog, *Tart* conforms to traditional, fragmented sex scenes found in mainstream coming of age teen films.

Therefore, it is not surprising that *Tart* ends with the reinstitution of justice and familial order. After the murder, William is caught and shown on TV being taken away in handcuffs by the police. In terms of family, throughout the film, Cat has had trouble relating to her mother. They fight about Cat borrowing her dress, whether or not she stole her earrings, how she's hanging out with the wrong crowd etc., but she is constantly *present* in her life. A prime example of a generational disconnect but not an example of absentee or abusive parenting commonly found in JD films. So at the end of the film, then, it comes as not surprise that Cat's mother would chase after Cat through Central Park and say, "I'm so sorry about Delilah…I know you always think mommy's being critical and negative, but I don't mean it that way. I just get so concerned that I don't know what to say anymore or how to say it…I see you struggle so hard to fit in. All the pain you go through it breaks my heart. Don't you know that I couldn't live with myself if anything happened to you?" Sappy piano music begins to play as it is revealed to Cat that her mother notices her hardships and recognizes how difficult it is for her to fit in. They exchange 'I love you's' and embrace as acoustic guitar layers over the piano to swell the score. The camera tracks back and the credits roll. The film ends with an imprisonment of the threat to Cat's innocence and the restoration of the loving mother daughter relationship – not typical delinquent behavior in the least.

It has been the goal of this chapter to define the contemporary JD subgenre through discerning recurring narrative tropes and stylistic commonalities. The characteristics of the cycle, the school shootings, the negative appropriation of camcorders, the unresolved endings, the violence, the sex, the drugs, the suicide, the neglect and the depression are all working together to create a particularly bleak and grim

tone, but one that attempts to feel, through the removal of judgment by the film itself, true to life. These films speak to the sadness and frustration of being a teen, and rather than offer a quick fix, they merely present a look into a particular, ignored type of life. While several different tones and styles emanate from this body of films, some are ironic, some fast paced, others slow and methodical, they all are working to expose what some teens go through and why they act in such (self) destructive, harmful ways. In the documentary film *Bowling for Columbine* (Michael Moore, 2002), singer Marylyn Manson, one of the dozen sites of blame for why the massacre took place, was asked by the film's director what he would say to the kids at Columbine,[24] and I believe the essence of his words can be seen as manifested in the films of this cycle: "I wouldn't say a single word to them. I would listen to what they have to say. And that's what no one did."

[24] Moore seems to be asking Manson if what he would say to the kids (victims) and families of Columbine, but his response is clearly in regards to the shooters.

Chapter 3: Genre

In this chapter, I will discuss this cycle in generic terms. First, I will use Rick Altman's semantic/syntactic model to strictly speak on these films textually. His model will aid me in distinguishing this current cycle from other types of films, 'hood' for example, serving both to strengthen my argument for the characteristics of this cycle and to demonstrate the applicability of his method. The next goal of this section is to deal with the concept of art cinema, and I would like to nuance the ways in which these art films are examples of films with qualifications not typically connected to generic categorization, but because of the sheer prevalence of them and contextual factors, inherently demand for their linkage. I will briefly situate these films within the context of the 1950s cycle in terms of reception and audience, and use Thomas Schatz' definition of the life cycle of film genres to conjecture what the future holds for this JD film cycle.

In order to fully flesh out what I believe distinguish the films of this cycle from other cotemporary films, I am implementing Rick Altman's semantic/syntactic model. To quote Altman in his delineation of syntax and semantics:

> The semantic/syntactic approach to genre is based on the recognition that generic labels are commonly attached to categories deriving their existence from two quite different sources. At times we invoke generic terminology because multiple texts share the same building blocks (these *semantic* elements might be common topics, shared plots, key scenes, character types, familiar objects or recognizable shots and sounds). At other times we recognize generic affiliation because a group of texts organizes those building blocks in a similar manner (as seen through such shared *syntactic* aspects as plot structure, character relationships or image and sound montage).[1]

Rationalizing the function of the semantic model, he writes, "Semantic approaches to genre thus serve the important social function of providing easily sharable and

[1] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre,* (BFI: London, 1999), 89.

consistently applicable vocabulary. In this sense, you don't have to see a whole film to know whether it is a Western, and you can be pretty sure your neighbour (or even an Italian or Venezuelan film fan) will share your conclusion."[2] These semantic elements are often the most obvious to a viewer and allow for the broadest number of films to be linked. While Altman justifies this approach, he recognizes that some may value one over the other, writing:

> Proponents of syntactic analysis regularly point, however, to the relative shallowness of the semantic approach. Where attention to semantic concerns produce little more than a label, they suggest, syntactic analysis offers understanding of textual workings and thus of the deeper structures underlying generic affiliation. Stressing an exclusive corpus of texts that share multilayered patterns, the syntactic approach requires attention and much more than individual objects or images…The process may be more complex, and thus both slower and less consensual, but it has the benefit of facilitating comparison to extratextual syntactic patters (like history, myth or psychology) that might be seen to explain or at least appropriately contextualize the genre. [3]

The syntactic model requires more attention, more analysis and a broader knowledge of the films being studied more generally. Altman introduces his genre theory, one that stresses the importance of combing the syntax and semantics in order to fully articulate the genre, and I believe his approach is fundamental to best understand a genre.

Based on the elements of the subgenre analyzed in the previous chapter, it can be relatively simple to break the current cycle of the subgenre down semantically and syntactically. Semantically, there are young rebellious teens, drugs, guns and filmmaking styles that traditionally serves to present the characters as 'real,' which manifests itself in hand held cameras, real sets, and nonactors who are close in age to the characters they are portraying. Some of these films have much different aesthetics, particularly because

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

these are often art films created by filmmakers with their own aesthetic preference, but most common is a long take, cinéma vérité-esque approach. Syntactically, it is a bit more difficult to define the cycle, which is why Altman gives more weight to this approach.

Once again taking the unresolved ending as a place of importance, the syntax of these films is unique and differentiated from all previous JD films. Certainly if the dichotomy is social problem films vs. coming of age films, these fall on the side of social problems, but the narrative does not present the films in the manner that offers a solution to the problem. In the most pure films in this subgenre, broad ideological factors tend to be less critical to the whole of the discourse than one might expect. Essentially, films like *Kids, Bully, Elephant, Gummo* (Harmony Korine, 1997)*, Ken Park, Alpha Dog,* etc., while calling into questions the factors that led to the delinquency of their characters, often fail to question how to change broader ideologies. They are much smaller than that, more interested in focusing on individual characters with their own unique concerns, therefore questions of race, class and gender are not emphasized by the film as much as they could be. Certainly it is possible to infer as an audience member through the discourse that these films are questioning how problematic societal factors may be, but the films lack a proffered solution. The films appear to say that life is already too far-gone for these characters, it seems.[4] Maybe their stories can help change the future, but the films are not using these teens in a way that feels preachy. For this reason, I believe films that use juvenile delinquents as a lens to critique and reform complex concerns, like

[4] Line from *Mysterious Skin*: "I wish there was some way for us to go back and undo the past. But there wasn't. There was nothing we could do. So I just stayed silent…I wished with all my heart that we could just leave this world behind, rise like two angels in the night and magically disappear" – the only angle Neil will ever be is the one created when he was 8, the one his pedophilic rapist deemed him to be.

the conditions of urban and suburban culture at large, are now possibly tangential hybridizations when they were once more central to the subgenre.

Suburban films, for example, take semantic concerns and qualities found unique in the current youth film subgenre, but place them in, often times, dark comedies (which lean toward dramas) with the main goal of satirizing and critiquing suburban culture. Simply put, pure JD films look to factors like drug abuse, bullying and absentee parents to explain and rarely reform the actions of the teens, but hybrid films use teens as one of many sites to criticize society. For example, the film *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999) uses the notion of the juvenile delinquent, particularly through the character of Ricky Fitts (Wes Bentley), to trouble the classically idealized perception American society has of American suburbia.

Semantically, *American Beauty* borrows from the contemporary JD cycle. Ricky, equipped with his trusty camcorder, is unburdened by traditional norms. He films whomever he likes, sells drugs, and outright quits his catering job, a job that existed so his parents could turn a blind eye to his sizable savings ("never underestimate the power of denial"). In the story world, we find out that Ricky's father, someone unbelievably burdened by traditional norms, attempted to straighten him out by sending him to military school, but alas, Ricky maintains his rebellious attitude. Syntactically, however, the film is working on a different level than contemporary delinquent films.

Ricky, it turns out, is both paradoxically an example of rebellious youth and surprisingly one of the few voices of reason in the film. He inspires Lester (Kevin Spacey) to do what he wants and not what he feels he is obligated to do, helps Jane (Thora Birch) stand up to her best friend, and shows her how beautiful the world can be.

His camcorder functions in a radically different way than those of his delinquent comrades; one of the more memorable scenes in recent years, Ricky shows Jane a video that he took which captures a plastic bag floating in the wind. Calling it the most beautiful thing he has ever filmed, Ricky and Jane watch the video as he says, "That's the day I realized there was this entire life behind things. And this incredibly benevolent force wanted me to know that there was no reason to be afraid. Ever. The video's a poor excuse, I know, but it helps me remember. I need to remember. Sometimes there's so much beauty in the world I feel like I can't take it." Jane listens to Ricky, really listens to what he has to say, and in this scene their maturity and wisdom outshines any of the adults in the whole film. He isn't a character to fear or one who needs to grow up and change, but rather, through his acknowledgement of his instability recognized in this moment captured by the camcorder, one who teaches and leads.

The hood films, or what Amanda Ann Klein describes as the ghetto action films, are slightly more connected to the current JD films syntactically than a film like *American Beauty* due to the fact that they are entirely concerned with narratives of rebellious adolescents, but much less semantically and certainly not enough to be qualified as falling within the cycle. *Boyz N the Hood* (John Singleton), released in 1991 at the time of the emergence of the current JD cycle, for example, is a film much more tied to the hood film than of the contemporary JD subgenre. In his review of *Boyz N the Hood,* Roger Ebert articulates the point of the film:

> "There must be fewer experiences more wounding to the heart than for a parent to look at a child and fear for its future. In inner-city America, where one in every 21 young men will die of gunshot wounds, and most of them will be shot by other young men, it is not simply a question of

> whether the child will do well in school, or find a useful career: It is sometimes whether the child will live or die."[5]

That is *not* the point of the films in this current JD cycle, and semantically, the major role the parents play in this film for example, these films are not related in a way that would lead to that type of conclusion. The kids of this cycle, predominantly white ranging from lower to upper middle class, *are* in that world that *Boyz N the Hood* claims would allow the characters to prosper. But these kids are there and they aren't doing much better than the boys in the hood. The issues of these films aren't tied to one of race, gender or class – those elements become less noticeable when comparing the films because they are not consistent. While most often the protagonists are white suburban boys, Tracy is from a low socioeconomic home in *Thirteen*; the multiethnic kids in *Kids* are from New York City; Ali's family in the suburbs of Florida has money in *Bully*. They range from black to white, rich to poor, male to female, rural to suburb to city. While the hood film is rooted always in the semantic elements of African American urban life, JD films have different concerns than class and race. It's their age, it's their parents, it's the media, it's boredom, it's bad decision making it's everything that you can't chalk up to status. *Boyz n the Hood* and others like *Menace II Society* (Albert and Allen Hughes, 1993)[6] present a social problem with an entirely different function, one building its unique semantic elements up in order to speak to inner city life.

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[5] Roger Ebert, "Film Review: Boyz N the Hood," *The Chicago Sun Times,* July 12, 1991.

[6] Ebert's review for *Menace II Society,* which situates the film in terms of race and class, is similar to that of *Boyz N the Hood*: "Caine, the young man at the center of "Menace II Society," is not an evil person in the usual sense of the word. He has a good nature and a quick intelligence, and in another world he might have turned out happy and productive. But he was not raised in a world that allowed that side of his character to develop, and that is the whole point of this powerful film." Roger Ebert, "Film Review: Menace II Society," *The Chicago Sun Times,* May 26, 1993.

To reiterate, the coming of age aspect of *Boyz n the Hood* that offers a solution (as well as the common motif of telling the audience, through white text, what happens to the characters in the future), is quite different from the hopelessness of the contemporary JD films. Amanda Klein notes the intention of the film's director, John Singleton, and comparing it to lines from *Ken Park* and the coming of age film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower,* one can see the differences between the films. By presenting a character that faces the adversities of inner city life and comes out with a future, "Singleton felt that in making *Boyz N the Hood*, he was educating "his generation" about the importance of a college education, parental responsibility, and the rejection of gang violence."[7] Characters in the film want to go to college, want to succeed in life, and the film presents the fact that it is difficult but possible, and maybe if more attention is paid to the impairing dangers of gang violence, more can succeed. A film like *Ken Park* tells a bleaker story, one not offering a solution but rather simply showing the dark and disturbing lives of a group of teens. Shawn for example, at one point says, "I cant dream of other places. I can't picture in my head what they look like. Everything I think about looks like here." Comparing this to a line: "We cant choose where we come from but we can choose where we go from there" in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, one can see the different take on adolescent futures the coming of age films offer. Not tied to semantics and syntax is the fact that these films are marketed toward an entirely different audience, in the case of *Boyz N the Hood* a young, expansive African American one, and understanding the audience as well as other contextual factors of JD films might further emphasize how disparate these films truly are.

[7] Klein, *Cycles,* 156-157.

While the semantic/syntactic approach to studying a genre is beneficial in both discerning what conventions make up a genre as well as why certain films fall outside of its realm, paratextual consideration must also be given to both shape a genre and define a group of films as such. Looking at what numbers the films tend to gross, reception, taglines, ratings, and tendencies toward auteurism, the contemporary JD subgenre takes shape, its audience(s) can be revealed and therefore questions concerning traditional definitions of genre may be raised. For example, although the statistic that the hood film prototype *Boyz N the Hood* grossed more than all 35 of the films in this JD cycle combined[8] can't speak to defining a genre, it can, in a sense, shed light on questions of audience and appeal. In terms of audience, it is clear from that statistic that these films do not have a large one. The film that started this controversial teen film cycle in a cultural way was 1995's *Kids,* but not until 2003's *Elephant* did another film even break the million-dollar mark. Even with the minimal budgets with which independent films are typically associated, it is clear many films took a loss at the box office. And yet, the cycle has continued. This either troubles classic definitions of genre or genre troubles the attempt to distinguish this group of films as a cycle. Thinking about different modes of consumption and audience in an age of indie cinema, however, I would argue for the former.

Traditionally, genre is defined based on commercial box office success and an easily definable audience. The most acclaimed of film theorists discuss this, Thomas Schatz and Rick Altman in particular. In his seminal text *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System*, Thomas Schatz writes, "Film genres are not

[8] *Boyz N the Hood* Gross - $57,504,069 Cycle Combined - $56,469,835 (www.boxofficemojo.com)

organized or discovered by analysts but are the result of material conditions of commercial filmmaking itself, whereby popular stories are varied and repeated as along as they satisfy audience demand and turn a profit for the studios."[9] Because of the fact that these films are indeed outside of the studio system, they would essentially be excluded from Schatz' definition of genre. Certainly his definition comes in 1981, long before the major boom in independent cinema, so it is rather futile to disagree with Schatz given the time period in which he was working. Because this traditional definition is still widely accepted, however, it might be useful to recognize other ways of defining genre. Specifically discussing genre cycles, Amanda Ann Klein writes:

> The formation and longevity of film cycles are a direct result of their immediate financial viability as well as the public discourses circulating around them, including film reviews, director interviews, studio-issued press kits, movie posters, theatrical trailers, and media coverage. Because they are so dependent on audience desires, film cycles are also subject to defined time constraints: most film cycles are financially viable for only five to ten years. After that point, a cycle must be updated or altered in order to continue to turn a profit.[10]

Because these films, again, are not financially successful and therefore are not easily dying out because of it, the cycle length Klein argues is rather troubled by this subgenre. Altman rearticulates these classical claims, but does so in his introduction to strictly outlining how traditional genre studies is formulated, writing, "If it is not defined by the industry and recognized by the mass audience, then it cannot be a genre, because film genres are by definition not just scientifically derived or theoretically constructed categories, but are always industrially certified and publicly shared."[11] Altman later writes, as a segue to the rest of his book which attempts to reshape some of the claims of

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[9] Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System,* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1981), 16.
[10] Klein, Cycles, 4.
[11] Altman, *Film/Genre,* 16.

traditional genre studies, "This traditional view of genres thus presents a neat and welcome package. Still, the very coherence of this approach remains somewhat disconcerting…The time has now come to take that problem seriously. Can the current understanding of genre be squared with genre history? Or might careful consideration of historical questions shake the very ground on which traditional genre theory is built?"[12] While he uses the rest of his book to articulate many different and intelligent ways to conceive genre, using the contemporary JD film cycle to both utilize external factors to define it generically and reveal that, in this current cinematic age, that financial success and a clearly defined audience may not be as crucial to defining something as a genre as it was with classical Hollywood cinema.

For example, audience desires are not easily definable in relation to commercial success when discussing this cycle, particularly because one of the targeted audiences is excluded from attending. It is difficult to argue that teens would be disinterested in seeing these films, and also difficult to argue they aren't one of several targeted audiences despite the fact that the films are all rated R or higher. Yes, we have seen Stephen Chbosky's response to an initial R rating of his film and, because he intended for a teen audience, his subsequent decision to change the film, but it has also been argued that his film is working on quite a different, more coming of age level than the films of this cycle. Here, you have critically discussed controversy, R+ ratings making it apparent that the films include sex, drugs, and violence, and the trailers that include popular music and appealing taglines.[13] Through the fact that these films are intentionally attracting and attractive to rebellious teens who see themselves reflected on the screen, and through the

[12] Ibid,, 29.
[13] See Appendix.

analysis of these films it is clear that young adults want nothing more than to be filmed, seen and see themselves, is arguably only made stronger by the exclusionary rating system.

Concerning the subgenre historically, I would argue this cycle is more in line with the essence of the films than ever before. Previously, to disengage young audiences from the graphic nature of delinquency on the screen, censorship took place on the script level. The resulting films, while controversial, were toned down versions of what the films were originally intended to be. Now, the regulation of the films is happening after production, not restricting the films' content but rather who can see it. Luckily, modes of consumption such as DVDs, cable channels, and specialty channels like the Independent Film Channel and The Sundance Channel are impossible to regulate. Parents are assuredly still hoping to shield their children as they always have, but if the contemporary JD films are reflecting reality in the slightest, it is not as if parents are around to do it in the first place. In a review for the film *Spring Breakers* on the YouTube talk show *Pop Trigger* host Brett Erlich says, "I saw *Kids*. Granted I had to see *Kids* on Showtime at my house and it was kind of mixed out. I had to hack in to be able to see it on Showtime…Everybody tried their ass off to see *Kids*" [14] He also alludes to the fact that the film dually appeals to a higher brow audience, saying, "If you are a kid watching it, it's possible for you to be like, "this is awesome," and then if you're a little bit more sophisticated [it's appealing as well]." This latter audience is one that I believe is not reflected by traditional genre studies but rather newly emphasized due to indie cinema and the festival circuit. With festival films often comes art cinema, again, a concept with

[14] "Spring Breakers WARNING From Selena Gomez," YouTube video, 4:15, posted by "Pop Trigger," March 26, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHJji6y3qng.

an audience not traditionally associated with genre theory.

In his article "An Alphabet of Cinema," Peter Wollen discusses the emergences of what he refers to as the Festival Film genre. He writes, "The Brazilian artist and videomaker Artur Omar told me his theory that there was a whole new genre of films—the Festival Film genre. Films in this genre were specially made according to their own rules and traditions in order to win prizes at Festivals. They were immediately recognizable as Festival Films by juries, critics and audiences alike. They had become integrated into the institution of cinema."[15] Concerned with festival success rather than commercial success, this is very much the status of the films in the current JD cycle. In looking at the Appendix, one can see how much of a festival presence these films have, specifically at Sundance, Toronto, Telluride, Rotterdam, Venice, Sundance, and Cannes. Therefore, as long as these films continue to garner festival acclaim, which can also be seen in the prevalence of Independent Spirit Award nominations achieved by this cycle, the cycle will continue. Klein's assessment of cycle length is in direct relation to financial success, which has a much shorter shelf life than artistic talent manifesting itself in quality art films. As an aside, distribution is much less expansive for art films, both speaking to the argument for little financial success as well as the power of alternative modes of consumption.

Another aspect of these films that diverges from traditionally generic categorization is the fact that they are examples of art films. Thematically, the unresolved endings, ambiguity, realism, controversy, unique stylistic elements, and emphasis on auteurs are related to the art film, but not conceptions of narrative cinema,

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[15] Peter Wollen, "An Alphabet of Cinema," *New Left Review,* 12, (2001): 123.

which is typically related to genre studies.

Michael Z. Newman discusses the ways in which independent cinema is linked to art cinema, writing, "Some aspects of independent films are shared with art cinema. There is an emphasis on realism in nonclassical cinema that goes back at least to the 1920s and that is an important aspect of indie film. Likewise, authorship is a key interpretive frame for both, with both being figured as "personal cinema" that demands to be read as the product of an individual's artistic expression."[16] While artistic authorship is traditionally not associated with genre, one might argue, because of the prevalence of auteurs working in this topic, it inherently emerges.

Arguably the strongest evidence to support the claim that these are art films is the fact that two films in this cycle, *Julien Donkey-Boy* (Harmony Korine, 1999) and *Manic* were made in the spirit of Dogme 95, a radical Danish filmmaking movement that began in 1995. Danish directors Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg formed a group and wrote "The Dogme Manifest" and "The Vow of Chastity," which were a call for a better cinema and personally imposed guidelines for production. Their intentions, to rid cinema of the illusions aided by special effects and the like, were carried out through minimalist production. Very much in line with art cinema of the past, these directors called for on-location shooting, handheld camerawork, for example.[17] They also called for no genre films, further disavowing an association between art films and genre. The films of this cycle made in this spirit, *Julien Donkey-Boy* being one of only a few dozen films to actually be Dogme certified, and *Manic*, share many characteristics. Both about mentally

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[16] Newman, *Indie,* 28.
[17] Thomas Vinterberg and Lars Von Trier, "The Dogme Manifesto and The Vow of Chastity," Copenhagen, 13 March 1995, http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_10/section_1/artc1A.html#i2.

unstable boys (one schizophrenic and the other in a mental hospital) and difficult family situation, one can see even with these two films that even the most artistic of films may allow for generic qualification.

In looking at the films of the cycle, over a third of them are directed or written by only four different directors (Clark, Korine, Van Sant and Araki), and like Dogme 95 films, auteurist cinema is not typically associated with genre. More Fellini than Ford (think of Araki's deep admiration of Godard or the *Variety* review of *Gummo* that says, "Korine is said to be influenced by Godard, Herzog, Fellini and other Euromasters"[18]), these directors are not the ones who are first and foremost directing genre films, but because of their artistic tendencies to work with adolescent themes and in similar fashions, a generic category inherently emerges. Critics can easily draw comparisons between films of the same director, which results in articulations of common trends.

Despite these films' aberrant tendencies from genre theory traditions, theories concerning how critical reception can shape a genre and that cycles evolve in a clear trajectory over time, are still at play. For example, reception both demonstrates the generic relationship between these contemporary films and those between these films and classic examples. Particularly because of the frequency with which several directors work in this genre, many reviews find commonalities among these films – reviews of Larry Clark films reference other films by the director, and the same goes for Araki, Korine and Van Sant. Films by different directors but with similar themes are linked, as well. The *Variety* review of *Zero Day* remarks on the school shooting film trend; Critic Ronnie Scheib writes, "First in a rash of movie treatments of school massacres, "Zero"

[18] Emanuel Levy, "Film Review: Gummo," *Variety*, September 8-14, 1997, 80.

will be a tough act to follow. "Home Room" preems a mere couple of days later and Gus Van Sant's Cannes-palmed "Elephant" is skedded for October release. Oddly, these three nearly contemporaneous post-Columbine films comprise a kind of triptych."[19] A.O. Scott at *The New York Times* finds similarities between *Mean Creek* and *Bully*, writing, "The scenario is somewhat reminiscent of Larry Clark's "Bully," a horrific and exploitative tale of lawless youth. The contrast between the two films is worth noting, since Mr. Estes, in the best Sundance tradition, is careful not to let his fascination with errant young people drift into exploitation. Where "Bully" was prurient and cynical, "Mean Creek" is earnest almost to a fault."[20] Although Emanuel Levy for *Variety* distinguishes that Korine's film *Gummo* lacks the dark humor found in those of Araki, he writes, "Thematically, Korine's work bears resemblance to Gregg Araki's in its bleak despair over America's "nowhere" youth"[21] In *Variety* reviews by Todd McCarthy, the prototype *Kids,* the film he himself reviewed when it was released, is often compared to other films. Of its relationship to *Thirteen,* he writes, "Catherine Hardwicke's helming debut, which won the jury's directing prize at Sundance, can fairly be compared to the work of Larry Clark, such as "Kids" – although not as self-consciously provocative or sexually explicit – its overriding aim is to tell the startling "truth" about what really goes on in the lives of young teens."[22] In one sentence, McCarthy draws parallels between films, points to the festival success of *Thirteen* and articulates the general goal of these films: not to, like *Boyz N the Hood*, educated of the importance of college and good parenting, but to merely present life as it is for teens. Todd McCarthy reviews *Ken Park* and, too, compares and contrasts the film

[19] Ronnie Shieb, "Film Review: Zero Day," *Variety,* September 8-14, 2003, 26.
[20] A.O. Scott, "Mean Creek (2003) Film Review," *The New York Times,* August 20, 2004.
[21] Levy, "Gummo," *Variety*.
[22] Todd McCarthy, "Film Review: Thirteen," *Variety*, February 3-9, 2003, 37.

with *Kids*,[23] and looking at his initial review of *Kids*, one can see how strongly contemporary JD films can be linked with the original cycle.

In terms of reception, I would argue these films, on a certain level, are also very much in line with the first groundbreaking films of the original film cycle. The review of *Kids,* for example, echoes the reviews of *Blackboard Jungle* in terms of reception, despite the fact that they narratively have little more in common than the inclusion of delinquent teens. McCarthy notes, "An exemplary work of naturalistic cinema, this powerful independent production represents a prescription for controversy due to its uncompromising take on underage illicit behavior: It's easy to see the ratings board, government officials, moralistic editorialists, religious orgs, irate exhibitors and parental groups, not to mention Disney, getting plenty stirred up about this groundbreaker."[24] In his article 'The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent U.S. History,' Ronald D. Cohen discusses the impact the film *Blackboard Jungle* had on audience, writing, "Censors in Memphis, Tennessee, banned *Blackboard Jungle* for its violence; others, including *New York Times* reviewer Bosley Crowther, the Girl Scouts, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, denounced the film."[25] More than just sneered at by audience, these films caused so much of an uproar that many different groups felt the need to take a stand against them, a historical fact that undoubtedly links the films to one another.

Along with critical reviews helping to argue for the designation of these films as a genre, the longevity and validity of Thomas Schatz' theory concerning the life cycle of a

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[23] Todd McCarthy, "Film Review: Ken Park," *Variety,* September 9-15, 2002, 33.
[24] Todd McCarthy, "Film Review: Kids," *Variety,* May 29-June 4, 1995, 52.
[25] Ronald D. Cohen, "The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent U.S. History," *History of Education Quarterly,* 37 no. 3 (Autumn 1997), 263.

genre can function to help situate the 2013 films *The Bling Ring* and *Spring Breakers* within the frame of genre. Schatz makes the argument, pulling from theorists Robert Warshow, Christian Metz, Leo Braudy and particularly Henri Focillon's 'life span' of cultural forms:

> At the earliest stage of its life span, a genre tends to exploit the cinematic medium as a *medium.* If a genre is a society collectively speaking to itself, then any stylistic flourishes or formal self-consciousness will only impede the transmission of the message. At this stage, genre films transmit a certain idealized cultural self-image with as little "formal interference" as possible. Once a genre has passed through its experimental stage where its conventions have been established, it enters into its classical stage. We might consider this stage as one of formal transparency. Both the narrative formula and the film medium work together to transmit and reinforce that genre's social message – its ideology or problem-solving strategy – as directly as possible to the audience.[26]

While I think it might be slightly more difficult to apply this theory to this cycle particularly because it neither strays from stylistic innovations nor falls to commercial concerns which impact the need for conformity, his discussion of the last stage of generic evolution may aid in hypothesizing what the future hold for the JD film. He writes, "With its growing awareness of the formal and thematic structures, the genre evolves into what Focillon termed the age of refinement. As a genre's classic conventions are refined and eventually parodied and subverted, its transparency gradually gives way to *opacity*: we no longer look *through* the form…rather we look *at* the *form itself* to examine and appreciate its structure and its cultural appeal."[27] In looking at the self-aware narrative structure, and casting choices most recent films of the cycle, Schatz's theories might help define the evolutionary status of this cycle.

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[26] Schatz, *Hollywood*, 38.
[27] Ibid.

It is not difficult to find a connection between the two films from 2013.[28] Released only months apart, both generated buzz thanks to their casts and stories, as well as their trailers that included popular songs[29] and glossy image, and both A.O. Scott at *The New York Times*[30] and Mark Olsen at *The Los Angeles Times*[31] drew parallels between the films. In both *Spring Breakers* and *The Bling Ring*, films made by two directors very much aware of delinquent film conventions and trends,[32] there is a strong sense of generic awareness. In each film, the traditionally controversial aspects of the genre are blatantly overdone to the point of parody. In *Spring Breakers,* a film about a group of girlfriends who hold up a restaurant to have enough money to go to spring break, Korine spends the majority of the film showing young adults dancing, drinking and partying in Florida. At first, it is interesting and edgy, but because he is relentless with the frequency of the imagery, its shock value becomes banal and invisible. Coppola does the same with the robberies in *The Bling Ring:* the first was exciting, the next as well, but after half a dozen break ins and a beautifully shot extremely long shot/take of the robbery of reality TV star Audrina Patridge, one gets the sense that she is doing something quite unique with style and narrative. These directors, possibly aware that the

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[28] Even actress/director/writer Lena Dunham got in on the *Spring Breakers/The Bling Ring* action, tweeting on July 6, 2013, "Someone already wrote a big Bling Ring/Spring Breakers think piece, yes?"

[29] *Spring Breakers*: 'Young N*****' by Gucci Mane and Waka Flocka Flame
'Scary Monsters and Nice Sprites' by Skrillex (Zedd Remix)
The Bling Ring: '212' by Azealia Banks & Lazy Jay
'Crown On the Ground' by Sleigh Bells

[30] A.O. Scott, "A.O. Scott's Top Movies of 2013," *The New York Times,* December 11, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/15/movies/a-o-scotts-top-movies-of-2013.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&smid=tw-nytimes&_r=0.

[31] Mark Olsen, "'The Bling Ring' and the New American Dream," *Los Angeles Times,* June 16, 2013, http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-bling-ring-american-dream-20130616,0,3294696.story#axzz2vgj8w1o8.

[32] Korine, having a hand in *Kids, Gummy, Julien Donkey-Boy, and Ken Park,* and Sofia Coppola having always worked with troubled adolescents or the difficulties in growing up (*The Virgin Suicide* (1999)*, Marie Antoinette* (2006)*, Somewhere* (2010)*,* and arguable even her one other film *Lost in Translation* (2003)), are perfect directors to take the genre to a place of parody or extreme self-awareness.

shock value of the genre has run its course, mock the convention by turning it into something both boring and useful in speaking to the lives of these teens.

Another aspect of these films that might align them with an element of parody or self-referentiality is casting. Independent cinema is often seen as a space for actors to earn a level of credibility; they take a pay cut, appeal to a smaller audience and hone their acting skills. Along with that, it is also often seen as a way for younger actors to grow up and show their maturation. Often, these JD films are accused, because of their explicit sexuality, of exploiting teenagers.[33] I believe Harmony Korine's decision to cast three extremely famous actresses with very young fan bases is in direct relation to this question of exploitation. Very much aware of the criticism associated with contemporary JD films' placing young actors in extremely complex sexual situations, which has become so common it is linked to the genre itself, Korine satirizes this by taking it to an extreme. His choice to use three actresses made *extremely* famous by the Disney Channel or those owned by it - Selena Gomez, a Disney Channel original series star, Vanessa Hudgens, the star of the *High School Musical* (Kenny Ortega, 2006) franchise, and Ashley Benson, star of ABC Family's *Pretty Little Liars* (2010 -) – satirizes both the stigma surrounding the genre and pokes fun at the device of placing young actors in 'adult' situations. This also agrees with the argument that these directors, despite the ratings and content of their films, retain the subgenre's desire for a teenage audience. Coppola does the same but to a lesser degree, casting Emma Watson in *The Bling Ring*. The film itself concerns celebrity culture, so the decision to cast Emma Watson reflects the awareness the film has

[33] The IFC channel documentary special 'Indie Sex: Censored' featured an episode dedicated to teen movies and sex, and remarked heavily on both the realism of indie teen films and the stigma associated with the perceived exploitative qualities of *Kids* and Larry Clark.

of itself and of the subgenre as a whole. The acts of narrative repetition and casting in these two films, not particularly noteworthy without considering the lifecycle of the subgenre as a whole, show the level of parody and self-awareness now welcomed by directors working in the cycle. That this is the last stage Schatz describes in the life cycle of a genre might mean that the future of this cycle is particularly unknown.

Films of this cycle tow the line between possessing qualities that align with traditional genre categorization and those that are in opposition to it, and it has been the goal of this chapter to adequately present these complexities. While the films have a unique relationship with audience, not having a specifically defined one and looking to alternative forms of consumption to reach their teen audience, their appeal and longevity can be seen through festival success and controversial stigma. Their artistic tendencies, auteurist directors, and avant-garde filmmaking still remain linked to genre due to the ways in which critics draw on these types of commonalities. Traditional genre theories by Altman and Schatz are applicable to this group of films, helping to define it, push it against similar films and possibly speculate on its future.

Conclusion

The first chapter of this thesis attempted to historically, filmically, and industrially contextualize the juvenile delinquent film subgenre. Uniquely distinguished from the classic teen movie, JD films throughout history have been imbedded in their cultural reception and impact due to their controversial content and social problem concerns. Because the subgenre fully emerged during the Production Code years, much of the intended content and tone of the subgenre was censored. While the Code dissipated in the 1960s, many JD films retained the resolved stance associated with the Code. This argument may very well be directly a result of the small scope a project like this is bound to have, and I believe with more time and research, a larger group of films that took a similarly controversial stance in the 1970s and 1980s than what has been mentioned might very well emerge, shedding new light on the cycles of this subgenre.

The second chapter presented a group of films that were the direct result of a boom of independent cinema in the 1990s. These films took the JD characteristics, rebellious teens, the inclusion of elements of sex, drugs and violence, tenuous parental relationships, and issues with suicide and depression and reworked them into a contemporary, independent framework. Other narratives and devices emerged, like the inclusion of camcorders to speak to the concerns and dangers of contemporary society, the school shooting, and the lack of resolution, revealing the connections to the past cycles as well as the differentiating elements needed for cyclical categorization.

The third chapter has looked to reception, audience and authorship to help argue, despite the fact that these films are commercially unsuccessful art films, that this is, indeed, a genre in a different industrial time. While classically genre theorists argue that

commercial success is required for a genre to exist, the chapter argues that festival success and consumption via other channels may account for the continued existence of this cycle.

As well as further exploring the second cycle of the subgenre, a project with broader breadth would further explore the content of the third chapter. Elements of genre have only been touched on briefly, and placing more emphasis on this would strengthen the argument of this thesis; it has been the aim to primarily work with choosing and analyzing the films that make up the contemporary juvenile delinquent film cycle, but without genre theory, the argument for their connection would be weakened. More than the texts themselves, reception and audience are crucial in defining a cycle, and the argument would be that much stronger with more research into this topic.

At the very least, this thesis has presented the struggles involved in defining a cycle of a subgenre. Tying all of these cycles together while separating them in some way is crucial to understanding the changes over time, but it is quite difficult. The wavering importance associated with the social problem film and the cycles of this subgenre has become evident. The precursor to the subgenre, the Dead End Kids cycle of the 1930s and 1940s was very much concerned with social problems, as was the 1950s/early 1960s first fleshed out cycle. The second cycle tended to lose the edge associated with social problem films, particularly because it moved from the now to the then temporally, moving the subgenre to a space of coming of age film rather than social problem. The current cycle has moved the subgenre back to the now, but because these films are made independently of industrial rules and guidelines, these social problem films, which they arguably still are, no longer seem concerned with the reform aspect of

the film category. The first cycle problematized the 'now' but presented an optimistic future and the second looked to the past and lacked an ambiguous relationship with the future due to the fact that it temporally has already taken place. The current cycle again problematizes the present, but does so to such an extreme that it accepts that today's teens might have no future at all. Despite these differences, it has been the goal of this thesis to argue that the JD film, while traditionally associated with the 1950s, has been a teen movie staple before and since, and through its interesting evolutions, deserves close, cyclical analysis

Appendix – Films of the Current Cycle

Title	Rating	Tagline	Director Writer	Cast	Budget/ Gross (Domestic)
1. Totally F*ed Up***	UR	Another homo movie by Gregg Araki.	Gregg Araki	*James Duval*, Roko Belic, Susan Behshid	N/A
2. Animal Room	R for brutal violence, strong language, sexual content and drug use	Echoing alarms of Clockwork Orange.	Craig Singer	Matthew Lillard, Neil Patrick Harris	N/A
3. The Doom Generation°	R for strong vicious violence, graphic sexuality, pervasive strong language and some drug use	Sex. Violence. Whatever.	Gregg Araki	*James Duval* Rose McGowan Johnathon Schaech	G: $284,785
4. Kids§°	Originally NC-17, released UR	A Film by Larry Clark.	Larry Clark Larry Clark, Harmony Korine, Jim Lewis	*Leo Fitzpatrick*, Justin Pierce, *Chloë Sevigny*	B: $1,500,000 G: $7,412,216
5. Girls Town‡°	R for pervasive strong language, and for drug use	This ain't no 90210...	Jim McKay Jim McKay, Denise Casano	Lili Taylor, Bruklin Harris, Anna Grace	G: $503,667
6. Gummo*+±	R for pervasive depiction of anti-social behavior of juveniles, including violence, substance abuse, sexuality and language.	N/A	Harmony Korine	Nick Sutton, Jacob Sewell, Lara Tosh, *Chloë Sevigny*	B: $1,300,000 G: $116,799
7. Nowhere	R for scenes of strong violence, sexuality and drug use involving teens, and for strong language	Let the love feast begin.	Gregg Araki	*James Duval*, Rachel True, Nathan Bexton	G: $194,201
8. Julien Donkey-Boy*± ø	R for language, some sexuality and disturbing images	N/A (Dogme #6)	Harmony Korine	*Chloë Sevigny*	G: $85,400
9. Manic‡*ø	R for disturbing violent content, strong language and some drug use	You can't escape yourself.	Jordan Melamed Michael Bacall, Blayne Weaver	*Joseph Gordon-Levitt*, Michael Bacall, Zooey Deschanel, *Don Cheadle*	G: $69,958

10. Bully±ø	R for strong violence, sexual content, drug use and language - all involving teens	It's 4 a.m...do you know where your kids are?	Larry Clark Jim Schutze, David McKenna, Roger Pullis	Brad Renfro, Nick Stahl, *Bijou Phillips,* Michael Pitt	B: $2,100,000 G: $480,811
11. Ken Park*+±ø	NR	N/A	Larry Clark, Ed Lachman Harmony Korine	Adam Chubbuck, James Bullard, Seth Gray	N/A
12. Bang Bang You're Dead∞	R for elements of violence	What some kids keep inside is beyond words.	Guy Ferland William Mastrosimone	Tom Cavanagh, *Ben Foster*, Randy Harrison	N/A
13. Home Room	R for strong language and some violent images	A senseless tragedy. An unlikely friendship. A search for answers.	Paul F. Ryan	Busy Philipps, Erika Christensen	G: $5,216
14. Heart of America aka Home Room§	R for violence, drug use, sexuality and language - all involving teens	Violent lesson... Deadly learning.	Uwe Boll Robert Dean Klein	Jürgen Prochnow, Michael Paré	N/A
15. Elephant*+§°ø	Rated R for disturbing violent content, language, brief sexuality and drug use - all involving teens	An ordinary high school day. Except that it's not.	Gus Van Sant	John Robinson	B: $3,000,000 G: $1,266,955
16. The United States of Leland‡§	Rated R for language and some drug content	Crime. Confusion. Compassion. They're all just states of mind.	Matthew Ryan Hoge	Ryan Gosling, *Don Cheadle*	G: $343,847
17. Thirteen‡∞	R for drug use, self destructive violence, language and sexuality - all involving young teens	It's happening so fast.	Catherine Hardwicke Catherine Hardwicke, Nikki Reed	Evan Rachel Wood, Nikki Reed, *Brady Corbet, Vanessa Hudgens*	G: $4,601,043
18. Zero Day°ø	UR	In high school, you're told you can do anything you put your mind to.	Ben Coccio Ben Coccio, Christopher Coccio	Cal Robertson, Andre Keuck	G: $8,466
19. Mysterious Skin‡*±°	NC-17	N/A	Gregg Araki	*Brady Corbet*, *Joseph Gordon-Levitt*	G: $713,240

20. Mean Creek‡§°	Rated R for language, sexual references, teen drug and alcohol use	Beneath the surface, everyone has a secret.	Jacob Aaron Estes	*Rory Culkin*, Scott Mechlowic, *Josh Peck*	B: $500,000 G: $603,951
21. The Chumscrubber ‡	R for language, violent content, drug material and some sexuality	Meet Generation Rx.	Arie Posin Arie Posin, Zac Stanford	Jamie Bell, Allison Janney, *Rory Culkin*	G: $52,597
22. Havoc	R for strong sexual content, nudity, pervasive language, violence, drug and alcohol use - all involving teens	Too much is never enough.	Barbara Kopple Stephen Gaghan	Anne Hathaway, *Bijou Phillips, Joseph Gordon-Levitt*	B: $9,000,000 G: N/A
23. Brick‡°	R for violent and drug content	A detective story.	Rian Johnson	*Joseph Gordon-Levitt*	B: $475,000 G: $2,075,743
24. Alpha Dog‡	R for pervasive drug use and language, strong violence, sexuality and nudity	How did a crime with this many witnesses go so far?	Nick Cassavetes	Emile Hirsch, Anton Yelchin, *Ben Foster*	G: $15,309,602
25. State's Evidence	R for strong disturbing violent content including a graphic killing rampage, child rape/murder, suicidal behavior, pervasive language and some sexual content - all involving teens	Suicide is never easy...	Benjamin Louis Mark Brown	Douglas Smith, Kris Lemche, Drew Tyler Bell, Alexa Vega	N/A
26. Jimmy and Judy	R for strong sexuality, nudity, violence, drug content and language	A twisted, f'd up, teenage love story.	Randall Rubin Randall Rubin, John Shroder	Edward Furlong, Rachael Bella	N/A
27. Paranoid Park*§°ø	Rated R for some disturbing images, language and sexual content	Could you hide a deadly secret?	Gus Van Sant Gus Van Sant, Blake Nelson	Gabe Nevins, Taylor Momsen	G: $486,767
28. Afterschool§°	UR	There's always someone watching...	Antonio Campos	*Ezra Miller*, Jeremy Allen White	G: $3,967
29. Archie's Final Project	NR	A self-inflicted comedy.	David Lee Miller David Lee Miller Jordan Miller Gabriel Sunday	Gabriel Sunday	B: $2,000,000

30. April Showers	Rated R for some disturbing violent content	In an instant, their world changed forever.	Andrew Robinson	Anna Adams, Dominic Arellano, Mark Arnold	G: $16,880
31. Mad World	NR	N/A	Cory Cataldo	Gary Cairns, Dylan Vigus, Matthew Thompson	N/A
32. Trust*	R for disturbing material involving the rape of a teen, language, sexual content and some violence	What took her family years to build, a stranger stole in an instant.	David Schwimmer Andy Bellin, Robert Festinger	Liana Liberato, Clive Owen, Catherine Keener, Viola Davis	G: $120,016
33. We Need to Talk About Kevin∞*+§	R for disturbing violence and behavior, some sexuality and language	N/A	Lynn Ramsay Lynn Ramsay, Rory Kinnear	*Ezra Miller*, Tilda Swinton	G: $1,738,692
34. Spring Breakers*±°ø	Rated R for strong sexual content, language, nudity, drug use and violence throughout	Good Girls Gone Bad.	Harmony Korine	*Vanessa Hudgens,* Selena Gomez, Ashley Benson, James Franco	B: $5,000,000 G: $14,124,284
35. The Bling Ring§	Rated R for teen drug and alcohol use, and for language including some brief sexual references	If you can't be famous, be infamous.	Sofia Coppola	Katie Chang, Israel Broussard, Emma Watson	G: $5,845,732

Notes: Box office results from Box office mojo, Taglines from print ads, Budgets from IMDB or Wikipedia, Festival data from IMDB, Ratings from IMDB, italicize actors connote roles in multiple films of the cycle

‡ Sundance Film Festival
* Toronto International Film Festival
+ Telluride Film Festival
± Venice Film Festival
§ Cannes International Film Festival
ø International Film Festival Rotterdam
° Independent Spirit Award Nomination
∞ Major Award Nomination or Win (Golden Globe, Oscar, BAFTA, Emmy, SAG)

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