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Honey, Spice and Sometimes Nice: The 20th and 21st centuries Cultural, Social and Political Work of the Queen Bee

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Sarah Lawrence College

Honey, Spice and Sometimes Nice:
The 20th and 21st centuries Cultural, Social and Political Work of the Queen Bee

by

Sarah Elisabet Stanislawa Schmer

Thesis Advisor: Professor Lyde Cullen Sizer

Submitted in partial completion of the Master of Arts Degree in

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Abstract

This thesis was partially inspired by my personal experience of attending Emma Willard School, an all-girls boarding school in Troy, New York. This thesis examines the social, cultural and political history of the Queen Bee figure in the popular culture of the twentieth and twenty first centuries. The Queen Bee is a fluid anti-heroine however, a feminist character who while she tears down others around her to succeed is also genuine with relatable emotions. Here, I explore the 2000's media culture's fascination with the relational aggression and adolescent womanhood and its depiction of girls caught up in complex networks of social positions ranging from the Queen Bee to Bystander and Target. This thesis outlines the history of the Queen Bee figure from its emergence in 1949 through perhaps its most popular iteration in the early twenty-first century. In the early twenty-first century, the Queen Bee persona has become a contested terrain, at once negative and positive, much in the way the culture interprets feminism. Popular TV series *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007) and *Gossip Girl* (2007- 2012) render two versions of Queen Bee figures in the early 2000's television, offering a window into that contested terrain.

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personally and academically since I met her in 2006: she is a foundation of my life. You all are integral in my favorite memories.

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Introduction

Perhaps it does not seem “normal” to have loved high school—but I did. Generally, teenhood is unglamorous. It is awkward. It is saturated with a deeply entrenched teen anxiety. Much of this concern is drawn from the impression that everyone is not only watching but also judging. I wanted to avoid both that overwhelming anxious feeling and the sense that I was being misunderstood. As shy as I am today, that pales in comparison to how shy I was in my middle school years (6-8th grades: 2003-2006) going into high school (2006-2010). I treasure my—admittedly—semi-rose tinted high-school memories and the lessons I learned while within Emma Willard School’s protective gray walls. My study, here, indicates how unusual a space it was.

In middle school I hated being noticed and being praised: it was highly embarrassing, especially when I was passive aggressively admired for being “smart,” or being “sure of myself.” I did not want people remarking on my intelligence—smart isn’t feminine, I thought. Smart isn’t “cute.” My face would burn each time I heard an impressed breathless *wow*, “you are very smart for a girl” or “it’s surprising how smart you are.” I learned to avoid the label and recoil at those dreaded microaggressions; the intonation implied I was too smart for my own good. Too outspoken. In middle school, I did not want to be surprising: I just wanted to blend in. It was much later I realized that I had internalized cultural biases against smart girls.

My mother introduced me to several strong female characters that shaped my understanding of what it meant to be a powerful woman. I was drawn to characters who depicted girls and women who are openly self-assured. The classic bold and humorously long-winded idealizations of girlhood entertained me: the lyrical ramblings and daydreams of Anne of Green Gables, for example; Laura Ingalls Wilder’s matter- of- fact portrayals of adventures in the open

prairies; a Swedish hellion Madicken—who never met a problem she couldn't make worse—as written by Astrid Lindgren; Hermione's bravery, wit, and brains in the Harry Potter series. I also admired Queen Bees Blair Cordelia Waldorf and Paris Geller: I am not alone in my appreciation for these latter two paradoxical female character—unlikeable, loveable and unforgivably forgivable as they are.

One may wonder why Blair and Paris are on this list, since on the surface, these Queen Bees bear little to no similarity to the preceding characters. While often the Queen Bees words and manipulative actions cut others down around them, a close examination of the Queen Bee reveals a positive and inspiring side. These girls are unapologetic for using their minds well. They are gifted with a quick wit when responding to both criticism and praise. Yet even given their meanness, their hearts are worn on their sleeves. Each Queen Bee illustrates impressive intellectual lucidity; each is a leader in their own educational lives and social circles. Each inspired me.

Paris and Blair showed that I did not need to make myself smaller. There was no need to hide pieces of myself in an effort to be more acceptable. I did not need to be less threatening to my peers or their parents. To believe, at a young age, that being intelligent would be perceived as trying to make others feel dumb, I cannot imagine how I would have handled that pressure. Having the freedom to be myself was an enviable trait. While completely ruthless in their methodology, these girls were able to speak up. The Queen Bee is mesmerizing in her open-faced fearlessness. I too wanted to be accepted as unapologetically me.

Before I knew my parents were considering boarding school as an option for me, they handed me books like *The Clique*¹, *Queen Bees and Wannabe's*², and the *Gossip Girl*,³ series. Gone were the children's books of my upbringing. I entered my new reality. These sources were meant to help me navigate interpersonal relationships in my impending boarding school environment. Instead, each new title fired my teen fears of every Queen Bee, "mean girl" and "clique" I potentially would personally encounter. The Queen Bee persona was more than fiction to me. I was embarrassed that in some ways I wanted to be like her. The Queen Bee was one of my first exposures to the concept of an anti-heroine. At twelve to fourteen years old, I was afraid of having my own encounter with her, but I also wanted to emulate her audacity to speak up. Even if her goal is to gain power, seeing this bold faced strength was encouraging. My understanding of the Queen Bee then was not complicated enough to articulate that I admired her personality because I had such a little amount of confidence in my own.

I was thirteen years old when my parents told me I would be going to Emma Willard School in Troy New York as a boarding student. I wept because, clearly, my life was over. My heart? Broken. Just the sound of it: Boarding School—and all girls, no less. I had thought all private school girls were mean and somehow damaged. I thought it was a punishment to be sent away. I did not want to go. I believed I could not handle being even more different than I already felt in the eyes of my home-town peers. Everyone, from my peers to their concerned parents, doled out looks and audible gasps of pity at hearing I would be subjected to the "mean girls," "smart girls," and "sexy girls," in sexualized school uniforms. How could my parents possibly send me away? What had I done to deserve being sent there? They would never be able to part

¹ Lisi Harrison, *The Clique*, (Little Brown and Company, Boston: 2004).

² Rosalind Wiseman, *Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads: Dealing with the Difficult Parents in your Child's Life*, (Random House, New York: 2006).

³ Cecily von Ziegesar, *Gossip Girl*, (Little, Brown and Company, Boston: 2002-2011).

with *their* daughter like that—don't you know the kinds of girls those places construct? I was terrified.

I arrived at Emma in September 2006 with no idea what expect. What would the classes be like? Who would my friends be? Where would I find my Queen Bee and nemesis clique, a grouping of girls I would have to either participate in or usurp and overthrow? These are all typical worries as you enter into any new high stakes educational environment. At first, I admit, it was daunting. Everyone had chosen to be here. In the very least, each girl had made the effort to study for and take the Secondary School Admission Test (SSAT),⁴ chosen to write essays and apply, visit boarding schools across the United States, and interview.

Imagine the first time most people go on college tours and after the whirlwind of applications, SAT's and college tours, they end up on college campus. They think: "what have I gotten myself into?" Only, you're thirteen and, for the most part, your parents are making these major decisions on your behalf. Not many girls made this move without their parents looking outside the local schools for a stimulating educational experience. My parents sometimes asked for my input, exasperatedly begging me to just "try it out to see if you like it." Like handing a new food to a picky eater. Picture that you taste the dreaded food and realize that they were right all along, and you spent energy and time trying to avoid something wonderful.

Contrary to what most people anticipated, and what I dreaded, Emma was different. Believe it or not I was never bullied; I was not a lesbian until graduation (LUG); I was not a sexualized "bad" girl; I was not left out. Nor was I sent away because my parents couldn't handle me. They sent me because they wanted a better education than what my small hometown school could offer. They did not think they were "better" than those people in those schools; it was just

⁴ A standardized test used for admission to private middle schools and high schools.

that I needed a different cohort. They had read the research identifying that, in general, girls learn better in a single-sex environment.

One of the most commonly discussed differences between the co-ed and single sex educational settings relates to the dominant presence of boys in the classroom. Here there were no boys. Each space was dominated by girls. Nice girls. I had no personal experience with “mean girls” at Emma. The competition to attract a boy was not an issue. I discovered that I had needlessly lost sleep over the images of horrible girls’ popular culture had equipped me to defeat. The movie *Mean Girls*⁵ had recently made its debut in 2004 and remained relevant. While 2000’s popular culture was manically focused on girl’s relational aggression in friendships, at Emma, we did not see ourselves as “cliquey” because friend-groups were fluid; we supported each other.

Instead, I was lucky; my close group of friends was diverse— not only ethnically and socioeconomically, but in our interests and backgrounds. My roommate, Alexa Ortiz, was a Puerto Rican/Italian, academic, worrier princess. Alexa could ace any test put in front of her while sitting in an anxious puddle. Our St. Maarten girl Sandra Brooks had a mother from Wisconsin and a father born and bred in St. Maarten. Sandra always sang and danced with me no matter what her mood. Jenny Porter, to us, was our “it” girl: a pretty extrovert, smart, a friend to girls in all years, a leader in the dorms, captain of her sport in every season, head of a campus singing group, and to top it all off, a great student. Melissa Frederick was the designated blonde of the group from the Adirondacks—she was an African and South America study abroad

⁵ A 2004 American teen comedy directed by Mark Waters and written by Tina Fey. The film is partially based on Rosalind Wiseman's 2002 non-fiction self-help book, *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, which describes female high school social cliques and the damaging effects they can have on girls.

adventuress. Missa Wilpers was our dancing star—she was the youngest girl in Dance Company; she sashayed into our lives leaving a bubbly path of light everywhere she went.

We were also friends with day students, which wasn't always the case; there was a divide between the day students and boarding students. We all went to school together, but then some of us lived together. Hannah Rody-Wright was a day student in the year below; she was someone who seemingly never had to work too hard to fit in, a social butterfly able to communicate with peers both her year and our year. Kenzie Smith also penetrated the day-student/boarding-student divide because she was always staying late at school to excel at anything she put her hands on—and she always did.

All of us were involved in the school in major ways. It was expected. We should not only excel academically, but also volunteer and be involved in school activities and in as many extracurriculars as we could manage. Being an extrovert was appreciated but not required: most of the time it was anticipated that you would step outside of your comfort zone to succeed. Many inspirational speeches given at Emma left us with just that message. Mental and psychological health was also highlighted. We were often happily run ragged to the point of exhaustion. The environment was not exactly cut throat, but you were encouraged to step up in some way: head of the yearbook, a peer-educator, editor of the newspaper, a proctor, in choir, heading an acapella group, captain of a sports team, leading a dance company. There were also academic clubs to belong to. The more you could balance on your plate without breaking was the point. To be the best and extraordinary was supported but if you needed a break it was accepted, and help was given. We relied on the teachers and faculty to be cognizant of our wellbeing and we trusted them with that: “how you are doing?” asked by our houseparent's, in class, or in weekly meetings with our student advisors, was not simply a polite question but an authentic inquiry.

It was not always rainbows and Emma traditions, but we each went through our teen years learning how to encourage each other and be supported in return. We were intellectually challenged and loved it. I still remember a conversation we all had on a St. Maarten beach visiting Sandra for spring break just before I was sixteen. We lay talking about the bible. I love to think back on that. We wondered why there was not a bible written from the female perspective—where did all the supporting women go? Where were those stories? Were there women in the bible? We discussed this at length, coming up at the end that if we did not find that this already existed, we would have to write it.

This kind of conversation was an everyday occurrence. We internalized feminism⁶ without being actively aware of it; Alexa remembers that she “got to learn about empowering women, and being an empowered woman, before I learned what sexism actually looked like in real life.”⁷ This is not to say that we did not also experience all the expected highs and lows of teen-hood. Sometimes there was jealousy if someone got a leadership position you had worked for. We lusted after celebrities and wanted to experience romantic love just as other teens do and would squeal in excitement like stereotypically giddy school girls. But a significant factor in our growth was in the culture of support both by peers and faculty.

Emma Willard Dears: Alexa, Sandra, Hannah, Missa, Melissa, and Jenn

I will highlight what five of my peers experienced at before, during and sometimes after Emma Willard. Each added her voice to this thesis. Additionally, my houseparent and advisor, Jenn added her views; she has been at Emma for twenty years. These girls—now, women—continue to be my go to group of peers when I need help. Each wrote pieces for me to better describe and remember our Emma Willard experience. I asked my Emma dears to consider the following

⁶ Interchangeably called feminism(s) to indicate the intricacies and multiplicities of the term.

⁷ Alexa M. Ortiz, email message to author, October 20, 2018.

questions: How each felt about Emma before, during and after; and what changed while they were there (if anything) and how it affects/ has helped/ hindered them now. I asked specifically about the "mean girl" spirit as it was portrayed in the media and if it had a role in their experience. I asked how they felt society viewed them in high-school as private school girls, and if that was noted in their lives subsequently. Finally, I asked how they described their experience at Emma. ; recurring themes ran through each narrative. **Coming to Emma**

Alexa is a lawyer in Knoxville, Tennessee; she writes that her “thoughts now might be colored by my inevitable experience there (at Emma Willard), but I will try my best to think back accurately.”⁸ Like many, Alexa remembers not wanting to go away but acknowledges in retrospect that her town’s public high school could not provide the best and most well-rounded education.⁹ Alexa visited several boarding schools:

Choate, Hotchkiss, Albany Academy, and Emma. Choate and Hotchkiss were nice, but I remember feeling like it was a little much for me... Albany Academy was a surprisingly bad visit... the one thing that still stands out about that visit is how much [the tour guide] talked about drama with other girls in her class. It was a huge red flag for me that she couldn’t even keep that kind of drama and “mean girl” experiences from a student she was supposed to be convincing to come to school there.

None of these afore mentioned schools are coed- with the exception of Albany Academy which had a brother school and some coed classes. Emma did not. I imagine Alexa taking an audible sigh as she reminisces:

And then there was Emma. I visited on an open house day, and one of the first things you go to at an open house is Morning Reports.¹⁰ All the girls were screaming and wildly excited for what to me appeared to be a normal school day. They sang the alma mater and yelled “SHALL BE” at the top of

⁸ Alexa Ortiz, email message to author, October 21, 2018.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Morning Reports were every morning where we would sing the Alma Mater and listen to an inspirational speaker: Often a student would have put together a story to tell, sometimes there would be performances. This ritual and tradition got us ready for the day. Some reports ran long while others ended after announcements and news headlines had been relayed to the student body.

their lungs. There were musical performances, including one of “What is This Feeling” from the musical *Wicked*... That beautiful auditorium... was quite literally buzzing with happiness... I was hooked. I didn’t even want to go to an all-girl’s school, but I knew immediately that this was where I belonged. This did not seem like a group of girls who were snobby, rich, and mean to each other. These girls were not afraid to be loud and slightly hysterical. These girls, to me, seemed real.¹¹

To Alexa, “these girls seemed real;” this can be interpreted that Emma girls as a whole were and are unabashedly themselves. More or less free of social dramas that seemingly color most or all popular girl popular culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Alexa was drawn to the culture of support of girls who were “not afraid to be loud and slightly hysterical.” Alexa may not have originally wanted to go to an all-girls school because of the social, historical and cultural stigma against this unknown environment, but once she felt the energy in that auditorium all her Queen Bee inflamed worries melted away.

The next Emma girl I received an email from was Sandra who is currently in the southern U.K starting a graduate program in Occupational Therapy. She was the farthest away from home while at Emma and therefore got the truest boarding experience. Sandra recalls it fondly, noting that she was looking to be challenged academically. She found Emma on her own. Sandra knows that she:

couldn’t wait to step my knowledge up and also to finally be in the USA, a place I always thought was full of much dreamier people, ideas and opportunities. My island, St. Maarten is very small (36 sq. mi) and I am prone to “island fever,” feeling the need to leave if I’m there for longer than 6 months, also the mentality of the majority of the students in my previous school was quite small-minded.¹²

¹² Sandra Brooks, email message to author, October 25, 2018.

Sandra wanted, first, to complete her high school education in the United States because, coming from a small island, the U.S culture seemed to be more lenient towards “others.” That her St. Maarten peers seemed “small minded” indicates that Sandra knew there was more to experience than life on St. Maarten.

Next is Hannah, who currently lives and works in New York City at a publishing company. Hannah was a year younger than the rest of us and had a different story as a day student at Emma. She came to Emma from a “very hard middle school situation that involved a lot of being left out, a lot of desperately trying to fit in and an endless sea of not knowing who I was. I hated middle school and most of the kids there hated me too: my crime was that I tried too hard to be liked and I just couldn’t figure out how to do it.”¹³ What Hannah describes as her middle school experience is what many expected of the Emma life. Hannah penetrated the day-student, boarding student divide as well as the apparent gap between our grade and her grade. Considering that her parents “chose it because it was fairly local...by the time I was able to go to a new school and have a clean slate, I leapt at the chance.”¹⁴ This idea of a clean slate is undervalued. For Hannah Emma life was life altering:

The version of me that arrived at Emma in the fall of 2007 was... a mess. I was an awful student... so used to trying so hard to be anybody but myself that I was hyperactive and desperate, but the miraculous thing was that it didn’t matter what I was like; I made friends... right away...the way you dream you might when you’re someone who has been lonely a lot. I couldn’t even believe it. I still can’t, sometimes; not to put too fine a point on it, but that school literally saved my life.... it wasn’t just me; there was a girl in my grade who had an obsession with Superman and wore a cape to class every single day for the entire four years we attended the school, and even *she* had friends! She was never even bullied! People just took her as she was, and this is my point: girls came to Emma for [many] reasons, leaving behind...drama for fresh starts. I think this is important to note because it wasn’t just kindness, it wasn’t just acceptance, but it was

¹³ Hannah Rody-Wright, email to author, November 12, 2018.

¹⁴ Ibid.

gratitude to each other *for* those things that made this space as safe as it was.¹⁵

Emma Willard was a safe space for those who felt that they were out of the box in their local public schools, made for those girls who were lonely, shy, smart, talented, or who needed to have the freedom to wear a cape without fear.

Administrator Jenn explains that Emma worked to do more than accept difference; they worked to celebrate it. Those who were most different, she explained, “often, actually have a little cult-ish following by the time they are seniors, which speaks to the tolerance and even acceptance here.”¹⁶ This “gratitude to each other *for* those things”¹⁷ that would make us outsiders in other environments shows that at Emma we were outside of the popular cultural gaze and learned to accept eccentricities as assets: acceptance was not a goal—it simply was.

Five of six of us learned about Emma in the year before we applied to attend or heard about it through the grapevine—only one had an older sibling and therefore expected to go Emma. Missa, a Massachusetts native, writes that her Emma experience began when she was nine years old. Missa’s older sister Abby became independent from the family when she left for school:

I was shattered driving away [from her sister]. At 9 I knew that the distance was a big deal, because it was and is. Sending little girls between the ages of 13-14 to live away from their family is intense no matter how you slice it. When a girl attends Emma Willard as a boarder, even if they live within driving distance, their closest family for four years is the Emma Willard Community.

Those people see you every single day and are house-parents. As girls attempt to navigate a new school in freshman year, Jenn observes, they sometimes slipped into a mean girl dynamic. Yet

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Jenn Ulicnick, email message to author, December 3, 2018.

¹⁷ Hannah Rody-Wright, email to author, November 12, 2018.

“by the time students are seniors, they are more interested in cheering each other on and being happy for each other.”¹⁸ Emma Willard becomes a new home and their classmates a new family. And it built as a kind and accepting family in a seeming cultural world full of judgment.

The Emma “It” Girl and No Boys

Even in a world as accepting as ours, there were hints that a kind of Queen Bee expectation colored the ways Emma students sometimes perceived each other. Alexa and I remember in 2008, our Junior year, a group of Senior girls suggested that our close group of friends was an exclusive group. An “it” group. My group of friends were labeled the “mean girls,” and each of us were categorized into one of the *Mean Girl* characters (Cady, Regina, Karen, and Gretchen). We were also, apparently, dubbed “The Brat Pack.” Perhaps that was what all the self-help books my mother had forced upon me were talking about; this was the only experience I had with any interpersonal girl’s aggression that captivated the 2000’s media. This was the model that the Senior girls had for decoding the social world: we all had to fit, somehow, into these categories to make sense.

In this made up drama, the Senior girls labeled each of us: I was the outwardly sweet but closet bitch; Jenny was the outright bitch; Sandra was the actual sweet one; Alexa was the one who stayed out of people’s business; Finally, Kenz was the day student who was so jealous of us that she tried all methods of entering our friend group. Later, we joked that because Melissa didn’t get a label, she would be our “Cady” from *Mean Girls* because she had studied abroad in Africa.¹⁹ All of these descriptions underlined the tensions between classes. It was not atypical for

¹⁸ Jenn Ulicnick, email message to author, December 3, 2018.

¹⁹ Alexa states that she would be remiss if I didn’t mention the fact that, through the rumor mill, I and my friend group discovered that some upper class-women at one point apparently dubbed us “the brat pack.” I don’t think I was offended by this so much as I was amused, because it was so different from how we saw ourselves, and because we didn’t even know any upper class-women! It was more comical than anything, because it was clear that whoever made this name for

younger class women to not ordinarily socialize with older class women outside of extracurricular activities and upper level courses. Those girls who were friends with all grades and classes however were the most loved and respected because they crossed those invisible barriers. The senior girls above my class often did not want to socialize with the younger girls. I actually cannot recall the reasoning behind it other than they were in their class and we were in ours. I remember hoping that our friend group would not dismiss underclass women—I know we actively worked to be friendly to those younger than us, so the comradery could extend beyond our grade.

The dynamics between classes was filled with tensions. Not all transitions into Emma were easy; Melissa was in a mixed dorm her freshman year and often felt isolated. She says that “Those girls were not interested in friendships with younger girls and I missed the close bonds that the culture and traditions of Emma helped cultivate through these smaller dorm communities.” Again, the older class was often not accepting of some younger class women unless they could prove that they could hold their own—intellectually. Melissa ended up leaving Emma and returning a year and half later after traveling and studying abroad in South America and Africa. When she came back she did “not face the same feeling of rejection from older girls and was mature enough” to handle it, regardless.²⁰ Being able to feel balanced when you come in to Emma is necessary to feel accepted.

The cultural significance of the Queen Bee is well known—upon mentioning this thesis topic, all of these women knew what I was talking about. When it comes to understanding the resonance of this well-known adolescent character, Alexa writes that

us didn't know us at all and was making an assumption based on how we looked from the outside. I certainly *hope* that the name had no basis in reality, although I do recognize that we probably appeared, and perhaps were, exclusive to some degree.

²⁰ Melissa Frederick, email message to author, November 23, 2018.

“whenever I tell a new person that I went to an all-girl’s school, a frequent reaction is to ask how I could ever stand such a thing, when teenage girls can be so terrible to each other.” Alexa notes that she “never experienced a truly ‘mean girl/queen bee’ situation at Emma was this very point—we didn’t have any!”²¹ On the other hand, Alexa also remembers “sure, I was stressed about school *a lot* [emphasis added] ... But all of this prepared me for life after Emma.” When it often felt like a cut throat environment to us in the moment, we were each proud of the others’ accomplishments. Happy to know the smartest girls and hardworking girls were our girls and were our friends; we knew how hard we all worked.

The factor that also is meaningful here is that Alexa as well as the rest of us felt pressure to perform academically and be involved in every opportunity the school had to offer. Being “someone” at Emma meant that you were hardworking, smart, talented, and wanted to be a leader in some extracurricular activities. That is where the competition was found—between us as in who got to be head of the yearbook, dance company, a sporting team, debate team. I remember that the person who was voted into these positions and it was not a popularity contest but to see and know who would actually exhibit good leadership skills based on previous behavior and merits.

In Sandra’s experience there were a “few instances when I felt the mean girl spirit at EW, but in general, it felt like most people wanted to share camaraderie.”²² Sandra had some troubles with her roommate and writes that even they did not really “engage in the mean streak girls often have.”²³ Sandra and her roommate “didn’t get along well

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

at all but the worst we did was put passive aggressive Post It's on each other's side of the room" letting the other one know that they felt their space had been invaded.²⁴

Sandra does have one example of someone she would place in Queen Bee category; this person often made her feel as though she was viewed as inferior, projecting the she did not understand that someone from the Caribbean could be "a substantive, intelligent person."²⁵

Sandra indicates that while it was "never said outright...it felt like I was not good enough to be in her presence. Upon reflection, maybe this was a contribution of the competitive side of being at a quite a prestigious high school. This was annoying, but it didn't happen often enough for it to permeate my every day feelings and quality of life."²⁶ Sandra notes that her difference of coming from St. Maarten in one instance had her feeling like an outsider—however, even her "Blair Waldorf" did not hinder her dreams or shrink her spirit.

As far as how popularity functioned in this high school setting, Hannah describes that the mark of popularity or "cool" at Emma was different. These were girls who were:

Simply.... well known on the Emma campus. The people who were well known were people who were in a lot of leadership positions and were therefore prominent figures at Emma... They were the girls that got huge parts in Revels²⁷ and hordes of crying underclasswomen at graduation...²⁸
The girls who got and were these things were typical "Emma Girls," and

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Melissa Frederick, email message to author, November 23, 2018.

²⁷ The senior play where all seniors have a part—everyone wanted a part. The parts were known to the school but who got them was a huge secret the seniors got to have to themselves. The way underclasswomen responded when they got to see Revels was like all major high school social events wrapped into one. "Revels" is unlike any other play performed at a school in this area, or most of the country for that matter. It is a thread that connects current students halfway back through the school's 200-year history. It changes with the times, but at its core, the girls are reading the same lines as generations of Emma Willard alums have done for almost a century, from their own grandmothers and sisters to notable alumna like Jane Fonda and U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand.

²⁸ Tearful goodbyes at graduation from underclasswomen showed how much you would be missed.

that is why they were so celebrated; friendly, outgoing, the kind of people who drew others into their orbits, brilliantly smart, fiercely independent... [the way] rest of us aspired to be. [Not] the kind of people who are necessarily held up in other high schools as paragons of popularity... People defied the dress code and wore sweatpants and no bras, gigantic, lopsided buns balancing on top of their heads; nobody cared what anyone looked like. Instead, the focus was on what you were capable of.²⁹

This experience rings true in my story as well—the “kinds of people”³⁰ that we aspired to be were like those who were kind to others, excelled in academics: another kind of Queen Bee—the Educated Queen Bee—like Paris Geller, minus the tendency to tear others down. This person raised others up with her instead of working to tear those around her down. Hannah also mentions the fact that there were no boys to compete over and defied the dress code; sweatpants clad with messy bun. This look showed that we cared more about our success in school rather than how we were physically perceived.

Academics dwarfed the need to worry about what others were wearing, who was friends with whom, and what others had—it was a privileged world where most of us had what the other had.³¹ Jenn notes that she “feel[s] like I see more of the competitive piece in academics than in social life. Not to say it doesn’t exist, but the competition is not as prevalent socially as in the academic culture of the school.”³² Jenn continues that the “cool” Emma girl is about confidence: “that confidence, not being afraid to say, ‘I don’t want to be that[way—mean],’ allowed you [all] to exist without needing peer adoration or validation in quite the same way.”³³

²⁹ Hannah Rody-Wright, email message to author, November 12, 2018.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hannah writes that “of course, the academics were an important part of that, but the friendships have had much more long-lasting effects.”

³² Jenn Ulicnick, email message to author, December 3, 2018.

³³ Ibid.

We did not have an official uniform, however, high school girls still wanting to fit in would wear black north face jackets, brown UGG boots and jeans, leggings, or sweatpants. The mean girl dynamics were different because the environment did not support other girls being mean to third parties—I, just as Hannah experienced mean girls to be an outlier— “largely speaking...Emma Girls were better than that.”³⁴ Recalling that some girls did wear a “uniform” of flowery and pink Lily Pulitzer clothing, Melissa’s testimony aligns with my memory and the memories detailed above: her experience did not reflect the mean girl as the apex. Relating back to what Hannah said, to Melissa, “status” was “tied to girls who were engaged and vibrant.”³⁵ While there was a subculture of competition between each girl through academics Melissa felt the culture of support outweighed it.

For the most part we girls were hard on ourselves, or perhaps insecure in comparing ourselves to others – it was our friends who helped celebrate our strengths instead of live in each other’s shadows...I can’t tell you if I was [just] too happy and proud of my friends to notice any negative ways we were perceived by others. Apparently other girls called us the “brat pack.” I was drawn to my friends because they were smart and goofy, because they were involved and passionate about all kinds of things, and most importantly because they celebrated my strengths instead of preying on my insecurity.

Missa accents that as she remembers being encouraged “from the moment we set foot on campus to practice emotional health... to challenge ourselves in every facet of life, find ourselves, speak out, try new things, be silly, be serious, be vulnerable, take on responsibilities we may never have. Emma Willard made me feel like each and every girl there was capable of the most incredible things. Because they were and are!” Again, the theme is that the Emma experience stressed appreciating each other:

I’ll never forget is hearing for the first time the way the student body supports each other... Just a Morning Reports could sound like a rock show because some girl was talking about a game they were about to play, or it

³⁴ Hannah Rody-Wright, email message to author, November 12, 2018.

³⁵ Melissa Frederick, email message to author, November 23, 2018.

was someone's birthday, or [something as simple as] a poem. It didn't matter. Emma girls turned out and turned up for each other in the most genuine [and literal] wall shaking way. I mean, professors wore construction level ear protection because we all loved each other so loudly.

Support came in the form of screaming at the tops of our lungs—at Revels, I know many girls who lost their voices because of the excitement levels. This is what is never talked about in outside circles. This excitement to be learning, to be supporting, to be loved and show love. Instead, it was seen as excited girls needlessly screaming and causing an uproar for no reason. Even the strictness that many associate with boarding school is not reality within in the Emma walls.

The single sex environment is a theme that highlights a reason why at Emma we did not have to impress anyone without sexuality and there was no one to fight over in ways that we undermined each other's intelligences and attributes. Jenn identifies that "Because there are no boys, there isn't the competition to be the prettiest or the head cheerleader or any of those pieces like in public schools. It's easier to be yourself and you find others whom you enjoy spending time with."³⁶ There were no boys to fight over, no one to impress but our own peers, and even in that, we helped each-other out. Alexa, as many Emma Girls do, "smile[s] and remind[s] them that, a lot of the time, teenage girls are terrible to each other because they're competing over *boys!*" Sandra agrees, stating that "there were no boys to fight over, no stresses about who looked hotter than the other person." Hannah adds that there was no one to "compete over" and no one to "show off for." This allowed us to defy the dress code. Emma girls did get to

³⁶ Jenn, email message to author, December 3, 2018.

skip “over the stereotypical insecurities of high school”³⁷ as we were given spaces to be ourselves, learn to talk through insecurities.

Life After Emma

Leaving Emma, we were more aware of the Emma bubble in a very real sense; the outside world, once again, was not kind to or understanding of the Emma experience. Not kind to confident girls. Social and cultural norms dictate that the boarding school girl must also always be rich, and this is not always the case. Hannah’s experience is tinted with some sadness because it is also a commonality that we all felt like when we went to college: no matter how excited we were to have been an Emma girl, no one could understand. Going to college in my experience, Emma had hindered me in one way—almost nothing would live up to the girls and school I had loved entirely.

Not everyone is wealthy who sends their daughter away to school, most of us were not snobby, and the perpetuated idea that boarding school and private school attendees are must change. Hannah experienced that when she would talk about Emma in college what “caught people’s attention the most was the idea of affluence as it pertains to a boarding school... [by extension] the idea that I was wealthy because I had attended said school.”³⁸ This highlights the U.S cultural dislike of wealth and those who show it off ostentatiously and needlessly—this includes sending their daughters away to school. There is a significant socio-economic dimension to the media portrayals that is related about American ambivalence towards wealth. Hannah “tried to explain that this was somewhat of a misperception; that money wasn’t something that was really discussed there, as there were lots of girls (myself included) who were

³⁷ Sandra Brooks, email message to author, November 23, 2018.

³⁸ Hannah Rody-Wright, email to author, November 12, 2018.

on at least partial scholarships...”³⁹ This aspect of boarding school is important to note as well since the Queen Bees are all socioeconomically well off and this perpetuates the notion that girls who attend boarding school are snobby and are all Queen Bees.

Embarrassment at having attended Emma and being proud of this accomplishment undermines the purpose of having attended; we wanted to be unrepentantly strong but had to learn how to apply this on the ground outside of the Emma bubble. Alexa’s mother reminds her that she would

“thank them” for sending me away... It was the best thing they could have done for me... I got to grow up in a castle... [it was a] a beautiful campus surrounded by students, teachers, faculty and staff who understood that Emma was something bigger than all of us. It was a legacy that created smart, independent, free-thinking, fearless women before us, and we were its current caretakers.

Being thankful that our parents sent us away does not comport with the common label about all girls boarding school experiences. The ideologies of family played a large role in the perceptions of those parents who sent their daughters to Emma. In the real world, strong girls, especially perceived a rich up-tight bitchy one from an all-girls high school, is even more repugnant than the simple smart girls we were before.

Once we had gone to Emma, the harsh realities that others may have experienced throughout high school affected us differently because we had never experienced not being accepted. Because of this cultural backlash, Hannah eventually would “look back on my own gilded and wonderful high school years and feel frustrated and embarrassed that they were different than everyone else’s”⁴⁰ This backslide could be prevented by extending the mindset that young girls may learn to be

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Sandra Brooks, email message to author, November 23, 2018.

women without being catty—that they are not the “bitchy” educated girl who thinks she is better than everyone else. Confidence is not “bitchy.” It is certainly not. We were highly privileged to be sent to Emma and learned that the outside world and most college cultures seemed regressive in comparison.

These memories are often clouded by how each of us felt going into the University setting and therefore we all may have Emma blinders on. With that acknowledged, the threads that tie together each narrative is that Emma Willard was a place where the educated, involved, academically talented, over-tired, college minded girl was not the bitch girl— but the “it” girl. The girl who could do the most and still keep good grades was lauded at every turn both by her peers as well as faculty. The lack of boys is scientifically hypothesized to foster better female relationships. This creates a better sense of community. At Emma we did not even have G.P. A’s given to us so that we would not focus on who was the absolute best student. We had no idea how well we were doing compared. It did not seem to matter.

The above recollections used to show the benefits going to Emma—for was for six girls, and a houseparent. These stories are not indicative of the experience as a whole. Still, the fact that some peers from public school wished they too had attended boarding school and refrained because they were too scared to face the mean girls, is notable. These peers feared the boarding school girls and Queen Bees, to their detriment. Sadly, public school did not protect them from the terrible mean girl spirit. They could have been saved this from this fate. The narrative can change. There is a history in which this was single sex education was the norm—this change over time is symptomatic of a cultural, social and historical bias against smart, perceived wealthy and confident girls. I experienced girls who studied and genuinely loved to learn and were

encouraged to do so. I was surrounded by girls who had their own voices—the educated girl was my “normal.” Emma Willard is also where I learned that feminism didn’t have to be a “dirty word.” I am now a strong advocate for all girl’s education as the product of it.

Finding representation of the “serious” girl in the media was unrealistic to me; I loved to watch shows like *Gilmore Girls* (2000) and *Gossip Girl* (2007) because it did not reflect my experience whatsoever, in terms of the Queen Bee social hierarchy and meanness. What I did identify with was that the Queen Bee was eloquent. Smart. Confident. Her good qualities reminded me of an Emma Girl. How could I separate that nasty part of the Queen Bee from the pieces I appreciated? Rory Gilmore and Paris’s long winded and smart conversations were reminiscent of Emma discussions; however, Blair Waldorf’s Queen Bee meanness was not. Watching portrayals of educated girls on television, I noticed the interpretation of Queen Bees in private schools. I thought that it was not a true representation of what it was like to be a boarding school girl. Before I experienced Emma, I was forming my identity through consuming media images where some women were forced to be manipulative and “bitchy” and that was “okay” because I didn’t notice the effect these images had on me.

The twentieth and twenty-first century texts were oxymoronic and bi-polar: loved to hate and hated to love the Queen Bee. Sometimes, I *am* like her. I speak my mind. I had no idea going into Emma that it would be the safe-haven it turned out to be for girls who are “different” because they are smart. The cultural anxieties around the private schooled female body, educated female, and Queen Bee was still “out there” in the world I had to enter into when I was eighteen. This speaks to why the twenty-first century media maintained the illusion that girls were venomous; they had to be in order to be in competition with the boys. It never occurred to be that I would leave Emma with the confidence of the Queen Bee. Less intimidated by other strong

personalities and characters. I learned to love the “mean girl” persona because I understood that she may have been misunderstood and mis-represented. She isn’t always, primarily a “mean girl” but instead, a strong girl, a smart girl, an educated girl. She is imperfectly perfect—her first paradox; that grounds her a little more into reality.

Semiotics & Media

This thesis deals with semiotics applied to the Queen Bee representation as portrayed in the media texts and visual art forms *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl*. A simple definition of semiotics is that it is the study of signs.⁴¹ Human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture attempt to making sense of those sign. Semiotics is more than simple ‘visual signs’ it incorporates “words, sounds and body language.”⁴² This background is important to understand how media texts and representations permeate into the culture and spread into stereotypes about women and the Queen Bee, for example.

Semiotics can be applied to all aspects within a culture as a sign: language, body language, gesture, clothing, behavior, hairstyle, types of house or car owned, accent, and so on. Signs, are used to convey thoughts, information, commands and judgments. These allow us to develop perceptions and understandings of each other and the world we inhabit. Semiotics is used to approach textual analysis from written texts to visual texts, and media texts.

In a history of semiotics, according to *A Theory of Semiotics*, in 1986, Umberto Eco a literary critic, philosopher, semiotician, and university professor, states that Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce were the first to create a definition of the discipline in the nineteenth century. Peirce’s semiotic analysis (which is central to rhetorical studies but appears frequently

⁴¹ Daniel Chandler, *The Basics: Semiotics*, (Routledge, New York: 2007).

⁴² *Ibid*, 2.

in fields such as advertising and marketing in addition to communication studies) examines three functions of signs. First, the iconic, second, the indexical, and third, the symbolic.⁴³ Peirce details that the “iconic is the sign looks like what it represents; for instance, the little icon on a women’s room is supposed to resemble a woman.”⁴⁴ The second is the indexical which is “the sign indicates that some process or activity will take place or has already taken place; yield and stop signs tell us that we are supposed to direct our cars in a given way.”⁴⁵ Finally, the symbolic sign is the “sign has a deeper conceptual meaning we have learned or will learn.”⁴⁶ For instance, the instant recognition of the Pepsi logo; a circular symbol with waves of red, white, and blue that the company does not even use the word ‘Pepsi’ in many ads utilizing the logo.⁴⁷

As a literary theorist, philosopher, linguist, critic, and semiotician, and in exploring ideas of a diverse range of fields and he influenced the development of many schools of theory, including structuralism, semiotics, Roland Barthes posited that myth is an aspect that functions in tandem with signs by adding ideological meaning that is then expressed through connotation. According to Barthes, myth is the hidden set of rules, codes and conceptions through which meanings which may pertain only to certain groups, are rendered universal and given for a society as a whole.⁴⁸

This thesis will take the position that semiotics is applicable in order to open up new practices and possibilities of 'seeing'. A sign describes the relationship between a general word, image or object and its specific meaning in a context. Signs are in every visual media piece because it allows a symbol, for example, a headband as a crown, to relate to the viewer that this

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Daniel Chandler, *The Basics: Semiotics*, (Routledge, New York: 2007).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

person is a Queen personality. All visual texts convey certain signs and myths to a target audience. The audience watches, views, and interprets that sign. This then allows a Queen Bee character not only to have a verbally description, but also, she can be understood through interpretations and images that have permeated through any historical and cultural moment. One example for the Queen Bee social circle, is the imagery from the sign of a bee's swarm and hive. These methods are used to describe and interpret teen human social interactions. This is how the viewer identifies the Queen Bee and her "minions."

For a complete image to be interpretable to a large target group, myth allows a viewer to wordlessly relate to a visual text as well.⁴⁹ The relationship between the bee-hive Queen Bee, a historic Queen and a cultural Queen Bee is that she needs the hive, court, and high school environment to exist. She has the power. The image and myth of a Queen Bee in her hive is an image that has enough social and cultural significance, such that when a woman evokes the same strong and socially necessary part of a social network. A historic Queen and her ladies in waiting is also an interpretable sign because the reference is known. The viewer is not confused by the implication.

The Queen Bee also draws her symbolism and strength through renderings of Queens throughout history; the idealization of queendom is not a new phenomenon. The fascination with queendom has been seen in portrayals of historic queens (Victoria, Marie-Antoinette, Mary Queen of Scots), symbolic queens (Jacqueline Kennedy, Angela Merkel,) queens of pop culture (Rihanna, Marlene Dietrich, Audrey Hepburn), or even other fictional Queen Bees (Blair Waldorf, Cher Horowitz and Santana Lopez. The idealization and romanization of a powerful Queenly personality branches off from these conceptualizations.

⁴⁹ Daniel Chandler, *The Basics: Semiotics*, (Routledge, New York: 2007).

Queens are interpreted as women who have or had power, women who made names for themselves that history remembers: influential, and perplexing, yet puzzlingly relatable and tangible. Interpellation is a term coined by Marxist theorist, Louis Althusser, who identified the term, using it to explain the process where a person encounters his or her own cultural values in media and internalizes them.⁵⁰ It is a way to identify where people and items belong in a cultural system. Interestingly, interpolating a malicious and cruel Queen Bee character has serious implications. The question also becomes whether such a character is actually being interpolated, and emulated or if it is the underlying vulnerabilities that audiences recognize and empathize with.

These shows dealt with Queen Bees and mean-girl hierarchies in a sociocultural and historical moment that was mesmerized by the social dynamics of female relationships. This analysis will parse through semiotic terms in and apply them to *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl*. A semiotic analysis will help identify some signifiers of female- friendships and a Queen Bee image that early 2000 audiences consumed. This will be part of deconstructing the cultural image of a Queen Bee and the cultural captivation with a Queen Bee icon.

Media and visual images permeate the global culture helping to produce emotions and elicit cultural responses to media texts.⁵¹ This analysis lends itself to answer the question as to how and why in the 2000's pop cultural media, educated women are portrayed and written off as loudmouthed or mean in texts like *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl*. The crux of the questions will determine how these interpretations of female youth culture, versions of girlhood, and opportunities of female teens in media texts have changed over time. I seek to address this

⁵⁰ Ibid, 446.

⁵¹ Media texts in this work speaks to media that is continually produced and renewed. Media texts engage people, convey some kind of information, and to produce reactions in their audiences. It appears to have a material existence – the DVD, the magazine, the novel, and broadcast live programs.

concept, to unearth how the Queen Bee persona, while she has been portrayed as difficult to deal with, is an important figure from the 2000s. The lack of appropriate representations of the educated Queen Bee buttresses gender biases and backlashes to feminisms.

Girlhood, Adolescence & Her Body

This thesis also traces the history of United States⁵² girl youth culture and girlhood throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The high-school years (grades 9-12), according to psychologists, are some of the most formative years of a young life.⁵³ During these years adolescents attempt to form an identity and understand how they fit into society.⁵⁴ Erik Erikson, a psychologist who expanded Sigmund Freud's work by describing stages of development, posited that all of the human lifespan, from infancy through old age, identifies that this particular stage is critical in understanding and describing human behavior.⁵⁵ Psychologist Erikson's stages of young adulthood offers insights on the tasks presented to each person by life itself as people mature and grow.⁵⁶

Adolescence is an especially critical time in a girl's development. Often, adolescent girls attempt to connect their lives to history and situate their reality on a cultural scale, relating to herself in terms of her past culture.⁵⁷ The girl must enter and to connect her life with history to create her future. A girl is on the edge of adolescence and the struggles she will face are a key in

⁵² U.S or American used interchangeably with the acknowledgement of the controversial history of referring to the United States as the only "America" in this hemisphere.

⁵³ Clea McNeely & Jayne Blanchard, "The Teen Years Explained: A Guide to Healthy Adolescent Development. "John Hopkins School of Public Health," *Bureau of Primary Health Care and Primary Care Policy Center* (2009).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ V Ravi, *Advanced Educational Psychology*, (Ashok Yakkaldevi, India 2016).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Trudy Hamner, *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990) 15.

Western girls' development.⁵⁸ Teen girls, in a sense, must navigate a psychological precipice in order to form her identity. Adolescence is a time when girls are in danger of losing their voices and thus losing connection with others. Also, it is a time when girls, gaining a voice and knowledge, are in danger of revealing the unseen and speaking the unspoken, and being interpreted as "too" much.⁵⁹

This thesis explores the ways popular culture offers a close surveillance of girls and girl's bodies especially that of the educated, bitchy Queen Bee. Media permeates U.S culture, suggesting that a Queen Bee, or someone like her, must be perfect. Those who wish to emulate her must, therefore also strive for perfection. Significantly, to be a Queen Bee is to embody the acme of conventional gender identification as a woman. A child's body image is influenced by how people around her react to her body and how she looks. A pre-adolescent becomes more aware of what society's standards are for the ideal body, and mind, and how much of it she should share. These observations trickle down into the inner monologue that girls have that she "cannot" be sexual, smart, intricate, or social without someone closely monitoring what she is doing. In my opinion, this causes girls to adopt the "I can't" attitude, and retreat within herself and lack confidence, when in fact, she can.

Historiography

Through this thesis, I enter into several parallel, existing conversations. While considering near contemporary terrain, I draw on historical studies of girlhood and all girls educational settings. In addition, I explore the history of the term Queen Bee and the concept of the "mean girl," in the recent and not so recent past.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 15.

In 1974, three psychologists, Graham L. Staines, Toby E. Jayaratne, and Carol Tavris adopted the term “Queen Bee,” when examining promotion rates and the impact of women’s mobility in the workplace.⁶⁰ According to the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology, the term Queen Bee (syndrome) is defined as “a tendency for some individually successful women in a male dominated work environment to block the advancement of junior female colleagues and to be intolerant of competition from members of their own sex.”⁶¹ The term was created to describe the phenomenon that senior and powerful women who made their way to the “top” of the social, political, or career ladder were seemingly unwilling and uninterested to help other women achieve the same or similar success.

Scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined and elucidated her theory on intersectionality in 1994 which refers to represented diversity of individual lives.⁶² Crenshaw acknowledged the strengths of identity-based politics and notes that it has been “a source of strength, community, and intellectual development.” That said, she also argues that feminism fell flat because the movement marginalized those who were different and did not consider race, gender, and other identity categories.⁶³ Intersectionality underlines the lack of representation of people of color across fields—be it feminism, media, arts, scholarship.

The 2000’s saw how an intensified focus on girls has amplified concern over those issues that are framed as a primary characteristic of girl culture, such as cliques. Queen Bee’s, and “bad girls” flooded popular culture and media beginning in the 1990’ and then exploded in the 2000’s onward.⁶⁴ Interest in the “mean girl” and Queen Bee in the 2000’s is evidenced by the popularity

⁶⁰ Graham Staines, Carol Tavris and Toby Jayaratne, “The Queen Bee Syndrome,” *Psychology Today*, no. 7 (1974).

⁶¹ Andrew M. Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2015).

⁶² Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

of best-selling books: Rosalind Wiseman's *Queen Bees and Wannabees* (2002), Emily White's *Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut* (2002), Sharon Lamb's, *The Secret Lives of Girls: What Good Girls Really Do – Sex Play, Aggression, and their Guilt* (2002), and Rachel Simmond's *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Aggression in Girls* (2003).

Rosalind Wiseman wrote *Queen Bee and Wannabe*'s, published in 2002; this self-help book sparked the early 2000's cultural craze that spoke to parent's anxieties about their daughters and the "perils of the 'girl world.'" It was updated in 2017, indicating its continued cultural relevance. Modern cultural anxieties about sending young girls away for better education in either a single sex environment, or a private school environment was not always the U.S cultural norm. The topic has become emotionally and ideologically charged. Instead of a conversation about how these educational environments are beneficial, conversation centers on the pitfalls of the social world.

The *New York Times* released an article in 2002 titled "Girls Just Want to be Mean," evaluating girl's relationships, illustrating the perception of a mean-girl mentality in the early 2000's (and perhaps reinforcing it).⁶⁵ Each of these books are targeted to mothers of teenage girls as self-help aids in understanding the lives of teenaged trials of relationships between girls—their friendships, fights, and enemies. Not only did this public anxiety ascend in the form of self-help books but was accompanied with media scrutiny of women's relationships and academic interest in the "mean girl" and the public anxieties of girls and girlhood more generally. Scholar Sara Banet-Weiser explores the "girl power" movement in the 1990s as it moved into the 2000s in 2004. Wiser explains that the early twenty-first century has seen an increase in cultural

⁶⁵ Margaret Talbot, "Girls Just Want to Be Mean," *The New York Times*, 2002. <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/24/magazine/girls-just-want-to-be-mean.html>

attention to girls.⁶⁶ In *How Young Ladies Became Girls*, historian Jane Hunter, argues that portraits of girls on the cusp of change has been a prevalent development in exploring youth culture in the twentieth century.⁶⁷

Education, Women and Gender Studies Scholar Marina Gonick contended in 2004 that the mean girl trope in 1990s media replaced the vulnerable girl in public consciousness—I posit that the mean girl continued to be portrayed as mean as a result of her vulnerability. This figure doesn't want to seem too despondent, instead, she is cruel as a way to disguise her dependence upon others. Gonick continues that the 2000's bore witness to the rise of the concept of the Queen Bee and the "it girl" who is used to "mark a perceived crisis of girlhood."⁶⁸ This theory suggests that the girl matters because she is a cultural marker representing anxieties.

Scholar Illana Nash's 2006 work *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth Century Popular Culture*, is situated through a historical scholarship that shows teen-girl storylines and depictions of girlhood icons in the 1930s through 1965.⁶⁹ In 2007 philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler explores gender performativity to analyze gender and class identities in the 1986 film *Pretty in Pink* by examining the significance of the prom as a key locus of heteronormative gender and class performativity. In addition, girlhood and teen popular culture began to see depictions of the sexualized teen-girl and mean girl cliques (*The Breakfast Club*, 1985), or more closely linked to the Queen Bee of the early 2000's, the 1988 film *Heathers*. *Heathers*.

⁶⁶ Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Girls rule!: Gender, feminism, and Nickelodeon," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21 (2004).

⁶⁷ Jane Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Illana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth Century Popular Culture*, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 2006).

Scholar Roy Fisher adds in 2008 that education is a key site through which a modern state exercises power, acting among other things, as a mechanism of socialization and control for young people.⁷⁰ Private school (especially boarding school) is an elite club where (for the most part) only those who can afford to send their children there do so.⁷¹ In 2008, Historian Marcia Chatelain points out that ideologies of girlhood and female youth culture in the Progressive Era (1890- 1920) emphasized white middle class notions of family roles; at this point, white-girlhood became more rigidly associated with purity, cleanliness and innocence.⁷² The Progressive Movement, she argued, helped institutionalize attitudes about girls through the establishment of maternity homes, girls' orphanages, all-girl schools, and by the agitation for the passage of age-of-consent laws and White slavery legislation.⁷³

According to Melissa Klapper's 2010 rendering of the beginning of the twentieth century, girls were more likely than boys to finish out school in American youth culture. This, she discovered, was due to the fact that boys were expected to help out with farming and work.⁷⁴ At this time, certain accomplishments were associated with white American girls. Acquiring particular skills, such as "proficiency in music or dancing" were markers of American girlhood. The class status that was associated with girls' musical endeavors and educational endeavors.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Roy Fisher, Anne Harris and Christine Jarvis, *Education in Popular Culture: Telling Tales on Teachers and Learners*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 26.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Marcia Chatelain, "The Most Interesting Girl of this Country is the Colored Girl: Girls and Racial Uplift in the Great Migration," (PhD diss., University of Missouri- Columbia, 2008).

⁷³ For more on these Progressive era reform movements, see Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women and Social Scientists and Progressive Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion of Reform, 1890-1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁷⁴ Melissa Klapper, "American Jewish Girls and the Politics of Identity, 1860–1920," *Girlhood: A Global History*, edited by Jennifer Helgren and Colleen Vasconocellos, (Rutgers University Press, 2010).

⁷⁵ Ibid, 8.

In her 2013 dissertation *Too Good to be True: Discursive Construction of the Ideal Girl in 20th Century Popular American Girls' Series*, Kate Harper interprets the ideal girl. Harper suggested that she is a “a historical and cultural construct that becomes concretized and essentialized over time through replication, reassertion, and exclusion.”⁷⁶ She discusses constructions of the ideal and non-ideal girl over time, taking into account the cultural, political, and economic factors that facilitate the production of the discourses of girlhood. Interestingly, Harper understands that the ideal girl in popular series is often juxtaposed with the “non-ideal girl,” who “functions as a political and ideological force, shaping our perception of who and what girls should be.”⁷⁷ Girls’ and youth studies has increasingly become an important subfield.

Kate Harper⁷⁸ and Marcia Chatelain⁷⁹ point out that prior to 1990, academic attention to girls—and adolescents in general—was sparse. Much of this earlier literature regarding girls highlighted moral anxieties about raising girls and young women. This informs the 2000s sudden interest in girls. In the mid 1990s, Chatelain discovers, Canadian and U.K scholars began publishing articles examining ideas of girlhood and popular culture.⁸⁰ Disappointingly if unsurprisingly, however, these studies have focused primarily on the consumption of white, middle-class girls in media. Communities of color continue to be sidelined, both by the representations media outlets continue to produce, and in academic circles engaged in examining idealizations of girl-hood in the twentieth and twenty-first century popular culture.

⁷⁶ Kate Harper, “Too Good to Be True: Discursive Construction of the Ideal Girl in 20th Century Popular American Girls' Series,” (PhD Diss., University of Arizona, 2013).

⁷⁷ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁷⁸ Kate Harper, “Too Good to Be True: Discursive Construction of the Ideal Girl in 20th Century Popular American Girls' Series,” (PhD Diss., University of Arizona, 2013).

⁷⁹ Marcia Chatelain, “The Most Interesting Girl of this Country is the Colored Girl: Girls and Racial Uplift in the Great Migration,” (PhD diss., University of Missouri- Columbia, 2008).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

In Roxanne Gay's 2014 manifesto, *Bad Feminist*, she describes the Queen Bee as someone that is ostensibly meant to be unlikable. Yet Gay points out the importance of unlikable characters. The Queen Bee might be mean, vindictive, need her minions to do her dirty work, but, she asserts, there is something in the honest portrayal that makes her more real, dirty, and appealing. Gay wonders: "why is likability even a question? Why are we so concerned with whether, in fact or fiction, someone is likable?" This is important to explore since the Queen Bee is an unlikable figure, however, she is adored. What does likability have to do with a female character? This implicates feminism's enormous impact on the television landscape

Since the women's liberation movement, stereotypical representations of women in popular culture are slowly changing. bell hooks clarifies in her 2015 book *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* that feminism is about "rights—about women gaining equal rights; there can be as many feminisms as there are people."⁸¹ hooks identifies that each person can identify his or herself within a cultural feminist movement.⁸² Continuing to suggest that powerful portrayal of women is one that has gained momentum, especially in response to previous portrayals of women in docile home making roles. Powerful or "different" and "difficult" and maybe even "complicated" women are often understood to be feminist ideas of what it means to be empowered, according to hooks.

To further complicate the unlikable, feminist anti-heroine, scholar, Margaret Tally centers her argument around the growth of the anti-heroine storyline in 2016 where "difficult women" are given a space to be complicated.⁸³ Tally understands that the anti-heroine can exhibit "qualities of excessive masculinity while others could be described as offering a kind of

⁸¹ bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, (Routledge: New York, 2015), 5.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Margaret Tally, *The Rise of the Anti-Heroine in T. V's Third Golden Age* (Cambridge Scholars, U.K., 2016).

excessive femininity.”⁸⁴ Importantly, Tally notes, anti-heroines are more complex than “traditional’ female characters in popular culture.”⁸⁵

Chapter Outline

This thesis works with the understanding that the reader will use the terms and theories portrayed in the previous chapters as building stones that inform future chapters.

Chapter One focuses on the cultural work of popular television and feminism by exploring the history of the Queen Bee from its genesis in 1949 to 2012. This chapter focuses on answering who the Queen Bee is through examining the history of the Queen Bee figure. This will, in part, be done by contextualizing her within each feminist wave and movement. I will highlight the history of girlhood and the cultural anxieties around the teen body as a site of surveillance and girl’s bodies in the twentieth century. Further, I will provide a detailed history of Feminism in twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This leads into a discussion of feminist media and media texts as well as characterization of twentieth century feminist television characters through third wave feminism that is focused on youth—this media portrayal of youth was packaged and sold to the U.S masses moving into the digital era. Chapter one delves into the teen Queen Bee showing how her naming relates to the 1974 coining of the Queen Bee *syndrome* and proves that the Queen Bee image and persona is used a means to thwart the feminist movements of its time.

Chapter two examines the educated Queen Bee in her high school setting and education of the Queen Bee and her peers. A Queen Bees setting is important. This is where her rule is supreme: high school. I will examine the cultural and political landscape of educated girls in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, through a *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007) lens. This chapter will

⁸⁴ Ibid, 2.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

frame the educated Queen Bee figure by looking into media representations of girl youth culture, the background of the educational aspect of the Queen Bee persona through *Gilmore Girl's* Queen Bee Paris Geller. This show is different from the others I examine as the Queen Bee is not the central focus of *Gilmore Girls*. This Chapter will also look into a history of white girlhood, looking for who is missing from the representations of girlhood and where are the “others.”⁸⁶ This chapter will closely examine Paris Geller, *Gilmore Girls* and the educated Queen Bee and anti-heroine.

The third and final chapter investigates the social hierarchies and political work of the Queen Bee through a *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012) lens; this allows me to further explicate the fluidity of the Queen Bee finalize the determination that she is a feminist icon. This Queen Bee is Blair Cordelia Waldorf of the Upper East Side in Manhattan. A close analysis of *Gossip Girl* and Blair's continued cultural authority will allow a dissection of the social socio-historical political moment in of this Queen Bee in 2007. I will conduct a semiotic analysis of Blair Waldorf: her world, feminist leanings, thought processes, minions, and love(s).

Chapter 1

All Hail the Queen Bee

Strong and independent, the Queen Bee buzzes in her swarming hive; she can be sweet as honey and pack a frightening sting if her nest is tousel. With so many adjectives to describe the Queen Bee insect, one could almost believe that the words describe a person. The history of applying an animal characteristic to describe an individual is a zoomorphism; this Greek term

⁸⁶ Media texts in this work speaks to media that is continually produced and renewed. Media texts engage people, convey some kind of information, and to produce reactions in their audiences. It appears to have a material existence – the DVD, the magazine, the novel, and broadcast live programs. Graddol and Boyd-Barrett (1994) discuss the nature of text, its range and its materiality.

means “animal” and “form.”⁸⁷ This is a literary technique in which animal attributes are imposed upon non-animal objects, humans, and events; and animal features are ascribed to humans, gods, and other objects.⁸⁸ Zoomorphic metaphors identifying aspects of human personalities that are connected to an animal species. Many of these terms can be negative depending on the cultural image it evokes. Using animal expressions manifest conceptions of how we understand a cultural identity by its social, political, economic or cultural aspects.⁸⁹ Other examples would include describing someone as sly as a fox, wise like an owl, and stinging like the Queen Bee. The Queen Bee zoomorphic term as employed in the twentieth and twenty first century is a metaphor that emphasizes a political, social, and cultural construct that indicates cultural anxieties around teen girls and women.

The Queen Bee term is applied to a teen girl and woman in a description that is meant to reflect the observed nature of the insect Queen Bee insect; a 1902 New York Times excerpt defines the Queen Bee as having “the power of choosing;” she is “the new woman of Bee-dom. She has given up her motherhood for a business career.”⁹⁰ In 1902 to conceive of a mother choosing business over motherhood was absurd and nearly insulting. Motherhood under the patriarchy is compulsory. The observation that the Queen Bee could be a woman of the future is an interesting genesis to what it would mean to be cast as a Queen Bee in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The Queen Bee insect was thus the “new woman of Bee-dom” who had “given up her motherhood for a business career.”⁹¹ This conceptualization implicates 1902’s ideologies of motherhood and who made for a good mother when assumptions about women’s

⁸⁷ For a more detailed source and information about Zoomorphism see: Ariel Gomez Ponce, “Eco semiotic Aspects of Zoomorphic Metaphors: The Human as a Predator,” *Sign Systems Studies* (2016): 233.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ainslee, “The Queen Bee,” *New York Times*, May 1902.

⁹¹ Ibid.

innate maternal capacity was relatively unchallenged. A 1902 reference of the new woman of bee-dom is avant guard, however, its function in shaming a woman who would, indeed, chose business over motherhood is not. Neither would this be the last time such a humiliation tactic was employed.

Continuing with this metaphor, in her hive, the Queen Bee insect is the puppet master of the worker bees, however, the worker bees have the ability to raise a new queen—or kill an existing one if they wish.⁹² She must be irreplaceable. Effective.⁹³ The Queen Bee cannot survive without her court; she is codependent on social insect society, and group-thinking in the super organized super organism of the honey-bee hive. Her efficacy as a Queen Bee defines her role within her hive.⁹⁴ These descriptions are further observations of the Queen Bee insect.

This zoomorphism, thus, would, in 2018 be used to describe an independent girl and woman, however, the history of how it became the yes, Queen, as it is known in 2018 is one riddled with backlashes against feminisms. There is a notable fluctuation in the cultural, political and social thinking about the Queen Bee from 1902 through the early 2000s and into 2018. Always fascinating to observe, the Queen Bee cultural icon has resonated with audiences since 1949. The Queen Bee represents contested terrain regarding social and cultural dual emptions of anxieties and captivation with powerful women. The term also often negatively describes roles in interpersonal female relationships.

The Queen Bee is a fluid term; one that absorb the feminisms in the historical moment in which it is evoked. In 1949 the novel *Queen Bee* by Edna Lee, was the first depiction of the

⁹² Philip A. Moore, Michael E. Wilson, and John A. Skinner, “Honey Bee Queens: Evaluating the Most Important Colony Member,” *Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology*, (2015).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Natalie Angier, “In Hive or Caste, Duty Without Power,” *New York Times*, May 15, 2007, accessed May 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/15/science/15angi.html>

Queen Bee persona. This term was first used to describe a white upper-and ruling class woman. *Queen Bee* was originally serialized in 3 parts in *Woman's Home Companion*, May- July 1949 edition when magazines served an important role in providing both education and entertainment to women. According to David E. Sumner, in *The Magazine Century: American Magazines Since 1900*, written in 2010, *Woman's Home Companion* was an American monthly magazine published from 1873 to 1957. During the 1890s in addition to housekeeping tips the magazine also covered subjects such as college education for girls, women in the arts and civil service, travel abroad, women's clubs and health. *Woman's Home Companion's* first female editor was Gertrude Battles Lane (editor from: 1911-1941). When Lanes became the first female editor she wrote a letter her readers stating her editors creed:

constantly in mind a picture of the housewife of today as I see her. She is not the woman who wants to do more housework, but the woman who wants to do less housework so that she will have more time for other things. She is intelligent and clear-headed; I must tell her the truth. She is busy; I must not waste her time. She is forever seeking new ideas; I must keep her in touch with the best. Her horizon is ever extending, her interest broadening: the pages of the *Woman's Home Companion* must reflect the sanest and most constructive thought on vital issues of the day.⁹⁵

Woman's Home Companion focused on its housewife readership who wants to do more than housework; this letter is a feminist gold mine as it shows that the readers "horizon is ever extending." In this vein, the 1949 printing of *Queen Bee* is reasonable. The circulation peak was more than four million during the 1930s and 1940's. This 1949 serial was so popular that it was adopted into a film in 1955.

Queen Bee is a romance that follows cousin Jenny coming to Atlanta Georgia to stay with her cousin Eva Phillips, the first Queen Bee. The Queen Bee, Eva, is portrayed as all-powerful, honeyed sweet, with a stinging vocabulary. It is not easily ignored that Eva's name is so close to

⁹⁵ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1957), 766.

evil adding dramatic effect. Eva is portrayed as a seductress. The novel pushes the reader to adopt the attitude that men are helpless victims of their libido when women weaponize sex. Eva Phillips the Queen Bee is a sexual symbol of progressive womanhood in 1949. She is dangerous to all those around her because she does not shrink from her true nature and always takes what she wants.

The 1955 film noir is the first visual portrayal of the Queen Bee. This film was nominated for an Academy Award in two categories in 1956: Best Cinematography, and Best Costume Design, Black- and-White. The story follows Jennifer Stewart (Lucy Marlow), Eva Phillip's (Joan Crawford) Chicagoan cousin. Jennifer walks up to the southern home. When she goes to ring the doorbell, an African American butler opens the door. He saw her coming. Jennifer walks in to the enormous home where other servants of color who tend to the housework and the Phillips children. Shortly after arriving, Jennifer overhears an argument between Eva's sister-in-law Carol Lee Phillips, and her fiancé Judson Prentis. They are arguing about how and when to announce their engagement. They do not want to upset Eva with the announcement. Carol introduces Jennifer to Eva's husband Avery, and to the neighbors Sue McKinnon and her brother Ty.

Along with Jennifer, the audience wonders why the characters actively avoid talking about Eva; there is a sense of foreboding about this Queen Bee. When Eva arrives home she greets everyone kindly by kissing each on the cheek. She happily hugs her cousin Jennifer. The formerly lively group Sue, Avery, Carol and Judd all sit stiff and silent in Eva's presence. Eva turns to her sister-in-law Carol and says "Carol, you look sweet. Even in those tacky riding

clothes.”⁹⁶ This is the sharp-tongued Queen Bee. Quickly, the group gets up in unison to make hasty exits from the scene.

Eva’s personality implicates the Madonna-Whore dichotomy which creates perceptions of women as either “good,” chaste and pure as Madonna’s or as “bad” promiscuous and seductive whores; Eva is no Madonna. Eva wears an ostentatious white fur coat. This extravagant garment is gaudy in comparison to the sensible brown tweed clothing of her cousin and sister-in law. Her hair is hidden under a 1950s style white cap. She wears pearl earrings, and a shining crystal swan brooch. The 1950s style exemplified class and grace. Eva’s face is accentuated with defined dark eyebrows, her eyes glisten under heavy fake eyelashes; she stands out against the other women in the film, suggesting a Marilyn Monroe coquettishness.

Eva is charming and terrifying; an empowered woman. Eva slides across the room explaining to Jenny that Sue is the “local legend” of a “beautiful girl jilted on her wedding day, still waiting for her lover to return. Her unfaithful, uncaring, and scoundrel of a lover... the bridegroom to be ran away with somebody else.”⁹⁷ Gossiping. The audience learns this scoundrel is Eva’s husband, he jilted Sue for Eva. Eva shares this conspiratorially to emphasize that she gets what she wants; her hand possessively on her husband. This scene indicates that Eva does actually get what she wants. No one else tries to stop her. A stiff Avery sits up to refill his liquor glass. Eva quickly stands between him and the bar. Avery snaps: “Eva, never come between me and my liquor. You’ll get knocked down.” This is a glimpse into Eva’s everyday routine and life. The abusive husband rhetoric would not have been shocking to the 1950s audience the way it sits with a twenty-first century viewer.

⁹⁶ *Queen Bee*, directed by Ranald MacDougall (1955; Burbank, CA: Columbia, 1955), DVD.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

The vulnerability of the Queen Bee shines through in the first few scene of the *Queen Bee* film; Eva is concerned with the impression he is making on her cousin. Avery does not want her to have the wrong impression. He says gruffly “If I seem drunk, it’s because I am. My normal condition.” Eva visibly tenses: “Don’t talk to me in that tone,” her eyes are cast down. She is on the verge of tears. Jennifer is ushered out of the room and we can hear Eva say to Avery “if only you’d try and understand what I feel.”⁹⁸ Asking for a 1950s husband to appreciate what she feels is an atypical 1950s housewife plea; Eva is stuck in this world where her husband is a drunk and does not care who knows that he is miserable. Of course, he is allowed to behave as he wishes. This plea to be understood resonates with the viewer, creating a mask from the Queen Bees that hides her vulnerability.

The supporting characters all fear Eva, in this fear, they end up hating her instead of attempting to understand her point of view. In one scene, Avery takes out Eva’s old dog and shoots him for its own good. Jennifer demands that they shouldn’t do this. Sister-in law Carol says that they won’t tell Eva: “we will tell her the dog died in its sleep...and I said ‘we’... Eva would rather be lied to than know the truth”⁹⁹ Saying “we” in this scene shows that the supporting characters conspire against Eva; exclude her from major decisions. Carol remarks as she calmly sips her tea. Jennifer angrily asserts “You hate her, don’t you?” Carol flippantly responds “of course.”¹⁰⁰ Jennifer leaves the scene.

The audience has the feeling that Eva would rather know the truth than be blindsided. Over the next few days, Jennifer learns more about her family, as she settles into being a personal assistant to Eva. Eva is often found in her glamorous large bed with eye mask. Eva

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ *Queen Bee*, directed by Ranald MacDougall (1955; Burbank, CA: Columbia, 1955), DVD.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

wakes to Jennifer holding a breakfast tray for her and smiles: “You’ve brought me my coffee. How nice you are.” Jennifer stares at Eva: “Don’t just stand there, so ridiculously young looking.” Eva hides her face, having issues with aging. “Go away for a minute,” she demands. Eva sashays into her bathroom where she ready’s herself for the day putting her makeup on and a beautiful dressing gown, hair done up: “Well, do I look fairly human?” she looks admiringly at herself in the mirror: she loves to look and preen.

Love in the Queen Bees life is an important aspect that defines her. Jennifer wants to learn more about Eva and Avery’s relationship. Eva smiles in memory responding that once he was “simply mad” about her and she was “worse, much worse. I knew I could never live without him... and it never changed... not with me.”¹⁰¹ Eva lives a lonely life without an emotional or sexual relationship with her husband. Jennifer says she is sorry because Eva is still nice even after all that has happened. Eva responds “Don’t feel sorry for me. I like everyone around me feeling gay.”¹⁰² Eva lets others know what she is feeling in the moment. No hiding here. In wanting everyone to feel gay, she picks up the white turn dial phone to set up Jennifer on a date. The audience hears Eva laugh “When will you ever succumb to my fatal charm?”¹⁰³ This foreshadows her fate. Eva advises Jennifer to make up her mind to date Ty: “Decide you want the best things in life and go get them. You can, you know. Any woman can. You can get anything you want.”¹⁰⁴ Telling innocent Jennifer that she can get anything she wants in a sexually alluding way is simply not how the 1950s housewife is portrayed.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ *Queen Bee*, directed by Randal MacDougall (1955; Burbank, CA: Columbia, 1955), DVD.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Traditional feminist scholars have identified three "waves" or periods in the history of the women's movement. The first wave of feminism addressed the legal and social equality of women in the 1830s to 1920s.¹⁰⁵ In 1920, the 19th amendment was passed, and women were then able to vote. The second wave began in the 1960s into the early 1970s when the movement dealt with political, social equality, and questioned traditional assumptions about gender and sexuality.¹⁰⁶ The third wave refers to feminism in the early 1990s that emphasis an intersection of identities.

World War II was a significant marker of the shift in American culture; the war impacted several aspects of everyday life that challenged previous ideas about gender in the workplace.¹⁰⁷ Historian Barbara Welter, responding to in 19th century, argued that husbands, neighbors, and society judged a woman's true femininity on the four cardinal virtues piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.¹⁰⁸ Without purity, a woman "was, in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower order."¹⁰⁹ By virtue of holding jobs in a traditionally masculine field, female war workers explicitly challenged "traditional notions about femininity and female limitations."¹¹⁰ The *Queen Bee* is the antithesis of "good" girl, she is able to perform and take power, and is thus understood as hateful.

The feminist moments are relevant to the Queen Bee as well as the—often gendered—cultural backlash to those movements. 1950s American society was highly focused on the ideology of the housewife. Eva Phillips' Queen Bee was the anti-housewife in 1955; she was not

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Gillis, "Feminist "Waves" and the Question of "Post-Feminism," *Women and Gender Studies*, <https://www.smu.edu/Dedman/Academics/Programs/WomGenStudies/ScholarshipsandAwards/PastWinners/GillisEssay>

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Bonaparte, "Reexamining the 1950s American Housewife: How Ladies Home Journal Challenged Domestic Expectations During the Postwar Period," *Scripps Senior Theses* (2014), 17.

¹⁰⁸ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly*, no. 2 (1966): 152.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 154.

¹¹⁰ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts, 1984), 1.

warm and nurturing to her nuclear family and when they hurt her, she would lash out in pain. The 1950s often is depicted as showing happy housewives, however, Scholar Vanessa Lamb states that many 1950s housewives did not have a “perfect life.” The reality was that they often lead a lonely and restricted life.¹¹¹ In that vein, *Queen Bee* is indicative of the 1950s housewife reality. The film *Queen Bee*, gently alludes that Eva’s anger stems from her embittered, guilt-ridden husband Avery having emotionally and sexually abandoned their marriage to retreat into the bottle.

The Queen Bee concept was drawn, in both the novel and film back to the Queen Bee insect. Sister-in law, Carol tells Jennifer that Eva is like the Queen Bee: “she’s sweet, all right. She’s sweet with everybody... she’s worried about anyone getting away from her. She’s so unhappy she can’t bear the idea of someone living a normal life... I read [a book about bees]. There is a whole chapter devoted to the queen, the ruler of the hive. The Queen Bee who stings all her rivals to death.” This is the zoomorphic Queen Bee, and a Queen Bee description that is not entirely true. The Queen Bee is misunderstood; she is lonely. This discussion about the Queen Bee insect makes Jennifer upset.

The film does not depict Eva as particularly evil—while she does in lash out, she explains her motives. Eva cleans out Carols room. In a fit of anger and covetousness that is very forward thinking for the 1955 audience, Eva rips down the items on the wall in the room as Jennifer watches shocked to tears. Eva has always felt like an “Outsider. And they hate outsiders [in the south]. They’re polite enough that’s how they are. You don’t know the things they’ve made me to trying to protect myself.” Self-protection is an understandable sentiment. Next, Eva holds a riding crop tight. She grips it in her hands wringing it in anger to describe “How ashamed I’ve

¹¹¹ Vanessa Martins Lamb, “The 1950s and the 1960s and the American Woman: the transition from the housewife” to the feminist” *UFR Lettres et Sciences Humaines* (2011): 1

been sometimes because of them.” The pain and ostracization Eva feels allows her to be more approachable; not manipulative. Jennifer cries “I am feeling sorry for you,” Eva puts her chin up high: “Don’t oppose me Jennifer, it makes me terribly cross when people oppose me.” Eva uses her vulnerability to not be opposed.

Eva feels ashamed and how she has made herself prickly when she once was a charming and loving person; this is indicated by her crazy love story with both her Husband Avery and with Jud. Jennifer suggests she should go home back to Chicago. Eva leans closer tears glistening down her face: “You’d leave me when I need you so badly?... You’d leave me all alone here just when I’ve gotten used to you? Don’t frighten me like this. If you left, I wouldn’t have anyone to call my own.” This is where we learn how lonely it has been for Eva to live alone with this family who hates her. Saying “need” and being afraid that she would have no one to “call her own” is heartbreaking. Eva’s husband doesn’t address her. Her sister in law feels like she took her brother away and her former lover wants to marry that sister-in-law.

Eva, does, however, let those around her know the entire truth and for that she is perceived as hateful. One evening, Eva reveals her past with Jud to Carol; Eva hints broadly about her affair. The following morning, a worried Jud asks Jennifer if she has seen Carol. After a search, they find Carol committed suicide in the barn. Carol could not live with the idea that Jud had been lovers with Eva. Eva feels responsible for this death and hides away for weeks in her room mourning the loss. This implies that she did not intend to harm Carol. Her remorse, sadness and embarrassment thus, make her vulnerable. She usually loves preening absurdly before mirrors and sashaying around in glamorous Jean Louis¹¹² gowns evoking a Marilyn

¹¹² Jean Louis was an Oscar winning costume designer and is credited with making the gowns in the 1955 Queen Bee film for which he was nominated for an Academy Award. Jean Louis was one of the finest costume designers of Hollywood's golden years. His clothes for women were soft and pliable, glamorous and very feminine, though like all

Monroe. Instead, she does not look in any mirrors—too ashamed to face herself; self-preservation.

This film did not receive stellar five star rated review in 1955; Bosley Crowther, a *New York Times* film critic from 1940 to 1967, reviewed the 1955 film *Queen Bee*: he was not kind to the figure who stood to juxtapose the 1955 housewife. The film stirred hatred in his heart as disgust curdled in his stomach. The keys of the 1955 type-writer droned as Crowther heatedly wrote the *New York Times* article eviscerating the *Queen Bee*. Crowther wrote that “the role that Joan Crawford plays in Columbia's "Queen Bee," ... is that of a honey you love to hate.”¹¹³ Crowther continued at his type-writer, clicking each word into history; indicating that the Queen Bee, Eva Phillips, has “driven [her husband] to bitterness and drink by her ruthless, self-seeking machinations and frank infidelity, she is the height of mellifluous meanness and sleek insincerity.”¹¹⁴ Crowther does not place any responsibility on Avery, Eva’s drunkard husband—instead, this evil housewife drove her husband to the bottle. The alliterations of “mellifluous meanness” is quite powerful writing.

Even this critic saw that Eva was insecure and mean as a result of her experiences; the review lacked empathy for the Queen Bee and the 1955 unhappy housewife. Fearfully and vigorously, his fragile 1950s masculine ego having taken a beating watching Eva Phillips’ defiant, powerful Queen Bee. The review ruthlessly annihilates the film:

five minutes after Miss Crawford appears on the luxurious scene, acting the queen bee like a buzz saw and oozing her unctuous poison from every cell, it is evident

designers of the period he was also adept at providing wide shoulders, angular lines, or smartly tailored business suits for the executive woman. In the 1940’s Louis styled clothing for Rita Hayworth, created stage costumes for Marlene Dietrich in the 1950s and Jean Louis actually did style Marilyn Monroe in one of her last films. A famous moment for him and one of his gowns is in 1962 when he literally sewed Marilyn Monroe into a flesh-colored marquisette gown covered in 2,500 graduated rhinestones. In it she sang "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" to John F. Kennedy at Madison Square Garden in front of 15,000 people.

¹¹³ Bosley Crowther, “The Screen: 'Queen Bee'; New Film at Loew's State Drones Along,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1955, accessed October 10, 2018.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

—no, it is mandatory—that she should be taken out and shot or run off a cliff in an automobile, which is how it is finally done. This act of mercy is performed by John Ireland, who clearly has nothing to lose, since Miss Crawford has already driven his fiancée, Betsy Palmer, to destroy herself. For an interminable time, he lets Miss Crawford flaunt her noxiousness and bad acting all over the place, while Barry Sullivan blinks and boozes as her husband and Lucy Marlow gawks and quakes as her disillusioned niece. When the deed is finally done by Mr. Ireland, nothing has really been achieved except a mawkish manifestation of cheap dramatics. We've enough of those all over the world these days.¹¹⁵

Again, this review takes away the agency of the other characters in the film. Everything is Eva's fault, according to Crowther's. No one else is responsible—apparently.

Crowther's scorn is impossible to ignore. The resonances he uses to describe the Queen Bee are palpable, stinging words: "buzzing and oozing... unctuous poison... flaunt her noxiousness... blinks and boozes." Crowther goes as far as to say that "... it is mandatory—that she should be taken out and shot or run off a cliff in an automobile... [as an] act of mercy." Eventually this does happen. The men conspire to kill Eva—something they both agree should have been done long ago. Both Eva's former lovers decide that the miserable lady must go. Again, neither man takes responsibility for Eva having felt ostracized. If Crowther's intention was to hide this film and the Queen Bee from history—he failed: The Queen Bee lives on. This film was released at the height of the perfect housewife image.

It is clear that no 1950s man would want the Queen Bee as his wife; instead, Crowther writes in his review that he would rather she be "taken out and shot or run off a cliff in an automobile."¹¹⁶ There is no mention about how Eva feels terrible for having driven Carol to "destroy herself" no hint of what else would prompt Carol to do so. It is all Eva's fault. What kind of "mercy" killing is this? To consider the 1955 audience having just endured World War II and the feminist powers that followed as a result, Crowther feeling that he has "had enough" of

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

“cheap dramatics” all “over the world these days” highlights his distaste for his current cultural moment.

Future references to a Queen Bee are not mentioned in popular culture other than in passing; referring to Joan Crawford’s role or as a reference to someone who was “acting like a queen bee” indicating that she is being horrible. The 1955 mainstream gender conventions celebrated a different kind of woman. The *Queen Bee* was the antithesis to the 1955 housewife. That the term was not used again until 1974 is indicative of this critical cultural moment that assumed unenthusiastic approach toward the Queen Bee. The nineteen-year gap between the *Queen Bee* film and the coining of the Queen Bee “syndrome” in 1974 is meaningful. From 1955-1974, there is no pop cultural reference to the Queen Bee, other than in referring to the 1955 film.

Social movements are not static; they change according to what the movement and moment require and depend upon the political landscape. Women’s historians have often used the feminist “waves” to discuss feminism, is a useful, though a contested metaphor. Employing the terms first wave, second, and third wave to denote different turning points in feminist activism and in the feminist movement over time.¹¹⁷ This metaphor allowed each movement to be compared and paralleled to analyze the growth of movements for women’s rights in the United States.¹¹⁸ It is a widely accepted academic standard and description for United States feminisms that allow for a chronology of events.

Developments in the 1950s and 1960s galvanized the Women’s Liberation Movement that was driven by feminism and the women that drove the liberation movement were active in

¹¹⁷ Kathleen A. Laughlin, Julie Gallagher, Dorothy Sue Cobble, Eileen Boris, Premilla Nadasen, Stephanie Gilmore & Leandra Zarnow, “Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor” *Feminist Formations* (2010):135.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

many ways: protests, demonstrations, legislation, and literature. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953)¹¹⁹ and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)¹²⁰ are examples of the underpinnings of the potential women's empowerment socially, politically, and culturally.¹²¹ Both works indicated that women can and should rethink their position in their patriarchal societies. The notion of women staying in the home was found to be flawed; the domestic sphere was now contested terrain.

The typical pre-war happy housewife was disputed in 1955; historian Joanne Meyerowitz contributed to this revisionist history by questioning the postwar woman as stereotypically quiescent, docile, and isolating. In her anthology *Not June Cleaver*, Meyerowitz responds to Betty Friedan's claim that women's magazines only promoted a domestic lifestyle. Through analyzing women's magazines, she found that many non-fiction articles "expressed overt admiration for women whose individual striving moved them beyond the home."¹²² Like the 1949 *Queen Bee* original serialized in 3 parts in *Woman's Home Companion*, magazines embraced contradictions women of the time experienced in wanting to be home with the nuclear family as well as outside of the home. With this history of 1950s feminism in mind, Crowther's visceral response to the *Queen Bee* indicates a backlash against a woman who goes after what she wants. Further, his reaction highlights that his version of a woman would not beg to be understood, but instead would maintain the illusion that she is happy even when her heart is breaking.

¹¹⁹ Lamb, "The 1950s and the 1960s and the American Woman," 1.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹²¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963).

¹²² Joanne Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America 1945–1960*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 24.

Feminism, emerging from the 1960s, resisted the seemingly natural alignment of women with domestic duties in the home to campaign for women's freedom of opportunity within the public spaces and systems shaping socio-economic and political realities. Feminists of the 1960s pointed to womanhood in the 1950s as being a catalyst in forming the 1960s women's movement.¹²³ These women stated that 1950s texts typically were portrayed as insipid, submissive domestic creatures.¹²⁴ Scholar Christina Catalano also asserts the opposite is true. Magazines depicted women in varied roles and positions of power.¹²⁵ In this vein, both Edna Lee's and Joan Crawford's Queen Bees stood against the idea of the ideal housewife of post-World War II and 1950s.

In the nineteen-year gap between the resurgence of the Queen Bee figure, in the 1960s Joan Crawford's image was used as the Queen Bee used in a Pepsi commercial. In this commercial her crazed 1955 Queen Bee is dialed back to be more palatable as she purchases a Pepsi. Joan Crawford appears in and narrates this 1969 Pepsi-Cola sponsored video. A kinder and gentler Joan, who, oddly enough, comes off as even more terrifying than her Queen Bee portrayal visits a supermarket. This depiction of a toned-down Queen Bee icon indicates the cultural anxieties surrounding the figure, as well as its cultural relevance that fourteen years after the *Queen Bee* Joan Crawford would still be recognized as that character.

1970s Psychological studies were not careful to avoid confirmation bias when creating content that suggesting that women were hindering other women in the workplace to the point where it was significant enough to conduct a study on it. According to the oxford dictionary of psychology, the term Queen Bee syndrome is

¹²³ Christina Catalano, "Shaping the American Woman: Feminism and Advertising in the 1950s," *Constructing the Past* no. 6 (2002), 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

defined as “a tendency for some individually successful women to in a male dominated work environment to block the advancement of junior female colleagues and to be intolerant of competition from members of their own sex.”¹²⁶ The term originated to describe the phenomenon that senior and powerful women who made their way to the “top” of the social, political, or career ladder were seemingly unwilling and uninterested to help other women achieve the same or similar success.

The Queen Bee term was not used again in popular culture until 1974 when three psychologists, Graham Staines, Toby Jayaratne, and Carol Tavris coopted and re-coined the term “Queen Bee” by adding “syndrome” to its definition. Queen Bee was re-imagined and used to represent an actual apparently, definable, psychological syndrome; the strong working woman: a syndrome. The term “syndrome” was added to the Queen Bee term in 1974 to enhance the idea that this powerful woman who takes what she wants when she wants was, not only culturally repugnant a “psychosocial” issue. Again, popular culture treated the Queen Bee as an insect used to speak against the popular narrative of the “perfect woman” in its 1950s form. This 1974 re-coining reveals the Queen Bee as a syndrome was a backlash against 1970s feminisms and working woman. The Queen Bee operating as a syndrome is reminiscent to Brosley Crowther’s 1955 *New York Times* vilification of the Queen Bee.

Understanding how to analyze the history of the feminist movement helps to situation the Queen Bee figure in her socio-cultural and historical moment. Showing the change over time of the movement itself speaks to how different ideals of womanhood and girlhood emerged over time to creating the Queen Bee figure and vehicle for feminist thought. Feminism is a term that describes a social justice movement for gender equality and human liberation in a way that

¹²⁶ Andrew M. Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2015).

challenges the patriarchal structure of society—it is either treated as a “dirty” word, or as some perfect ideal of womanhood and human-hood and holds people up to unreasonable standards.

The use of the Queen Bee and working woman as a negative term was not new; popular 1970s psychological magazines ran the account that, while women in the twentieth century were lucky because—finally—they had won the fight for freedom, these liberated women also were cause for psychological concern. Now that women were able to do as they pleased more than before, American humanist, journalist, feminist author, Susan Faludi writes that psychological magazines analyzed that American “[women] have never been more miserable.”¹²⁷ This was in response to the career woman. Criticism against the liberated woman read a peak. 1970s pop culture indicated that “professional women [were] suffering ‘burnout’ The *New York Times* [reported]: High-powered women are stricken with unprecedented outbreaks of ‘stress induced disorders...’ The psychology books [advised]: Independent women’s loneliness represents a ‘major health problem today’ and so on.¹²⁸ It was in this social, historical and cultural moment that the term Queen Bee syndrome was created and given new life that reflected the 1950s scorn for the Queen Bee.

Instead of women helping other women reach the top positions, Graham Staines, Toby Jayaratne, and Carol Tavis work suggested that the Queen Bee would stop at nothing to remain the one with top power. This is where the modern concept of the Queen Bee comes into play. Feminism is implicated in the way Staines, Jayatrne and Tavis coined the Queen Bee term as it emerged during the 1970s women’s movement. This is relevant as the cultural and political shifts of women in the workplace increased. This draws the question as to whether the term was

¹²⁷ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1991), 1.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

a backlash against women in the workplace and a backlash to feminism? This theory has been tested in 2016 to prove its accuracy and the evidence shows otherwise

In 2016 Columbia Business School and the University of Maryland examined top management of the Standard & Poor's 1,500 companies over 20 years. This study found what they thought support this Queen Bee concept from 1974 that when one woman reached senior management, it was 51% less likely a second woman would make it.¹²⁹ Contrary to the concept of the Queen Bee in the workplace inhibiting other women, on closer examination, it was not the "Queen Bee" blocking the second woman's advancement—it was a male executive.¹³⁰ When a woman was made chief executive, the opposite was true and woman had a better chance of joining senior management than when the chief executive was a man.¹³¹ This study shows that the 1974 use of the Queen Bee persona as a syndrome was, not factual. Instead, it was indicative of the post 1960s feminist movement slump that Faludi describes and distastes against the working woman.

In 1974, this term was used when examining promotion rates and the impact of women's mobility in the workplace. While the tangible on the ground application has been disproven, the cultural reflection of the term is still alive evidenced by its re-application to teen-drama and young female interpersonal relationships. This point begs the question as to why women and adolescent girls are portrayed in the media as catty, petty and vindictive.

Reappearances and reapplications of the Queen Bee connote her cultural clout; the 1980s second wave feminist media witnessed several renderings of the Queen Bee

¹²⁹Audrey Nelson, "Are Women Queen Bee's? Queen Bees exist but they are far less common than we think," *Psychology Today*, (2016).

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

trope. The 1980s historical, cultural, sociopolitical moment was not above disparaging the working woman and Queen Bee. In a pattern that has already been identified, and is therefore significant to address, the 1980s psychological texts also indicated several “statistical” development’s regarding women. There was no actual finding that women’s mental health was affected. Still, various psychological studies-maintained notions against women in the workplace. Emphasizing concerns about how working affected the fragile female creatures. This usage and image distorted reality. The narrative that the Queen Bee held others down weakened the benefits of feminist movements as these myths trickled down to crystalized into reality.

In 1985, psychologist, Dr. Srully Blotnick” wrote *Otherwise Engaged: The Private Lives of Successful Women*, in which he conducts a twenty-five-year study of 3,466 women that apparently were proof of career women who would be eventual spinsters. Faludi comments on this study, indicating that the 1985 media “received his findings warmly” that Dr. Blotnick was a “fixture” in *New York Times*, *Forbes Magazine*, and *Savvy*. No media outlet questioned his methodology. As it turns out, “Dr.” Blotnick was not a Dr. after all—however, because he perpetuated the comfortable cultural narrative that unwed women were stressed out and miserable, his words continued to be printed. The stigma against the strong, confident career woman persisted as 1980s feminism bore the brunt of heavy backlash against the women’s movement. This falsehood was sustained in the 1990s; career women were suspect.

Fearful of the powerful and tired working place woman, 1990s feminism was largely, “post-feminist;” in a decade promoted gender equality, post feminism erroneously assumed that feminists and feminism had completed its task. To further

complicate movements and feminisms as related to the discussion of the Queen Bee figure, the label “post-feminist” is relevant to understand the sensationalized female aggressions in the Queen Bee that reached its popularity in the 2000’s. The 1990s referred to its social changes and institutional advances as an enlightened and ‘post-feminist’ period. Post feminism came to represent the idea that women had already gained equal rights –access to employment, equal education. The post-feminist movement itself is another form of backlash to the feminist movement. Scholarship on post-feminism in popular culture suggests iconic images of post-feminism are white.¹³²

In response to the white washed post feminism, Rebecca Walker who is credited with coining the term the third wave in her 1992 article, “Becoming the Third Wave,” reacted; indicating that there needed to be more feminisms, especially for women of color. In this article, Walker observes the Anita Hill case. This case empowered Walker to say that she is “not a post feminism feminist, I am the Third Wave.”¹³³ Walker argued, “for many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn’t allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories.”¹³⁴ Walkers claim inspired third wave feminists to accept a complicated feminism. In particular, she argued second wave feminism was judgmental and not understanding of multiple identities.

The third wave was a reaction and opposition to the stereotypical images of women as passive, weak, and virginal figures; instead, this wave aimed to change the traditional view of women in society by redefining both women and girls as assertive, powerful, and in control of

¹³³ Rebekka Walker, “Becoming the Third Wave,” *Ms. Magazine*, 3.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

their own sexuality. Laying the foundation for important social progress in the treatment of women. This established the idea of girl power, that permeated all 1900s pop culture and 1990s media. Much of the third wave feminism followed the mantra of “Riot Grrrl” which began in the early 1990s, when women musicians and activists stormed the punk rock stage to espouse feminist values and protest violence against women, and “you go girl” phrases. These were rhetoric’s of girl power in the 1990s that were ideals. The third wave movement is frequently associated with women of color and emphasizes the diversity amongst women; yet, feminist scholar bell hooks makes the argument that the dominance of white middle class heterosexual voices has also been observed in the third wave movement.¹³⁵

In an effort to be more inclusive and understanding of race, intersectionality is another marker of third wave feminism. Walkers work created a space for Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectionality to survive. Intersectionality was included the struggle to define the individual nuances of feminism; it is relevant to the Queen Bee because none of the representations of the Queen Bee in the 2000s media culture depicts her as a woman of color. The term represents diversity of individual lives; there are as many versions of feminism as there are people willing to call themselves feminist; Kimberlé Crenshaw, a scholar and feminist, coined the term and introduced the idea of intersectional feminism. Crenshaw acknowledged the strengths of identity-based politics and notes that it has been “a source of strength, community, and intellectual development” however, she argues that feminism fell flat because the movement marginalized those who were different and did not consider race, gender, and other identity categories.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, (London: Routledge: 1994).

¹³⁶ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*. New York: Routledge, 1994), 94.

Crenshaw uses the concept of intersectionality to denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's employment experiences. Crenshaw's work highlights the importance of "the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed."¹³⁷ Intersectionality underlines the lack of representations of people of color across fields—be it feminism, media, arts, scholarship, etc. Understanding the importance of intersectionality helps to clarify how and why media many feminist media landscapes often left out people of color. Here, the Queen Bee is not an intersectional figure although she easily could be.

A feminism timeline is vital in order to situate both the feminism of my high school years (2006-2010), the feminism in *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007) and of *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012) within an appropriate sphere of contextual criticism. The history of feminism helps contextualize and *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl* as a feminist texts. This supports the idea that a Queen Bee figure is feminist. How true is the Queen Bee myth and what are the dangers of perpetuating an image of a cut throat teen Queen Bee girls of the 2000's like *Gossip Girl's* Blair Waldorf or *Gilmore Girl's* Paris Geller? Considering the 1980s pseudo psychological studies raising cultural anxieties about the working women was propaganda to pit women against each other, how does Rosalind Wisemans Queen Bee rhetoric fit into that narrative? Each text creates a construction of 2000s girlhood indicative of a larger cultural phenomenon. The Queen Bee history is informed and reinforced by preexisting discourses and contributes to ongoing debates.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Suzanna Danuta Walters, *Material girls: Making sense of feminist cultural theory* (University of California Press, Berkley: 1995).

Rosalind Wiseman, author of *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, credits herself with revamping the Queen Bee/ Mean Girl craze in the early 2000s. She is responsible for the limited reimagining of the intricate term. This time, instead of being applied to career women tearing each other down, the Queen Bee term was applied to middle school and high-school daughters. Wiseman first published *Queen Bee and Wannabe's: helping your daughter survive Cliques, Gossip, Boys, and the New Realities of Girl World*, in 2002. This parent guide was reprinted with updates in 2017 to reflect modern teenagers helping, advise parents on how to navigate how their daughter's interactions with social medias. Parents have found this guide essentially useful. This reprinting emphasizes this book's social, cultural, and modern historical significance. The interest in self- help guides indicates a fascination with pop-psychology. According to Barnes and Nobles sales rank, this guide ranks at 413,903 sales, continuing to be used by parents and likely handed to teen daughters as a reference guide to dealing with interpersonal meanness and gossip.

This book landed Wiseman on the *New York Times* best-seller list in 2002 and helped spark the early 2000's cultural fixation that spoke to parent's anxieties about their daughters and the "perils of the 'girl world.'"¹³⁹ Wiseman divides teenage girls into categories that are anxiety producing for parents. Further, this model does not always fit every teen girl—it is a totalizing pseudo-psychological breakdown of teen-girlhood. The concept of the Queen Bee is powerful and has resonated with the U.S culture since 1949—the figure is fluid and the significance of the image has changed over time. The Queen Bee is a vehicle for social and cultural anxieties about strong and powerful women and girls.

¹³⁹ Rosalind Wiseman, *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends and Other Realities of Adolescence* (Crown, New York: 2009).

Wiseman writes in her own credentials; other than being a middle school teacher and observing teen girls, just in case parents are interested to know her background, under the subheading “So Why Listen to Me?” Wiseman details that why parents should consider her a good source. She knows girls. Wiseman received her B.A in political science at Occidental College in 1988; she is an internationally recognized expert on children, teens, parenting, bullying, social justice, and ethical leadership. Now, she is an educator, writer, and founder of Cultures of Dignity.¹⁴⁰ Wiseman’s personal mission is to work with youth to end teen violence; an admirable desire. This thesis does not seek to discredit her personal aims, nevertheless, to critically analyze her descriptions of teen girlhood and social structures.

The introduction to the second edition guide shows the cultural relevance of the terms “Girl World” and “Queen Bee” has changed, even since its conception in 2002. Wiseman says the 2009 pop cultural world talks about Queen Bees “at work, on television, and in their preschool play groups. You can buy Queen Bee T-shirts, backpacks and pencil cases...for better or for worse, our awareness of Queen Bees and Mean girls is now commonplace”¹⁴¹ Wiseman sees what she considers “her work” everywhere in the 2009 pop culture. Saying that it is “for better or worse” shows her own dissatisfaction with her work, while also profiting from it. This acknowledgement signifies that Wiseman knows she has made the interpersonal relationships between girls even more prevalent and talked about. Even to the point where parents are identifying and placing these behaviors upon pre-school aged children.

¹⁴⁰ An organization that works with communities to shift the way we think about young people’s physical and emotional well-being.

¹⁴¹ Wiseman, *Queen Bees and Wannabees*, 2.

This Queen Bee is identified as dangerous—parents, beware, your daughter may just be a mean girl and Queen Bee. Wiseman ends the 2009 introduction encouraging girls to be brave enough to be the “agents of their own social change...we have to...empower our girls so they can go into the store with the Queen Bee backpacks and tell the manager to take them off the shelf”¹⁴² Wiseman can only hope to change the future readers; her work has already made a huge impact on the past. Adding that she must “empower girls” indicates perhaps, that she did not expect her 2002 edition to make much headway. The ambivalence Wiseman exhibits toward the terms and labels she continues to disseminate is perplexing. This backtracking is to say that Queen Bees are never good; no good that can come of owning a term that has implicated feminism from 1949 onward. Wisemans original and, even reworked Queen Bee is, sadly, not a feminist vehicle for change who can herself as well as empower other women. This rendering is unfair and does not reflect the ways in which the Queen Bee is used in popular culture. There is no need to fear the Queen Bee. The 2000s culture and media bought into Wisemans depiction of the Queen Bee and her Wannabes to the point where a Queen Bee is present in all walks of media.

The first chapter of *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, indicates that girls must be given credit for their advanced social systems.¹⁴³ Wiseman considers cliques as sophisticated, complex, and multilayered and every girl has a role within them. The chapter states that Wiseman is “going to take you through a general breakdown of the different positions in the clique.... If you can answer yes to the majority of items for each role, you’ve identified your daughter. So, here are the different roles that you daughter and her friends

¹⁴² Ibid,13.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 24.

might play: Queen Bee, Sidekick, Banker, Floater, Torn Bystander, Pleaser/Wannabe/Messenger, and Target. You may choose one of nine options for your daughter. This chapter continues with an analysis of each role; Wiseman shows how a parent can identify their daughter's role within her clique: The Queen Bees popularity is:

based on fear and control, think of a combination of the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* and Barbie. I call her the Queen Bee. Through a combination of charisma, force, money, looks, will, and manipulation, this girl reigns supreme over the other girls and weakens their friendship with others thereby strengthening her own power and influence. She appears omnipotent. Never underestimate her power over the other girls (and boys as well). She can silence her peers with a look.¹⁴⁴

Each analysis of the social roles in *Queen Bees and Wannabes* is Wiseman's close observation of teen girl culture based on interviews she conducts with her students.

According to Wiseman, the Queen Bee derives her power from "fear and control," just as the Alice in Wonderlands Queen of Hearts and Barbie.¹⁴⁵ The Queen of Hearts is identifiable through her huffs of displeasure and "off with their heads" threats. Barbie is, an iconic perfection—however, Wiseman fails to consider the nuanced history of the Barbie figure in this: Since her genesis in 1950 even Barbie has evolved over time to represent the feminist movements and the modern white woman.¹⁴⁶ The description that the Queen Bee uses her "charisma, force, money, looks, will and manipulation," continues to be how the Queen Bee is represented in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

When approaching controversial and inflammatory issues, proper framing and language matters: the way Rosalind Wiseman re-ignited the mean girl/Queen Bee craze

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 28.

¹⁴⁵ *Alice in Wonderland* was first published in 1865.

¹⁴⁶ Cassie Hendrick, "Barbie is Actually a Feminist," *Her Campus*, September 28, 2017, accessed November 2, 2018. <https://www.hercampus.com/school/ucf/barbie-actually-feminist>

in the 2000's is risky. The 2000s media latched on the idea. The 2004 *Mean Girls* film which is based on Wiseman's guide, and had Wiseman's approval, creates an image of an adolescent girl who does not care who she steps on to get ahead for the sake of her social status. Wiseman's careless approach to interpersonal female relationships is not helpful, having used too broad a stroke. In *Queen Bees and Wannabe's*, she argues that "seemingly innocuous rites of passages that are dismissed with phrases like 'girls will be girls' (gossip, cliques, competition for social status) teach girls how power and privilege work in our culture."¹⁴⁷ *Mean Girls* "commodifies these remedies for pathological, middle-class meanness for an even wider, mass audience. In the film, girl culture is depicted as stereotypically superficial, catty, cruel and manipulative."¹⁴⁸ While *Mean Girls* came out in 2004—now, fourteen years ago—the story remains culturally relevant as the parent's guide and film has made its Broadway debut in April 2018.

Aware of the social, cultural, and political pull of her argument, Wiseman attempts to backpedal when she watches teens mimicking her portrayals of girlhood and female relationships. Intriguingly, while Wiseman was proud to have her book made into a film, she believes that girls dressing up as the plastics for Halloween, while "brilliant," was "completely antithetical to everything that I'm trying to get across."¹⁴⁹ Wiseman herself articulates that it was not her intention that girls and some parents have taken her words and bastardized her definitions to glorify the mean girl. This is addressed in the second edition printing where she ensures to encourage girls to throw away the Queen

¹⁴⁷ Rosalind Wiseman, *Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads: dealing with you're the Difficult Parents in your Child's life*, Random House, New York: (2006). This book addresses the social hierarchies and conflicts among parents.

¹⁴⁸ Jessica Ringrose, "A New Universal Mean Girl: Examining the Discursive Construction and Social Regulation of a New Feminine Pathology," *Feminism & Psychology*, no. 4 (2016): 416.

¹⁴⁹ Ester Zuckerman, "Revisiting 'Mean Girls' with Rosalind Wiseman," *The Atlantic*, April 28, 2018.

Bee backpacks instead of emulating her. Wiseman's call does not take into account how the Queen Bee can use her power to empower.

Wiseman has also written the alternative parents' guide for boys, called: "Masterminds and Wingman: Helping Our Boys Cope with Schoolyard Power, Locker Room Tests, Girlfriends and the New Rules of Boy World." This book has not had the same momentum as Queen Bees and Wannabee's. This does not show that U.S culture is less worried about boys but is indicative that there has been more of a focus on how girls and women handle social status. There has been a recent push back against focusing on girls, women, and feminism. Many have asked "what about the boy?" How boys are addressed in the changing nature of the gender gap in education is related to feminism, however, there is a misunderstanding that feminism does not also include the boys. Boys have started to be educated to challenge and overcome discriminatory gender norms. Keeping this in mind, the 2000's media culture was not obsessed with King-Pins as it was concerned with Queen Bees.

Western popular culture uses and reuses gender binaries of women to present a simplistic vision of femininity and to reinforce a gendered power structure. These depictions are often linked to characterizations of the "good" girl and "bad girl," or "mean girl," and are related to the virgin/whore dichotomy in popular media culture. It creates the illusion that all girls are simply mean girls and are working within certain roles within their friend groups. Even the way Wiseman positions boyhood as "masterminds and wingmen" shows that men are "masterminds" and girls are "Queen Bees" which may or may not demonstrate that the young girl is educated and also a genius person.

Scholars in education, criminology, and psychology note that the mean girl phenomenon is overwhelmingly perceived as a white problem,¹⁵⁰ as the Queen Bee is often portrayed as white. Wiseman's self-help aid does, in fact, reference girls of color, however she clumps these girls together in a way that suggest racial separations in cliques. A Queen Bee may be a girl of color; however, according to Wisemans world, she is Queen Bee to other girls of color, not an intersectional and interracial group of girls. This does not mean that girls of color do not have the potential to be mean, however, likely because of her socioeconomic class and perpetuated media stereotypes of that world, the Queen Bee as portrayed in the Media is always from the upper class. I will address the wealthy white Queen Bees in the limited scope of this thesis; this does not reflect either that there are no Queen Bees of color nor that there is no place for Queen Bees of color.

A cultural Queen Bee needs socioeconomic status, social and political prowess, love, a commanding presence, benevolence (when it suits her), and to prevent others from tearing her down. Being at the "top" means that she has a long way to fall if she is pushed out of the groups social graces. Her power is derived from other's willingness to follow her. Her followers hold a lot of power when it comes to keeping her on "top." This impression is reinforced by the strong woman, "ball buster" trope that is perpetuated throughout Hollywood cinema and television.¹⁵¹ This "strong woman" adult ball buster stereotype has had negative treatment.

The socioeconomic aspect to the Queen Bee, and private, or boarding school attendee ties into U.S cultural ambivalence to wealth; while the "American Dream" has long been indicated to

¹⁵⁰ Meda Chesney-Lind, a criminologist with an abiding interest in the situations of women who become embroiled in the criminal justice system, Criminologist Kathrine Irwin, and Maria Gonick, Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction/ Women's Studies at the Pennsylvania State University, University Park. Her research interests are in girl studies, gender and schooling, feminist post-structural theory, and feminist cultural studies, and Jessica Ringrose, the Senior Lecturer in Sociology of Gender and Education.

¹⁵¹ Kate White, "Kate White's Corner: Does It Pay to be a Ballbuster?" *Forbes*, March 2014.

be the American way, there is a mistrust and disdain toward the wealthy. A feeling that they are putting on airs to make others feel less than. Not only that, but they send away their children and separate them from “normal” children—my children—and thus, they think they are better. This twists into an ideology about families as well. U.S attitudes toward wealth and income are complicated as wealth, spending, and money are not merely commodities. They hold a deep signifier that ties into beliefs about morality, equality. History points to different ways U.S has handled cyclical histories between the intense capitalism of the 1920s or 1980s interspersed with an emphasis on greater economic equality, as with the 1930s new deal and the 1940s; these reflects contradictory attitudes about wealth. The boarding school girl is an intersection of wealth, or at least, perceived wealth. The mean girl and Queen Bee she will face, as well as some level of ambivalence toward her learning to be an independent thinker away from the nuisance of boys in the class rooms adds to the cultural confusion about boarding school girls and the Queen Bee.

Contextualizing the cultural fascination of media portrayals of private school girls and boarding school girls and education in the 2000’s, leads to a Foucauldian analysis of school as a site of surveillance, and therefore as a site of social and cultural intrigue. The 2000’s media-scape had a fascination with adolescent girl’s interpersonal relationships that often centered on the adolescent Queen Bee. Evaluating girls’ relationships, even the *New York Times* released an article in 2002 titled “Girls Just want to be Mean” by Margot Talbot, who showed the impact of this mean-girl mentality. This article addressed the *Mean Girls* (2004) film where a girl, Cady moves with her family to the Unites States from Africa where she was homeschooled. Cady must handle “girl world” by infiltrating the mean girl squad with Queen Bee, Regina George and company—Gretchen Wieners who knows everything and Karen.

Talbot questions Wiseman as to her feminism. Wiseman's feminism is relevant in this discussion as she deals with female relationships. Talbot writes that while Wiseman is a feminist she is not

the sort likely to ascribe greater inherent compassion to women or girls as a group than to men or boys. More her style is the analysis of the feminist historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who has observed that "those who have experienced dismissal by the junior-high-school girls' clique could hardly, with a straight face, claim generosity and nurture as a natural attribute of women." Together, [related to this mean girl research, not their friendship] Wiseman and I once watched the movie "Heathers," the 1989 black comedy about a triad of vicious Queen Bees who get their comeuppance, and she found it 'pretty true to life.'¹⁵²

Remarking on Wiseman's feminisms is important to construe how she views her Queen Bee as Wiseman missed out on the Queen Bee as a figure with feminist potential. Wiseman states that she is not a feminist; that, at least when the article was published in 2002, she was comfortable perpetuating the tropes regarding girls and interpersonal teen dramas. To state that the Queen Bee typically does not own up to her own behavior and bullying perpetuates the notion that the Queen Bee is inherently evil. The reference to the 1989 film *Heathers* as being "pretty true to life" as experienced in the 1980s and 1990s, shows that Wiseman is imposing her 1980s experience of girlhood and feminisms on the girls in 2002. What does this resurgence of the Queen Bee in 2002 say about the social, political, and historical landscape?

In 2000, the focus on the cruelty of girls was a new phenomenon. Focusing on the "bitchery"¹⁵³ of female lives is a negative manifestation of the life of the Queen Bee, instead of creating a girl world where the Queen Bee is understood, Wiseman and the

¹⁵² Margaret Talbot, "Girls Just Want to Be Mean," *The New York Times*, 2002.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/24/magazine/girls-just-want-to-be-mean.html>

¹⁵³ White, "Kate White's Corner," *Forbes*.

2000s media perpetuated the antiquated 1970s notion that the Queen Bee was similar to a treatable syndrome. Girls were monitored because of their bitchy tendencies instead of given a space to be understood for them, and perhaps, corrected. In this case, “bitchy” could mean that she spoke up and showed confidence. In the 2002 *New York Times* article when, Talbot notes that Wiseman “laughs. [and says] ‘Haven't I told you girls are crafty?’ she asks, ‘Haven't I told you girls are evil?’”¹⁵⁴ Using the word “evil” to describes girls shows Wiseman’s inattention to the political, social, and historical work of her Queen Bee. Wiseman claims that her parents’ guide is meant to help teen girls to have better coping mechanisms than relational aggression—in 2002. As Talbot states, the focus on the cruelty of girls was “new,” however, in terms of applying this mean persona to the Queen Bee, it was not.¹⁵⁵

While *Queen Bees and Wannabes* speaks to the relational aggression in girlhood, it also highlights the shifts in the ideologies of parenthood and who is a good parent or bad parent in 2002. Studying girlhood and the ideology of parenthood and parenting techniques questioned how the parents dealt with their daughters in these social situations emerged in 2002. Parents are, invariably, the targets of the public scrutiny; the recipients of the media messages about ‘good’ parenting behaviors. This inspection leads them to seize a self-help book when they very well could moderate their daughter’s issues on their own. Susan Shaw, a sociologist focused on issues related to gender equity and social justice, suggests that in 2000-2005 “parenting discourses...popularized and perpetuated through discussions and advice in parenting books and magazines, articles in newspapers, television reports and other forms of media

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

communication.”¹⁵⁶ For both mothers and fathers, popular media, in the form of advice books, magazines, and tutorials, is designed to provide parents with the knowledge and tools to raise children in the most effective way possible. This is placing immense trust in that author.

Parents and media hypervigilance of teen girls in the 2000s relates to a discussion about where the teen Queen Bee can be found: high school. Queen Bees, and bad girls seemed to be everywhere in the media starting in the 1990’ and extending into an explosion in the 2000’s onward. These women are the new heroines of popular culture who use feminism as a way to furnish young girls with chances for education. The 2000’s, bore witness to the rise of the concept of the Queen Bee and “it girl” who is a paradigm of a perceived crisis of girlhood.¹⁵⁷ This crisis has been reflected in the backlash against strong and powerful women from the 1949 Queen Bee into the Queen Bee of the 2000s. Feminist psychologist, Maria Gonick argues that the mean girl trope in media replaced the vulnerable girl in public consciousness. The Queen Bee is often mean or portrayed as mean vulnerable.

Early 2000s American popular culture was also fascinated by the portrayal of private school girls and boarding school girls; the two interests intersect, in the fact that the Queen Bee is often found in private school setting, throughout modern media and cultural history. The idea that schools and the educational processes are concerned with the construction of an obedient or governable subject can be explicated through Michael Foucault’s work. Foucault was a historian and philosopher in the twentieth century. He examined the institutionalization of power where discipline was enforced by observation and surveillance, as in the panopticon, in order to

¹⁵⁶ Susan Shaw, “Family Leisure and Changing Ideologies of Parenthood,” *Sociology Compass*, (2008): 689.

¹⁵⁷ Marina Gonick, “The ‘Mean Girl’ Crisis: Problematizing Representations of Girls’ Friendships.” *Feminism & Psychology*, (SAGE: London. 2004): 394.

regulate behavior through minimal intervention and the acquiescence of those under scrutiny.¹⁵⁸ The anxieties around the panoptic gaze in the United States addresses the references to private school attendees as “bad” girls. It is implicated that sexually deviant bad girls must be watched like prisoners; private schools are Understanding surveillance practices is important when parsing the Queen Bee image, perceived or actual surveillance in private school or boarding school indicates an aspect of human societies that is now vital to the emerging cultures of control.¹⁵⁹

Culturally, sites of surveillance indicate anxieties around girl bodies and teen-girlhood; in this context, a site of surveillance relates to a form of control. Surveillance studies are a phenomenon that indicates that there are “appropriate targets for surveillance.” Observing who is monitored relates to the heightened focus on the Queen Bee in the 2000’s media. In this, the body—especially the female body—moves into an “historical construction and medium of social control; the ‘politics of the body.’”¹⁶⁰ In the early modern world, school was not the chief socializing mechanism as it is in a modern context. Education is a key site through which a modern state exercises power, acting, among other things, as a mechanism of socialization and control for young people.

This leads to a cultural ambivalence toward wealth that is echoed in the depictions of the Queen Bee as private school and boarding school is a commodified space where knowledge is commodified, and the attendees are in control of their own education. Further, private school girl’s bodies are regulated in television. Each level of control and site of surveillance feeds into

¹⁵⁸ Roy Fisher, Anne Harris & Christine Jarvis(eds), *Education in Popular Culture: Telling Tales on Teachers and Learners*, (New York: Routledge), 26.

¹⁵⁹ David Lyon, “Surveillance Studies: An Overview,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, (2008).

¹⁶⁰ Susan Bordo, *Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body* (In Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions Between Foucault and Feminism), 181.

the cultural media frenzy surrounding depicting social situations that are “taboo” feeds into the misconception that boarding school girls and private school attendees are some kind of “other.” Surveillance is deeply related to and rooted in power dynamics, that lends itself to the discussion of other social structures of power-dynamics like; through this lens, the Madonna/whore complex in United States culture relates to the sexualized “othering” of the smart girl.

The Queen Bee icon is shaped at the intersection of cultural responses to private education, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and the bodies and minds of the girl. The Queen Bee figure is fluid because she is dependent on her social, historical and political moment, as well as in her on relationship to feminism. The analysis about the history of feminism as it relates to the Queen Bee is important to interpret the Queen Bees of the 2000s media culture. History lends itself to elucidating the background of the feminist life of the Queen Bee and of the Queen Bee as a vehicle that first pushed against feminist backlash, was coopted to fodder that same backlash, and then was reinterpreted to be the educated school girl or private school girl. The Queen Bees Whiteness, while in the 2000s popular culture was the norm, the Queen Bee has changed again to integrate the feminist movement and moment that emphasizes intersectionality. Examining Wiseman’s *Queen Bees and Wannabes* text as a primary source, as well as her politics, and her popularity emphasizes that the Queen Bee was a central figure of 2000s hypervigilance and surveillance about girls.

Chapter 2

Everyone Hates Me: Examining the Educated Queen Bee

The bright blue-eyed brunette mother and daughter duo —Lorelai (32) and Lorelai (Rory, 16) Gilmore – sit on a floral-patterned 1990s couch on their front porch. Rory squirts

canned whipped cream into her mouth as Lorelai holds Rory's feet, painting her daughters toe nails bright red in the *Gilmore Girls* second episode, "The Lorelai's' First Day at Chilton." Rory asks, seemingly backed into allowing her mother to paint her toes: "why are you insisting on doing this?" Her mother's quips back, "Well because you are starting private school tomorrow."¹⁶¹ Rory counters "yes, but I'm going to be wearing shoes, nobody's gonna see my feet."¹⁶² Lorelai shakes her head in mock exasperation "okay, but everybody knows that private school girls are bad, and bad girls wear red nail polish" emphasizing each "bad" in a sexy husky tone.¹⁶³ Rory sits in silence considering this. Lorelai asks, "Are you nervous... about starting Chilton tomorrow?" Rory answers "Well, I wasn't until I heard about all those bad girls."¹⁶⁴ Rory's best friend Lane Kim excitedly interrupts the Lorelai's nail painting with news of her new CD—XTZ, Apple Venus Volume 2. Lorelai runs into the house after Lane thrilled at the chance of listening to the new music. Rory's red nails are forgotten, she looks around and yells: "But you only finished half my toes!" Lorelai responds from inside the house "Who cares? You're gonna be wearing shoes anyway!" Rory slowly stalks into the house to listen to Lane's new CD.

Lorelai's mention of the "bad" private school girl, noted here, is symptomatic of the 2000's social, historical, political, and media landscapes portraying girl's education and private schooling. The color red has a number of contextual associations that deliver a highly visible punch: danger, passion, excitement, and love. In this case, "bad" has several meanings. Bad in the private school girl context implies that the private school girl is dangerous, sexually deviant, maybe mean, often, a combination; a palimpsest of deviant behaviors ascribed to girls and

¹⁶¹ *Gilmore Girls*, 1.02, "The Lorelai's First Day at Chilton," Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Gilmore Girls*, 1.02, "The Lorelai's First Day at Chilton," Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

women. Lorelai's husky intonation *bad* is sexually suggestive. This *bad* classification of the private school girl is only one example of this type of reference that reproduces the cultural, social and historical anxieties surrounding private school girls in *Gilmore Girls*.

This opening scene showcases Rory's very real nerves relating to her first day at her new private school, Chilton, it is reflective of the experiences of first attending Emma Willard. An education driven teen, more worried about her academics than drama and meanness, is more in tune with an Emma reality than other media portrayals of private school girls. The conversations on *Gilmore Girls* between the Lorelai's demonstrates the friendship between mother and daughter. Lorelai is more childlike than Rory because she grew up in a strict environment. She rebels against conformity. Rory is often the voice of reason in the show, but she respects her mother's whims and generally plays into them. The Lorelai-Rory relationship is central to the series.

Gilmore Girls was broadcast in October 2000 and ran until 2007; this mother-daughter narrative is a family-friendly dramedy, a genre that blends elements of drama and comedy,¹⁶⁵ created in the manner of two recent developments within class depictions in a TV series. It contributed to the popular screening of class-crossing dramas of the late 1990s and portrayed the drama in the life of an emancipated middle-class women. Boasting a mixture of female characters with quirky lives and habits. *Gilmore Girls* is set in an idyllic fictional small town called Stars Hollow imaginarily situated near Hartford, Connecticut. Stars Hollow is intended to be the epitome of the American Dream town with its non-existent crime rate, picturesque cat themed shops, its own town troubadour, and its hilarious town meetings.¹⁶⁶ With a quaintness

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Alyson R. Buckman, "'You've Always Been the Head Pilgrim Girl': Stars Hollow as the Embodiment of the American Dream" in *Screwball Television: Critical Perspectives on Gilmore Girls* ed. David Scott Diffrient with David Lavery, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 130-147.

mocks Stepford-like perfections that small towns represent, and caricatures of real towns folk with riotously banal issues for the residents to argue over. For *Gilmore Girls*, Warner Brothers (WB) targeted the CW demographic: female viewers ages fifteen to twenty-five. Ostensibly this is the world they yearn for.

This 2000 show is a renaissance of the female-led series, a phenomenon that waned in the 1980s responding to the cultural, economic, and political arenas that cautioned against female-centric television shows.¹⁶⁷ Media studies scholar Aniko Bodroghkozy laments the decline in of feminism and feminists in prime-time television in from the 1970s to the 2000s.¹⁶⁸ The CW show created a space for female-led characters to talk about women and women's lives. The mother-daughter narrative and female centric viewpoint was a rarity in 2000s. Notably, these women were not viewed through the lens of the men around them as so many had been framed before them.¹⁶⁹

The Gilmore girls are career focused, smart, determined women of the 2000s reclaiming overtly feminist models and creating paths for nuanced representation of women on television. Set in a "post-feminist" and third wave feminist cultural moment, *Gilmore Girls* enters the media space in the 2000s feminisms following the 1990s Spice Girls "go girl" and Riot Grrrls rhetoric. It is hailed as a feminist text from the first episode. Jennifer Baumgardner, a writer and activist and Amy Richards, a writer, producer and organizer of feminist content state that most women come into feminism through personal experience.¹⁷⁰ This is applicable to both Lorelai's. Rory is introduced to feminism through watching her mother support her and thrive as a single mother.

¹⁶⁷ Ritch Calvin, *Gilmore Girls and the Politics of Identity: Essays on Family and Feminism in the Television Series*, McFarland & Company 2008, location 131 on kindle book (HOW DO I CITE THAT?)

¹⁶⁸ Bodroghkozy, "Where Have You Gone Mary Richards," 12.

¹⁶⁹ Calvin, *Gilmore Girls and the Politics of Identity*, 142.

¹⁷⁰ Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future*, New York: Y: Macmillan, 2000, 58.

Lorelai's background reflects the choices she had to make at sixteen and pregnant with Rory. First, she avoided the requirement of having to be married to Rory's father, Christopher, out of obligation. Next, she rejected her parents financial support, choosing to leave the world of the ostentatious wealth; in a move that was much to the Elder Gilmore's chagrin. Lorelai's feminism is born from having seen her own mother conform to antiquated gender norms; she breaks from that narrative, she says, out of self-preservation. Many 2000's young-teen television shows depict a coming of age story; *Gilmore Girls* is no exception.

A pivotal story line in *Gilmore Girls*, is centered around class. The audience learns that Lorelai often felt suffocated by the wealthy atmosphere of her childhood. In the Pilot episode, she is forced to return home to her parents for money in order to send Rory to the private school of her dreams. She rigidly rejects her parents in an attempt to get away from the class and gender identities of her mother, protection Rory from these trappings as well.¹⁷¹ When it comes to her daughter she swallows her pride to ask her parents for help—this is how important Rory's education is to Lorelai. She wants more for Rory than she had in terms of love, warmth, education and open mindedness. It seems that Rory's interest in her education is self-driven, however, Lorelai gently guides Rory to pursue this avenue. If Rory instead had wanted to be a Rockstar, Lorelai likely would have supported her in that venture as well.

The show foregrounds 2000's feminism with two strong female leads, even mentioning feminism in the first episode. If it was a rare occurrence of the word "feminism," notably it framed the first episode, and was part of the naming of the shows most beloved character. In the "Pilot" episode, Rory explains to her soon to be boyfriend Dean why she is named Lorelai. This is because the first Lorelai "Was lying in the hospital thinking about how men name boys after

¹⁷¹ Calvin, *Gilmore Girls and the Politics of Identity*, 246.

themselves all the time, you know, so why couldn't women? She says her feminism just kind of took over."¹⁷² As this term is part of Rory's rambling, the audience understands that Lorelai is the classic 2000s feminist—a feminine feminist, sexy and irreverent. Acceptable because she is slender, beautiful, and entertaining. Rory is carved from the same stone.

The women in this show have substantial and meaningful conversations, strong, clever, and quick witted, passing the Bechdel test with flying colors. This Bechdel test is meant to be a feminist litmus test showing ways that a film or shows can dispel gender stereotypes and feature nuanced characters.¹⁷³ First, there are more than two female characters who are named, second, these characters talk to each-other in every single scene, it is the point of the show, and thirdly, they talk about more than a man.¹⁷⁴ These leading women and secondary characters are of different socioeconomic backgrounds, of different educational backgrounds, and different ages.¹⁷⁵ The script is smart. These girls and women discuss politics, literature, cooking, history, religion, pop culture, yes, sometimes boys; the list continues.

The creator, writer and producer of the show, Amy Sherman-Palladino, is known for her feminist writing and producing. A tell-tale sign of Sherman-Palladino's writing is her unique dialogue, witty ping-pong banter, and pop cultural references that wiz by the viewer at lighting speed. *Gilmore Girls* signature 100-mph dialogue led to scripts being much longer than a normal hourlong TV show, which usually clock in around 60 pages. Actress Lauren Graham, who played Lorelai, said her scripts were usually eighty-five pages.

¹⁷² *Gilmore Girls*, 1.01, "Pilot," Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Allison Bechdel is an illustrator who, in 1985 who presented a test in her comic strip "Dykes to watch out for."

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

The emphasis on scholarship and book-savvy is a crucial aspect of Rory's character's dedication to educational excellence. This becomes a storyline throughout the series: this is where the audience meets the Queen Bee and academic rival/friend Paris Geller. Sherman-Palladino stated that she created the characters Lorelai and Rory for "two primary reasons: to represent a mother and daughter, and to represent a young female in contemporary society who was focused on her studies and career, a bit naïve, and not sexually active."¹⁷⁶ Sherman-Palladino has been characterized as one of the spokespeople for strong women in television—her latest work is *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* dramedy.¹⁷⁷

While Sherman-Palladino has been praised for her feminist forward writing, her work has been criticized for its utter lack of diversity. *Gilmore Girls* has a representation problem. The only representations of difference are the stereotypical and one dimensional Korean Kim family, and Lorelai's colleague Michelle Gerard, portrayed in the show as an African- Frenchman. Michelle's sexuality is questionable but never explicitly mentioned. There is one loophole that Sherman-Paladino can claim: The town on which Stars Hollow is based, Washington Depot, Connecticut, is over 93.5 percent white according to the most recent census results.¹⁷⁸ Sherman-Paladino contends that she was inspired by her husband's hometown. This loophole is disappointing, especially for a show that was revived in 2017 where the writers missed the mark failing to create a more diverse Gilmore world.

¹⁷⁶ Ritch Calvin, *Gilmore Girls and the Politics of Identity: Essays on Family and Feminism in the Television Series*, McFarland & Company 2008, 5.

¹⁷⁷ This show won two Emmy's in 2018 Best Actress in a Comedy (Rachel Brosnahan) and Best Comedy Series. Amy Sherman-Palladino made history as the first woman to win for both writing and directing in the same year.

¹⁷⁸ City data for Washington, Connecticut, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Washington-Connecticut.html>

The undeniable whiteness, and lack of intersectionality, forces the viewer in two directions: either to believe that the Gilmore's live in a fantasy world that is not representational of the "real world," or, that people of color are intentionally left out because of the depiction of the town as the "all American dream" town, and as such, people of color and diversity are only welcome in small doses. While the lack of diversity and representational issues can be attributed as outdated—the television landscape has changed since the show aired in 2000, it is easy to get caught up in keeping favorite shows flawless. This is complicated since diversifying a show simply for that reason would not stand.

Liberal arts and media studies scholar David Scott Diffrient claims that the series received an intense cult following among its most devoted fans.¹⁷⁹ During the seven years of broadcasting the show piqued the interest of media scholars with its witty writing and sophisticated play in jokes.¹⁸⁰ The show incorporates serious philosophy and high literature while remaining "light" and entertaining.¹⁸¹ According to National Nelson rating data, in its series premiere episode, the show garnered 4.6 million viewers with an average of 5.34 million viewers in its seven season run. The series was often in the top 3 most-viewed shows in its timeslot for women under 35.¹⁸² The fan base has grown since the show was added to Netflix. The "cult" like following is also evidenced in the fact that when the show ended in 2007 after a seven-series run, the fan-base pleaded for ten-years for it to be renewed. Finally, in 2017, *Gilmore Girls* was revived on Netflix for four-hour long episodes chronicling "A Year in the Life." After a ten-year hiatus, fans and the internet went wild over it.

¹⁷⁹ David Scott Diffrient, "Screwball television: critical perspectives on Gilmore girls," Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, xviii.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Josef Adalian, "Why *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* is Probably Going to Break the Internet," *Vulture*, November 23, 2016.

The audience watches as Rory Gilmore finds herself confronted with a “mean girl” and Queen Bee in her new private school. *Gilmore Girls* shows how young women experience feminism and competitive educational environments. Meant to represent the best of both the working world and the wealthy world, Rory is successful because she is, supposedly, balanced. Rory’s intelligence is verified in the “Pilot” when she is seen reading and attracts a boy, Dean. He asks her what she is reading. She says it is “Kind of cliché to pick *Moby Dick* as your first Melville,”¹⁸³ a reference that emphasizes her focus on literature and academia. In episode 1.09, “Rory’s Dance,” she stands in line buying tickets for a school dance. Classmate, Tristan teases “The guy’s supposed to buy the tickets,” Rory responds, “Does Susan Faludi know about this?” indicating that she is comfortable resisting gender roles.¹⁸⁴ This reference to feminist scholar Susan Faludi further points to Rory’s intellectual acumen at sixteen years old.

The series offers a glimpse of Rory’s growth from a teenage girl experiencing her first loves and cherished friendships between her best friend in Stars Hollow, and her confrontation of her frenemy: Queen Bee, Paris Geller.¹⁸⁵ Paris is petite brown eyed and angular, with dirty blond hair, in contrast to Rory’s icy-blue eyed porcelain virtuousness. Both girls have large ambitions. Paris’ goal is become the first-ever combination surgeon-judge in the history of the United States. She has no tempering sweetener; offending and frightening people away almost as quickly as Rory attracts them. This Queen Bee is hyper-focused on school. Throughout the first season the audience is clued in to the fact that she does not have a happy childhood. Her intensity

¹⁸³ *Gilmore Girls*, 1.01, “Pilot,” Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

¹⁸⁴ Molly McCaffrey, “Rory Gilmore and Faux Feminism: An Ivy League Education and Intellectual Banter does not a Feminist Make” in *Gilmore Girls and the Politics of Identity: Essays on Family and Feminism in the Television Series*, ed. Ritch Calvin (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2008), 588.

¹⁸⁵ Played by Liza Weil.

and bluntness are meant to cover up immense insecurities, making it easier to forgive her harshness. Rory's acceptance of Paris also allows her to be more palatable to the audience.

Even with the 2000s media attention to Queen Bees, Sherman-Paladino did not originally have Paris on her radar—she created the role exclusively for actress Liza Weil who impressed her in her audition for Rory. This show would have been Paris-less. Rory's character grows a backbone, needing a Paris. In an interview with *Buzzfeed* in 2014 when the *Gilmore Girls* Netflix revival was simply rumored, Weil said that her “fully formed self now sees it as a huge compliment that that's what they came up with from me reading originally for Rory.”¹⁸⁶ That it is a compliment in retrospect shows that Weil was not entirely thrilled by the idea. Weil remarks that she was “really freaked out that that’s what they wrote... it was just supposed to be three episodes and it kept going.” Paris’ character was solidified into *Gilmore* history; she is a staple from season one in 2000 through to the series revival in 2016.

The self-described shy actress initially had no idea how that arc — and Paris — came out of her audition, noting that “Paris could just do anything.”¹⁸⁷ Weil remarks that she was “Fortunate... to be a young actor and to be on a show that made it really cool for girls to be smart.”¹⁸⁸ A reason Paris is so beloved is because she is a cool smart girl. At the time of her audition she highlights that, “there were a lot of beauty shows, teen soaps, a lot of attention on looking pretty and being sexualized. It was really a gift for me to not have to do that and to really be able to explore the real issues of what it is to grow up.”¹⁸⁹ Weil sees herself in Paris. That is the beauty of the character. Her one liners are often funny

¹⁸⁶ Emily Orley, “The Actress Behind Paris Geller Is All Grown Up: Liza Weil, best known for playing Rory Gilmore's neurotic frenemy on *Gilmore Girls*, talks about what she learned from life in Stars Hollow, working in Shonda-Land for five years, and becoming a series regular again on *How to Get Away with Murder*,” *Buzzfeed*, 2014.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

albeit, mean. The initial trepidation of portraying Paris the “mean girl,” and Sherman-Palladino’s vision in creating the role is reflective of how integral she is in Rory’s growth. This persona was a favorite for Sherman-Paladino to write.

U.S cultural ambivalence toward wealth is mirrored in Lorelai’s character; this accents the emphasis on the daunting portrayal of the affluent private school. This unease is clear in the second episode when Lorelai and Rory pull up to Chilton in Lorelai’s Jeep Wrangler. This Jeep characterizes Lorelai’s working and middle-class background. The camera pans to the in-sync twosome who tilt their heads first in one direction then the other through Lorelai’s front window. Rory visibly gulps: “I remember it being smaller.”¹⁹⁰ Lorelai chimes in “And less...” Rory finishes her mother’s sentence in agreement, “Off their heads.”¹⁹¹ Lorelai moves to get a better look. Rory asks worriedly: “what are you looking at?” Lorelai is “Trying to see if there is a hunchback up in that bell tower.”¹⁹² The audience watches Rory and Lorelai squinting up in awe at the apparently huge intimidating building, decorated with gargoyles. Referencing the “off with their heads” harkens back to Alice in Wonderland’s Queen of Hearts oft-quoted phrase. The school features marbled halls, wooden paneling, lockers lined up against the walls and classrooms with large windows, the building made of large gray stones.

Later in the same episode, a scene that further underlines the rigidity of Chilton follows Rory, left to her own devices, with the Chilton’s Headmaster. Rory wears the Chilton uniform: a light blue collared shirt with a dark blue necktie under a silver buttoned navy-blue blazer paired with a knee length plaid navy and light blue skirt; knee high socks and 1950s style black and white saddle shoes and an oversized bright orange backpack. The two sit facing each-other in

¹⁹⁰ Gilmore Girls, 1.02, “Lorelai’s First Day at Chilton,” Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

large leather chairs as a fire blazes in the fireplace behind them. The white haired large bellied Headmaster Charleston peers at Rory over the rim of his glasses. He asks about Rory's aspirations. She tells him: her ultimate goal is a Harvard acceptance and to be like CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour.¹⁹³

Headmaster Charleston moves back behind his clichéd masculine mahogany desk putting physical distance between him and Rory who now sits in front of him. He states that he has “Known [Rory's] grandparents for quite some time.” Rory nervously replies, “I know.” Headmaster Charleston continues: “In fact, I was at a party at their house just last week where I had the most delicious lobster puffs I've ever eaten...” On a more serious note he leans back in his red leather chair, casts a dubious glare her way. He speaks harshly. Rory's charming smile begins to waver:

None of this [his relationship with her grandparents], however, will be of any benefit to you. Chilton has one of the highest academic standards of any school in America. You may have been the smartest girl at Stars Hollow, but this is a different place. The pressures are greater, the rules are stricter, and the expectations are higher. If you make it through, you will have received one of the finest educations one can get, and there should be no reason why you should not achieve all your goals. However, since you are starting late and are not used to this highly competitive atmosphere, there is a good chance you will fail. That is fine. Failure is a part of life, but not a part of Chilton. Understand?¹⁹⁴

This speech is meant both to stereotype and humorize an uncomfortable situation in the way Sherman-Palladino's work does; avuncular and realistic. The warning that Rory must meet Chilton's high standards is apparent. Abashed, she shakily attempts to lighten the mood, ignoring this harsh punch of reality: “so, you liked the lobster puffs, huh?” Rory is confronted with a

¹⁹³ According to the *New York Times*, Christiane Amanpour made her name as a CNN war correspondent in the early 1990s, covering conflicts in the Persian Gulf, Bosnia, Haiti and Rwanda. “Where There's War, There's Amanpour” went a *New York Times* headline in 1994. Since 2012, she has been the host on CNN International of “Amanpour,” the show that served as a fill-in for PBS as it made plans for something more permanent.

¹⁹⁴ *Gilmore Girls*, 1.03, “Kill Me Now,” Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

similar situation to many who attended Emma Willard School and many other private schools have found themselves in. It is daunting to enter into a competitive environment like Chilton. Charleston makes this speech to let Rory know that even while she may attend her grandparent's parties. He will discipline her should she prove to be a non-exemplary student and instigate trouble. Rory is thrown in the upper-class school that is rendered as a highly unfriendly and competitive environment.

Through hard work and dedication, the Gilmore girls enter into a part of the upper class;¹⁹⁵ Rory compensates for not being part of the "upper class" by making her education and future her guiding light. While Rory is the granddaughter of an affluent family, that wealth does not define her when she attends Chilton. Her family's money does not trickle down into her everyday life. Only Lorelai is responsible for providing Rory with all her needs. At Chilton, Rory meets Paris Geller, the Queen Bee. Paris is a self-motivated overachiever and comes from an even wealthier family. Paris is an educated girl who only cares about her grades, volunteer positions, and whether she will get into an Ivy League school of her choosing. This character is an important representation of the feminist Queen Bee.

While *Gilmore Girls* does not center around the Queen Bee persona, the appearance of a Queen Bee denotes her influence. The 2000s was interested in the Educated Queen Bee as a "bitchy" teen girl because she is book smart, accomplished, wealthy, and ambitious. A teen girl with important and relevant things to say. Using education as a means for female empowerment is noted. Unfortunately, the mean girl trope is still situated so that the smart girl is also the Queen Bee and thus, she threatens to make others' lives more difficult. This character is critical because it shows that educated girls, and girls who read, can be a defining trait of a Queen Bee. *Gilmore*

¹⁹⁵ Calvin, *Gilmore Girls and the Politics of Identity*, 48.

Girls helps depict the complexity of the female identity; social status does not have to be all about having the latest most fashionable clothing, instead, she is the top student. In yet another norm defying move, the *Gilmore Girls* classroom discussions are included. School is more than a social space. The learning material is accentuated showcasing the girls' intelligences. They are actively involved in class projects, plays and the newspaper.

The Queen Bee as a "mean girl" concept came to fruition as third wave feminism and post-feminist thought was at its peak. Feminist criminologists point out that 'popular constructions' of girl violence in the media are fueled by 'the search for equivalence' and a desire to demonstrate that girls do it too.¹⁹⁶ The essentialist view of women as caring and nurturing is partially responsible for contemporary ideas that girls who express aggression are deviant. This argument holds a new focus on adolescent aggression. The educated girl is, then, portrayed as the mean girl and she is often the Queen Bee; she manifests as the smart, eloquent and educated Queen Bee.

We Will Always Have Paris

The Queen Bee is, more often than not, the girl you love to hate; her evilness and vulnerability make her likable, as well as the acceptance of her peers. Paris is unlikable, and there is something in that concept that makes her more real, dirty, and appealing. In *Bad Feminist*, Roxanne Gay's first book of essays, Gay wonders

Why is likability even a question? Why are we so concerned with whether, in fact or fiction, someone is likable? *Unlikable* is a fluid designation that can be applied to any character who doesn't behave in a way the reader [or viewer] finds palatable... We need characters to be lovable while they do right.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Worrall, 2004: 47

¹⁹⁷ Roxanne Gay, *Bad Feminist*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), 85.

Gay, a contemporary cultural critic, is concerned with likability. This relates to how the Queen Bee is perceived even in her meanness, she is a revered fan favorite. The educated Queen Bee does not act in a palatable manner—in the first viewing the audience may hate her. Characters who do not follow the code of moral ethics become unlikeable, breaching to norms of acceptability. Gay continues that she is

Often drawn to unlikable character, to those who behave in socially unacceptable ways, say whatever is on their mind, and do what they want with varying levels of regard for the consequences. I want characters to do bad things and get away with their misdeeds...I want characters to do the things I am afraid to do for fear of making myself more unlikable than I may already be. I want characters to be the most honest of all things—human.”¹⁹⁸

The draw of the unlikable character reveals of their importance. They are allowed to push the boundaries of the cultural norms and expectations. Gay’s reference to “varying levels of regard for the consequences” is an important aspect to the Queen Bee. She does not care what the consequences may be. She is fearless. Confident in how smart she is. The audience lives vicariously through the unlikable character. The honesty of that character is captivating. That is the Queen Bee exactly: “human.” As Gay writes, flawed and unconventional—perfect.

The likeability question does not undermine the value in the oxymoronic likability and despicability of the Queen Bee. Especially because she is not there to be liked, but to be successful. No need for palatability but accepted as is. Powerful. In most cases it is the person who is liked and behaves well who belongs—but this is not always true. Paris Geller is the perfect example of the oxymoronic loveable - unlikable

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 86.

character. The audience is introduced to Paris when Rory attends her first day at Chilton. Paris is not a main character in the Gilmore world, but her character gives the “disagreeable” flair in Rory’s narrative. In the second episode, after Rory meets with Headmaster Charleston, the camera pans down into the bushes outside. Paris and her friends awkwardly squat in the bushes eavesdropping.

Paris reaches into a window to steal Rory’s manila academic file. Scowling, her long hair falls over her shoulders as she says: “she’s a month behind already. Why are they letting all these new kids in here? They just take up space and ruin the curve.”¹⁹⁹ The fact that Paris is more concerned with how Rory will be her academic competitor emphasizes the nature of the educated Queen Bee. When Paris officially introduces herself to Rory, she stops her in the marble halls of Chilton. Each girl holding impossibly heavy books her hands as they face each other. Paris is marginally shorter than Rory. Her head tilts up. Rory tries to get out of the conversation and Paris cuts in front of her:

I’m Paris... I know who you are. Lorelai Gilmore from Stars Hollow... Are you going out for the Franklin?... [Rory is understandably confused] ... Nice innocent act. At least I know you’re not going out for drama club. The school paper—are you going out for it? I’m going to be editor next year. I’m also the top of the class and I intend to be valedictorian when I graduate. You’ll never catch up. You’ll never beat me. This school is my domain and the Franklin is my domain. Don’t you ever forget that.²⁰⁰

Paris walks away, Rory says, to herself “Guess you’re not going to let me borrow your note, huh?”²⁰¹ Paris’ bluntness defines her character. She lets Rory know that she is the

¹⁹⁹ Gilmore Girls, 1.02, “Lorelai’s First Day at Chilton,” Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Gilmore Girls, 1.02, “Lorelai’s First Day at Chilton,” Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

hardest working and her intention to be valedictorian indicates her dedication to her schoolwork. These girls do their own work and are awarded grades based on merit, as normal students. Making sure she indicates that the school newspaper is her domain is foreshadowing as Rory will become Paris' major competition in the years to come. Paris does not tear Rory down here precisely. Instead, she intends to intimidate Rory. Paris gets her hands on all of the hot 'commodities' that pad college applications.

Another scene that shows Paris's ostensible cold bluntness is that she is impermeable to Rory's innocence just as Rory is impenetrable to Paris' meanness. Later in episode two, Rory has trouble getting her new locker unstuck. She backs into Paris' home-made project: a miniature castle replica complete with a moat filled with water. When she knocks into Paris, the project shatters into pieces. This is a project that has clearly taken a lot of meticulous time and effort. Rory attempts to help Paris when, in class, she lets the teacher know she broke the castle. Paris is angry. She does not want or need Rory's help. Rory hands Paris a note apologizing, offering to help her rebuild her project. Paris crumbles the note without reading it dropping it to the floor. Rory's blue eyes and widen mouth open in shock. The audience is meant to register shock in the same way; after all, Rory was just being nice.

In part, the Queen Bee functions in *Gilmore Girls* to coach; unlike other Queen Bees, Paris immediately seems both powerful and vulnerable; she is there to give Rory a backbone, and to spur her to compete. The teacher's voice has, up to this point, been droning as background noise, now she cuts in: "...the Romanists have, with great adroitness, drawn three walls round themselves, with which they have hitherto protected themselves, so that no one could reform them, whereby Christendom has fallen terribly.' Who said this?" Paris sits forward to answer

but, Rory now with a jaw set to prove herself. She interrupts Paris: “Martin Luther.” The teacher praises Rory and continues, “What year did Martin Luther address the Christian nobility?” When Rory sees Paris about to answer again, she responds quickly “1520.” The two girls glare at each other as the class ends. Paris makes clear what their body language implies, saying “Stay out of my way or I will make this school a living hell for you.” Thus, the Rory and Paris saga begins. With Paris rejecting Rory’s generosity and humility, and Rory refusing to be cowed.

That the girls are competing over who has the most knowledge is notable: here is a feminist take on the Queen Bee struggles which more typically revolve around social rather than academic power. Markedly, Rory is not the stellar straight A student right away. In episode four—*The Deer Hunters*, the girls get back their English paper from Mr. Max Medina. He hands Rory back a “D” paper, advising the students to “take these home, learn from your mistakes... to err is human.” The Queen Bee often highlights the flaws and downfalls of those around her. Paris teases about Rory’s “D” grade, conferring with her minions Madelyn and Louise. “Hard paper,” Paris comments knowing that Rory got a D. “A ‘D...’, that would be cause for concern... A job application at McDonald’s.” Louise jibes “would you like fries with that?” Paris continues “Hey, you know, not everybody can be smart. As my mother always says, somebody has to answer the phones.”²⁰² These references accentuate the elitism of Chilton and of Rory’s new peers. Someone who would have to answer the phones would, apparently, not be educated. These jobs presume meritocracy. Once more, the competition between the girls is palpable and Rory aims to succeed while Paris tears her down.

The quippy nature of the Gilmore world allows the audience to understand Paris as an extreme version of perfectionism; palatable because she is funny. Another exchange between

²⁰² Ibid.

Rory and Paris reveals Paris' humor. Paris says her mother does not think she is a "People person." She therefore makes her attend school events and parties. Paris says she "Highly doubt[s] that Madame Curie was voted most likely to dress like Jennifer Lopez."²⁰³ Rory responds, "You want to be a scientist?" Paris states causally, "Cancer Research" Rory accepts this as "Cool!"²⁰⁴ This acceptance of Paris' hard working rhetoric is powerful. The two girls compete over who will get into Harvard and who is allowed to apply. Even though ten generations of Geller's have gone to Harvard, Rory is not side-tracked from her goal. The ten generations of Harvard are revealing of the Geller's socioeconomic status as old money, as well as academic clout. Rory could claim several generations of Gilmores that went to Yale, but she would be the first Gilmore to enter Harvard. Later in the series, the Gilmore Grandparents worry who will help Rory get in to Harvard? They do not have any connections there. Rory assures them she can get in on her own merit; she does, including gaining entry to both Yale and Princeton.

A Queen Bee identifier is in the ways she is made vulnerable and relatable. In the *Paris is Burning* episode 1.11, the audience is introduced to Paris' family and home life—this makes her more relatable of a character and now, her behavior is finally put into context. Rory tells her mother that "apparently Paris' parents are going through a major divorce...and that Madelyn and Louise said hello to her in the hallway."²⁰⁵ Lorelai says "Wow, you're the new 'Heather.'"²⁰⁶ This is a reference to the 1988 film *Heathers*—the first mention of anything relating to the Queen Bee persona. *Heathers* is often mentioned with *Mean Girls* and *Clueless*; the most

²⁰³ Gilmore Girls, 1.06, "Rory's Birthday Parties," Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Gilmore Girls, 1.11, "Paris is Burning," Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

popular students are the “Heathers,” three girls who share the same first name and fashion sense. It is a focus on the social hierarchies of high school. When one *Heather* is defeated, a new one fills her place. Lorelai saying that Rory is the new Heather is meant to imply that Rory is the new “it” girl to fill Paris’ place. This mention to Paris as a *Heather* connects her to the Queen Bee in the show.

Unlikable but loveable because her family undervalues her, Paris grows on the audience, as well as on Lorelai and Rory. On Parents Day at Chilton we see Paris’ mother harassing her about whether she used to facewash she got her—Paris is breaking out in acne. A harsh mother. Paris attempts to convince her mother to go into her literature class with her. Mrs. Geller angrily retorts “Paris. With everything I have going on right now the last thing I need to do is face a bunch of bored people who are gossiping about me. I’ll see you later at home. Use that cover stick I got you.”²⁰⁷ This family dynamic is intended to contrast the relationship between Rory and Lorelai, suggesting that Rory is so well adjusted and kind as a result of the strong relationship she has with her mother.

Paris acts out because she is in pain when her unlikability rears its ugly head. With all of this attention on her family she searches for any way out. Lorelai has been keeping a secret that she is dating Rory’s teacher, Mr. Max Medina. This is perfect fodder for Paris who tells the entire school that she saw the two locking lips in a classroom; they were. Later that week, Rory hears Paris say to Madelyn and Louise, “I wish my mom would sleep with my teacher, it would make midterms a lot easier.”²⁰⁸ Paris undermines Rory here and puts her down to raise herself up—a typical Wiseman mean girl move. This statement also implies that Rory does not work for the grades she gets—insulting her intelligence is more than Rory can handle.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Gilmore Girls, 1.11, “Paris is Burning,” Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

The next part of this scene details how perceptive Rory is and her plea to Paris to be more thoughtful does not fall on deaf ears; Paris does have a heart after all, even if she is angry. In an un-Rory-like maneuver, she slams down her books on the table and leans in close to Paris. Minions dark haired Madlyn and blond Louise stand behind Paris backing her up. Rory tells them to leave. Louise remarks “ooh, catfight.” Rory demands “Go!” Standing her ground, the two make eye contact with Paris who gives them permission to leave. She is smiling smugly: “You’re not going to kiss me, are you?” Referring back to the Lorelai- Medina kiss. “What is wrong with you?” Rory insists. Paris says she’s “Great.” Rory makes the point that strikes home. Paris has just spent the last two weeks with her family’s private matters in the newspaper for everyone to read and talk about.

Appealing to Paris’ good nature instead of acting against her shows that this Educated Queen Bee has more depth. Rory draws that depth out of Paris. Caringly, she chastises “I saw how you walked around here. I saw how much you hated it. And then you turn around and pull something like this? Doesn’t that seem crazy to you?” Paris has not only hurt her and her mother, but Mr. Medina: “He likes you, he encourages you. He holds up your papers and tells the class how great you are. And then you turn around and spread stories about him. Whatever, forget it. You have no idea what I’m talking about.”²⁰⁹ Paris looks embarrassed, and a little remorseful admitting that she “does like Mr. Medina.”²¹⁰ Rory’s comeback is “Well, I’d take some dances classes because the way you express yourself needs a little work!”²¹¹ A comical retort to a serious situation referring to interpretive dance.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Gilmore Girls, 1.11, “Paris is Burning,” Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

Rory lucidly comprehends that Paris never meant to hurt Mr. Medina and knows this appeal is how to get to Paris; understanding her instead of judging her. This approach strikes a chord in Paris. Her Achilles heel is those who acknowledge how hard she works. Mr. Media is someone who holds up her papers and encourages her mind. This kind of behavior is recognizable and understandable. Her remorse is clear. This scene is pivotal in highlighting how Rory approaches Paris and vice-versa. Learning to work together showing solidarity is a significant and lasting lesson.

Ultimately, Paris and Rory learn to bounce ideas off of one another—appreciating the other as smart and – occasionally—a worthy ally. Throughout the series Paris learns to value Rory as an intellectual sounding board and equal. Someone who won't judge her harshness, who even helps her mitigate her rudeness. Paris's meanness and smartness stem from being judged and misunderstood. Rory stands by her. Most of the time she is there to dole out life lessons about kindness. The audience knows that Rory has learned these lessons through her upbringing, but Paris did not have present parents who guided her, instead, she had a Portuguese nanny.

The Gilmore script proves to be filled with historical, social, and political references—Paris and Rory speak to each other almost in another language; the language of the highly educated. These references often go over the audience's head through the first few times watching the show. Working on one school project, Paris asks Rory to “read this manifesto. I want your thoughts” Rory responds sagely, “first thought, lose the word ‘manifesto’” Paris quips back “too cabin in the woods?” Rory jokes “Don't open your mail.” Paris responds and reconsiders “Right. How about ‘doctrine’” and Rory approves “Better.”²¹² Small phrases like this draw attention to history that “manifesto” is too “cabin in the woods” is a reference to domestic

²¹² Gilmore Girls, 1.18, “The Third Lorelai,” Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

terrorist Ted Kaczynski in 1995, known as the Unabomber. Kaczynski wrote an essay known to police as the “Unabomber Manifesto” published in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.²¹³

Paris’ personality comes through in her academic prowess, her intensity for excellence is stark in contrast to her peers. Ruthless when it comes to earning good grades—unlike other Queen Bees. The show actually allows the audience to sit in on the discussions in the study groups, another indicator of the smart writing and intellectual conversations. In episode 13 *Concert Interruptus* the girls studying in a group. Paris interrupts a tangent conversation, she barks:

Hey! We have a debate to organize here, and the conversation here is quickly veering toward the subject of French kissing and glitter eyeshadow: trashy or trendy? I for one have no intention of being humiliated in front of the whole class because you two couldn’t keep your eye on the prize. I want to win. I’m going to win.²¹⁴

Paris does not have time to show interest in discussing boys, nor eyeshadow. To her, pop culture references are pointless. French kissing is just as impractical as glitter eye-shadow; these tête-à-têtes will not steer her away from an “A.” This separates Paris from other Queen Bees and aligns her more with Emma girls. She is not motivated by her male peers and the interpersonal female drama.

Paris is a new embodiment of the Queen Bee persona who shines through Sherman-Palladino’s writing that makes room for smart educated banter. In in episode 2.18, Paris is

²¹³ The Unabomber Trial: The Manifesto. Special Report. *Editor's Note*: This is the text of a 35,000-word manifesto as submitted to The Washington Post and the New York Times by the serial mail bomber called the Unabomber. The manifesto appeared in The Washington Post as an eight-page supplement that was not part of the news sections. This document contains corrections that appeared in the Friday, Sept. 22, 1995 editions of Washington Post. The text was sent in June 1995 to The New York Times and The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/longterm/unabomber/manifesto.text.htm?noredirect=on>

²¹⁴Gilmore Girls, 1.13, “Concert Interruptus,” Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2000.

exasperated by one of her classmates she bursts “It’s not the Bhagavad Gita Madelyn. It’s simple instructions...” The Bhagavad Gita references one of the epics and a staple in Hindu traditions. The 700 verses of the Gita, arranged in 18 chapters. Louise, her minion and friend says, “Someone’s not taking to Elba too kindly.” A historic reference to Napoleon Bonaparte when he was exiled to Elba. What does she mean by this? “Just that Rory’s the leader of this group, Napoleon, and you’re not.” Paris turns to Rory annoyed “Excuse me, leader? You wanna lead here, you’ve got anarchy.” Rory laughs “I’m just enjoying the show.” This interaction allows intellectual depth even in secondary characters.

A classic female trope in television is the “makeover” scene, the fact that these girls do not have a major Paris or Rory makeover moment is substantial, expressing that there more girlhood and Queen Bee-dom than the physical. In the minimal Gilmore scenes that deal with dating, Paris is asked out by Tristan (Chad Michael Murray), and her two friends Madelyn(M) and Louise(L) who are portrayed as the stereotypical “bad” private school girls with social and sexual savvy are shocked. The girls scare Paris when they comment about how Paris is not his “type.” They mull over the options:

L: Tristan usually likes his girls bad.

M: Looks like we are going to have to do a pink ladies makeover on you.

L: We’ll turn you from sweet Sandy into slutty Sandy dancing at the school fair in high-heels, black spandex and permed hair.

M: You can borrow my water bra.

Paris: Excuse me?

M: My water bra. It’s like a padded bra but with water—it moves.

Paris: It moves? Great, but I think I’ll pass.

Here is another reference to the sexually active promiscuous *bad* girl. Sandy’s scene in Grease was an iconic movie moment; she wanted her boy Danny so badly that she was

willing to change herself to be desirable to him. The reference to a “slutty Sandy” hair fluffed in curls in black spunks and red nails makeover from Grease responds to the bad girl image of private school girls Lorelai mentioned in the opening scene to episode 2.

Later in that episode, Paris runs to Rory in a panic over what to wear on her date:

Paris: I don't know what to wear.

Rory: Ever?

Paris: On my date with Tristan! I'm not trendy girl, haunting the little boutiques for that one fabulous little top. I study, I think about studying, then I study some more. I only have one lipstick, and its barely even a color. You put it on and it looks like you're wearing nothing, and that's why I liked it in the first place. But to date, you need the fabulous little top and you need a lipstick you can actually tell you're wearing.

Paris is different from other versions of the Queen Bee, because she is insecure and does not ‘rule the school’ with her obvious good looks, or manipulative personality; she is simply the best, most educated and hardest working. Her style is one of a matronly person and she her personal style is as if her mother picked it out for her—a little too old for her age. Her nude understated lipstick was a choice. She wants to be supported and wear a “fabulous little top” in this; wants to be desirable and the first person she runs to is Rory. Even Rory finds this little strange. Paris’ concern over not being “trendy” is only brought up when she worries over being compared to other girls Tristan dates. Rory helps her choose an outfit from her mother’s closet:

Rory: Can I ask you a question? Why didn't you go to Madeline or Louise? They seem to get that fabulous little top thing.

Paris: Yes, that they get. The whole supportive, ‘you're going to be fine and won't throw up in his car thing’—that they don't get... I don't have a lot of experience in the dating department. You can't put it on your transcript so what's the point?

The open conversation and silent understanding between Paris and Rory that they both value educational excellence than they do boys places them as intellectual and emotional equals.

Gilmore Girls is not about the Queen Bee power struggles, as such, it is unclear how Paris became the Queen Bee figure. It is possible that it relates to the fact that they wear uniforms, and therefore, all are equalized. No one person's style in school is more attractive than the other.

Paris is an uneasy wreck saying that her minions do not understand the whole supportive friend aspect of her going out with Tristan: they know how to date and are more sexually experienced than Paris. She does not pretend to be more experienced than she is, but she also will not show this side of her to her two old school friends. Paris's panic even though she rules the school makes her a real contender, and this scene renders her vulnerable. She understands that she and Rory are more alike than she is to her friend group. A n uncomfortable discovery. Paris is not the authority on the best things to wear. She is hyper focused on school and only things one can put on your transcript.

At Chilton, it is not those who have the most wealth who get the best grades, receive all the awards, nor who are liked by teachers—indeed, this rendition of a private school awards those who work hard. Those who make it are the hardest workers; later in the series when Rory goes to Yale, she learns that environment is more conducive to the wealthy where student's indiscretions are forgotten with a large donation and a new library in that family's name. This is not the Chilton world. Paris, the Queen Bees hive would not be upset if this were the case as she is wealthier than Rory, and therefore would be able to buy her good grades—no, these girls earn them.

Some highly coveted leadership positions are often—but not always—a popularity contest; Paris is the first to acknowledge this when she needs Rory's help to win. In a race for

student body President, Paris asks Rory to be her Vice President in season 2 episode 22. Paris insists:

Paris: Who would be the Yin to my Yang, Joel to my Ethan, Damon to my Affleck?

Rory: Who?

Paris: You! It's genius... Geller and Gilmore. We even have the "G" thing going. Never underestimate the power of alliteration, my friend.

Rory: I don't want to be Vice President.

Paris: Every little girl wants to be Vice President... Please, I'm begging you.

Rory: Paris!

Paris: They hate me, Okay?

Rory: Who hates you?

Paris: Everyone! The whole school hates me. Oh, they know I'm the best for the job, but they don't want to go to the mall with me, so that means I am going to lose... People think you're nice. You're quiet, you say 'excuse me,' you look like little birds help you get dressed every morning. People don't fear you.

Rory: Hey, I haven't been dressed by birds since I was two... I guess the thought of just being nice to people never occurred to you, huh?

Rory is starting to come around, not one to like seeing Paris disappointed. Paris knows how typical popularity contests work; this reference that while she is right for the job but may lose implicates feminism. Paris knows she is about to convince Rory who can never turn her down, it seems. Even Rory helping Paris out makes Paris insecure. In the next scene Paris sits in the auditorium sure she is going to lose the election. She calls Rory to read her Hubert Humphry's concession speech:²¹⁵ Paris: Now, other than the part about Nixon, parts of it really seem to apply here... Even if I win, I only won because of you. Therefore, either way; I lose. Paris' helplessness is Rory's weakness. Rory always trying to make her feel better. The pair need each other. Paris needs Rory to support her and Rory needs Paris to push her academically.

How teen female sexuality in visual texts, especially when dealing with educated and "bitchy" archetype characters, they are the Madonna or whore figures. The "bitch" archetype is

²¹⁵ Ibid.

problematic. The perpetuation of the terms of “mean girls” and “bitches” shows that strong opinionated women have to be unlikable; this is a misappropriation and another form of formulating the Madonna in the Madonna/Whore dichotomy. Paris’s character, however, manages to offset that description because she is smart, ambitious, driven and sometimes vulnerable. Paris isn’t simply a strong woman, nor is she a woman whose impoliteness is contained in moments.

The Madonna/whore dichotomy is used a little differently with sex as a secondary issue in *Gilmore Girls*. Paris is the “bad” girl to Rory’s “good” girl. Female sexuality is measured against the male sexual script, and as a result, is fragmented: "good girls" submit themselves to a male-defined double standard that says women should not consummate a sexual relationship too often, too quickly, with too many men, or under the wrong circumstances, while "bad girls" proudly defy this standard.

Feminist scholars have long referred to it as the Madonna/Whore complex. There are a few *Gilmore Girls* moments where sex is mentioned. In the first season, Rory is referred to as “Mary” because she is a “goody-goody.” Later she is called “Mary-Magdalen” and “Typhoid Mary” because she supposedly flirted with Tristan, who Paris had her eyes on. In season three, Paris and Rory have both applied to Harvard; Rory is accepted while Paris is rejected. Paris takes this very badly and has a meltdown on stage where she and Rory teamed up to broadcast a live speech on C-SPAN. Paris says on live TV: “I am being punished. I had sex, so now I don’t get to go to Harvard.” Rory pulls Paris off the stage as Paris continues ranting “She’s never had sex. She’ll probably go to Harvard. She’s a shoe in. Pack your chastity belt, Gilmore – you’re going to Harvard!”²¹⁶ *Gilmore Girls* does not punish Paris for sex. Lorelai jokes that when she is

²¹⁶ *Gilmore Girls*, 3.16, “Dear Emily and Richard,” Directed by Sherman-Palladino, Amy, 2003.

accepted to all the big colleges that Rory is “the biggest virgin ever,” gently teasing Paris’ meltdown. Both girls end up at Yale instead of Harvard.

Girl power, interpersonal female relationships and aggression has been portrayed and politicized in U.S culture which teaches and asks women to consider other’s opinions of them; Paris’s character creates space within *Gilmore Girls* for viewers to imagine a world where they might be found off-putting more often than not and value themselves anyway.²¹⁷ The nature of her character frequently spiteful, dictatorial, and ruthless. Soon they become good friends because as Paris says in a later season, Rory is the only person she knows who stays into the room with her until she is done speaking.

History of 20th and 21st century girlhood and the Educated Girl

Fleshing out United States (U.S or American) cultural anxieties surrounding girl youth culture and girlhood throughout the twentieth and twenty first centuries, helps elucidate the anxieties about the Queen Bee. A cultural Queen Bee needs socioeconomic status, social and political prowess, love, a commanding presence, benevolence (when it suits her), and to prevent others from tearing her down. The Queen Bees setting. High school. feeds into the negative attitudes regarding the educated school girl. The boarding school girl and Queen Bee are an intersectional representation of U.S social, historical and cultural concerns; wealthy (or perceived wealth), theoretically sexually deviant, archetypally feminist, and often, ascribed as “bitchy” based on the comingling of these traits.

Exploring the history of these cultural anxieties will help mark when and how opinions toward private girl’s education and single sex educated girls generally shifted from the norm to a luxury, and therefore, is a cause for suspicion. Initially, all formal education in the United States

²¹⁷ Ibid.

occurred in single-sex schools. Women did not attend schools and were typically educated at home. In the 1880s and early into the 1900s, communities sought an economy of scale and merged the genders into coeducational common” schools.²¹⁸ The single sex environment shifted, and coeducation became dominant as single sex environments were found in the private sector.²¹⁹ Private school (and boarding school) therefore is seen as an elite club where (for the most part) only those who can afford to, send their children. It is not a necessity nor is it seen as a normal part of United States society. The shift from single-sex education environments in the public sector to a private luxury setting created apprehensions toward private schooling. This is especially toward privately schooled girls. Marcia Chatelain, Associate Professor of History and African American Studies at Georgetown University shows that in the mid 1990s Canadian and U.K scholars began publishing articles examining ideas of girlhood and popular culture.²²⁰ This makes girls a concern provoking entity alone—never mind adding to that feminisms, education and power.

Creating the link between the expected naivete of girlhood and the ambivalent treatment of the educated girl is not difficult. Much of the literature prior to 1990 regarding girl’s detail moral anxieties about raising girls and young women. Twentieth century girls were girls were more likely than boys to finish out school in American youth culture; this was due to the fact that boys were expected to help out with farming and work.²²¹ American girls had certain requirements that enabled her to be found in an educational setting.

²¹⁸ David Tyack and D and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning together: A History of coeducation in American public schools*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

²¹⁹ Gerald Bracey, “Separate but Superior? A Review of Issues and Data Bearing on Single-Sex Education,” *The Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice* no. 6. (2006). (1-50)

²²⁰ Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls*, (Raleigh, N.C: Duke University Press, 2015).

²²¹ Melissa Klapper, “American Jewish Girls and the Politics of Identity, 1860–1920,” *Girlhood: A Global History*, edited by Jennifer Helgren and Colleen Vasconcellos, (Rutgers University Press, 2010).

The American girl was expected to acquire particular skills, that did not include classroom debates, like her male cohorts. She was allowed to be proficient in music or dancing;²²² class status was, therefore associated with girls' educational endeavors.²²³ The creation of co-ed classrooms led to privately schooled girls to be seen as especially upsetting because she had to be "sent away" as if she were danger to those around her.

In 2018, a new gender gap has been forming, one that favors girls; this is a major cause for cultural concern.²²⁴ Girls are outdoing boys on test scores, are achieving success in traditionally "male" curriculum areas such as technical subjects and are more likely to enroll in university programs.²²⁵ The fear that girls will dominate over boys causes tensions that leads people to wonder "what about the boys?" and debates about the dangers of girl power.²²⁶ Backlash against feminist concerns for girls education causes modern worries about the educated girl outdoing the educated boy. In this cultural context, the Educated Queen Bee becomes even more mistrusted

Girls youth culture in America witnessed several shifts throughout the twentieth and twenty first centuries that indicate a growing wariness to the power of the girl. These representations may be placed in the beginning of the women's movement (1848-1920) in the United States. Girls on the cusp of change are easily monitored; apprehension builds in response. Emerging from the Victorian Era (1837-1901) Jane Hunter, a historian and scholar, argues in *How Young Ladies Became Girls* that Victorian novelists grew concerned about a feminized

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid, 8.

²²⁴ Ibid, 10.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

American culture where “being good” was one of the only requirements for a young girl.²²⁷ This implies that “being bad” would be an ostracizable offense.

In 1868, the “bad” girl was an example of a rebellious woman; one of the most famous is was Louisa May Alcott’s Jo March (1868), who was often described as disheveled with an irascible temper, she spent much.²²⁸ The non-ideal girl becomes a political and ideological force of the cultural perception of who and what girls should not be nor want to be. Jo March spent her energy trying to overcome her hoydenish ways so that she might eventually make her father proud as a good ‘little woman.’²²⁹ Notions of the rebellious girl continued even while novelists and moralists celebrate propriety and virtue as the goals for teenage girls.²³⁰ These construction and juxtapositions of the ideal and non-ideal girl led to cultural creations that is solidified through several replication, reassertion, and exclusion of traits each girl has.

In the twentieth century, novelists focused on white-upper middle girls who were often understood as counter-normative. Constructions of the ideal girl and of ideal girlhood developed from the Victorian era into the twentieth century. Portraits of girls on the cusp of change has been a prevalent development in exploring youth culture in the twentieth century.²³¹ This ideal girl concept was used as a vehicle to create an image of the good girl, who stands in stark contrast to the “bad” girl: leading the conception duality of the loved and hated Queen Bee.

Cultural concern for the teenage girl grew through portrayals, storylines and depictions of girlhood icons in the 1930s through 1965, and thus, became a fixture in popular American

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid, 2.

²³⁰ Ibid, 3.

²³¹ Jane Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

narratives.²³² In the 1960s the teen angel and good girl depiction emerged and multiplied in the 1970s that was a response to feminist conceptualizations of female identities. Popular cultural narratives pushed back against strong women troupes that would advance feminist sentiments. In the 1980s girlhood and teen popular culture began to see depictions of the sexualized teen-girl and mean girl cliques (*The Breakfast Club*, 1985), or more closely linked to the Queen Bee of the early 2000's the *Heathers* (1988) film. *Heathers* highlights the pressures girls feel to maintain idealized relationships. The development of the good and bad girl lead to the 1990s media creating the vulnerable girl in public consciousness that eventually lead to the 2000s Queen Bee. The Queen Bee and “it” girl breathes life into the one-dimensional characters around her—she is the girl to be, even in her meanness.

A recurring theme in Queen Bee narrative is that there must be a light and frothy “good” version to counter the “badness” of the Queen Bees strong personality; these stems from U.S cultural anxieties about the good and bad girl. Being a good girl seems great on the surface. Rory excels in every category in which young women are told they should, and then some. But nobody resents her for it, since her bashfulness, innocence and fundamental niceness serve to make her accomplishments nonthreatening and her occasional missteps quickly forgotten. On the other hand, Paris Geller is the caustic character in the history of representing “mean girls” in popular culture. These social changes, historical and cultural moments relate to analyzing texts stress the importance of contextualizing any text. *Gilmore Girls* understands the cultural significance of different portrayals of the Queen Bee figure in the 2000s television landscape and takes into account the benefits and negatives in portraying the educated private school girl as “mean” and “bossy” and maybe even a “bitch.” Paris is still ‘dark’ and needs Rory’s light personality to

²³² Illana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth Century Popular Culture*, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 2006).

offset her, but it is clear that Rory needs Paris as well. The two girls grow closer as they motivate each other to succeed.

Chapter 3

The “Honest” Thing—a Perfect Role Model: Blair Waldorf

Gossip Girl's Queen Bee, like many before her, is an enigma. The *Gossip Girl* series is comprised of twelve novels – the first of which released in 2002 -- and six television seasons that aired in 2007. Both Rosalind Wiseman's observations in *Queen Bees and Wannabe's*, and Cecily von Ziegesar's work as the author of the *Gossip Girl* series look at the negatives associated with female teen lives in the 2000s. These young adult novels, targeting teens 12-18 years old, earned von Ziegesar number one on the *New York Times* best-selling author list in 2002. This momentum lead to the 2007 *Gossip Girl* television show. Here the narrator kept the viewers up-to-date of these teenage lives, creating ubiquitous small-scale notoriety. *Gossip Girl* was one of the first television shows that set the scene through the eyes of a blogger personality.

This show ushered in the internet era as dramatic gossip blogs became a focal point and platform for young people. The year 2000 marked when the internet became a common forum for online social engagement. The *Gossip Girl* book series was released two years after the internet hit its stride, marginally predating the height of the culture of connectivity, before the advent of social media outlets Myspace (2003), Facebook (2004), and Twitter (2006)). The *Gossip Girl* voiceover often speaks for someone who has submitted a secret, comment, or question; “she” makes commentaries on the relationships, dramas, and Queen Bee happenings.

The stereotypically glamorous lives of teenage lifestyles *Gossip Girl* depicted were a template for future CW shows. In 2000 with *Gilmore Girls*, the CW diverged from the television norm of portraying women as naïve props, to focusing on “girl power” to promote girls’ empowerment, riding on the coattails of Disney channel shows and taking the audiences from shows like *Lizzie McGuire* (2001-2004) and *That’s So Raven* (2003-2007). The CW did not seek to become a “teen network,” with target audiences of 18-to-34-year-old women; instead, the upscale programming in 2002 was teen-friendly. That said, the network was decidedly not opposed to attracting young teenaged viewers, acknowledging that those viewers (12-17) would enter into the CW’s target demographic in a few years.²³³ This strategy allowed older generations to relate to the sexy youthful content while it prompted younger viewers to interact with risqué storylines, making them feel “cool” and adult. Both demographics lived vicariously through these characters.

Gossip Girl’s premiere boasted 3.65 million viewers, averaging 2.7 million viewers during the first eighteen original episodes according to Nielsen Media Research. In 2008, *New York Times* reporter Alessandra Stanley wrote a review stating that it was “preposterous” to even say that the television *Gossip Girl*.... does not quite live up to the novels.”²³⁴ The television show, remains true to the novels in its fundamental principles, making an effort to make the series more palatable to an older audience, targeting ages 18 – 34, rather than the 12-18 audience the novels kindled. Stanley continued that some readers may be relieved that the basic “reefer madness,”²³⁵ is still intact. The drinking, sexually active, shoplifting teens resemble their novel

²³³ Kayti Adiare Lausch, “The Niche Network: Gender, Gender and the CW Brand,” *The Thesis Committee* (University of Texas: Austin, 2013), 7.

²³⁴ Alessandra Stanley, “Reading, Writing and Raunch: Mean Girls Rule Prep School,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2007.

²³⁵ Ibid.

characters. For parents, on the other hand, she writes “It is possibly the scariest tableau of prep school privilege since Robert Chambers requested another round at Dorian’s Red Hand in 1986,”²³⁶ a reference to the 1986 “Preppy Killer.”²³⁷ Dorian’s Red Hand is a bar on the 80s and Second Avenue on the Upper East Side that Chambers frequented—and it is the last place victim Jennifer Levin was seen with Chambers. To make this kind of comparison to the Upper East Side of the *Gossip Girl* world is quite a statement. While it is true, the story follows affluent and white Upper East Side teens, the fear and notoriety inspired by Chambers renders a harrowing comparison.

Like Wiseman, author Von Ziegesar was interested in writing about deplorable teens. Ziegesar grew up on the Upper East Side in the 1980s and would have been familiar with the “Preppy Killer.” When asked what drew her to writing about these teens, in an interview with *New York Magazine*, in 2005,²³⁸ Von Ziegesar said she “always resented books that tried to teach a lesson, where the characters are too good...” She wanted her characters to be real. “I mean, of course I want to be the responsible mother who says, ‘Oh, there are terrible repercussions if you have sex, do drugs, and have an eating disorder!’ But the truth is, my friends and I dabbled in all

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Stanley is referring to the 1986 Upper East Side killer who smothered Jennifer Levin, Robert Chambers, who became known as the “Preppy Killer” according to the *New York Post*. Chambers was a 19-year-old. Standing 6 ft. 4 in tall and strikingly handsome, he was an Upper East Sider who attended the most exclusive private schools, stole a friend’s credit card, and was caught after using it for a shopping spree. Chambers had several run-ins with stolen credit cards and a cocaine addiction. He brutally killed Levin, an 18-year-old college bound student from Long Island. Chambers was not actually rich, but he was accepted by his elite peers because he was charming and sold them drugs. The killer and soon to be victim, Jennifer Levin met up as she expressed her intention to date him. The pair partied together and on August 26, 1986 and walked to Central Park to have sex near the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is speculated that Chambers killed Levin because he could not perform properly after a night of partying with cocaine and ecstasy. Evidence shows that Levin fought for her life, but unfortunately was unsuccessful. Chambers pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to 5- 15 years in prison.

²³⁸ Emily Nussbaum, “Psst, Serena is a Slut. Pass it On,” *New York Magazine*, (2005).
<http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/books/12058/>

those things. And we all went to good colleges and grew up fine. And that's the honest thing to say."²³⁹ Von Ziegesar's writing and attitude reflects an extraordinary amount of white privilege.

But is this shocking Upper East Side teen life actually true to the 2000s and 2007 teen reality? An interview with six Upper East Side teen viewers suggests yes. Ruth La Ferla, writer for the *New York Times*, interviewed six Upper East Side teens after a *Gossip Girl* viewing party. La Ferla quotes twelve-year-old Brook Yalofas saying: "That would never happen in our grade, but if you were a senior, it might."²⁴⁰ La Ferla describes these girls sprawled on the floor eating pizza at the Yaloufs' uptown duplex. The teens say that the show holds up an only somewhat distorted take on their reality.²⁴¹ The article continues to quote Desirée Kennedy-Mitton, 16 who maintains that "It is "not just a fantasy... Although when you are in that life," she added, "it seems so crazy to you that you sometimes tell yourself, 'This can't be real.'" ²⁴²

Having grown up watching *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) these girls aspire to be who is reflected on the screen. *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012) is a *Sex and the City* for the younger generation. Simone Kennedy-Mitton, 19, describes what would be a Queen Bee figure in her experience. She is the "alpha female...at an all-girl school... you fight over who has the most guy friends. Knowing lots of boys makes you the alpha girl, the girl who goes everywhere, who knows everyone, who is the captain of the in crowd." Importantly, these Upper East Side teens often still are peers with boys even in an all-girls school setting. The Queen Bee knows all, controls all; she is the "alpha." Kennedy-Mitton's depiction muddles Wiseman's take—this girl is more intricate than Wiseman's Queen Bee.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ruth La Ferla, "My So-Called Gossipy Life", *New York Times*, September 16, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/16/fashion/16gossip.html>

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

The Upper East Side is an area with wealthy old money families; each neighborhood has distinguishable characteristics.²⁴³ Given the East Side's reputation as family-oriented, many 20 and 30-something professionals have tended to gravitate more towards the West Side for its trendy nightlife.²⁴⁴ In the first quarter of 2007, apartment sales on the East Side averaged \$1,128 per square foot; and the West Side averaged \$1,088 per square foot, according to data from Miller Samuel. This is hardly a difference. However, when the teens identify a "Friend that is on the Upper West Side" Simone Kennedy-Mitton said, "She left our school because everyone on the Upper East Side was really, really rich. She felt disincluded [*sic*]."²⁴⁵ That the Upper East Side is perceived, to the teens that lived there, as wealthier than the neighborhood on the opposite side of Central Park, is telling. The affluence in the neighborhood is, at least to the teens that lived there in the 2000s, unparalleled. As far as the family life, these teens identify with the absent wealthy parents on the show. One recalls "The other kids thought it was weird that I would spend time with my parents..."²⁴⁶ This is true of *Gossip Girl*; these teen girls concur that their lives are reflected in the show. *Gossip Girl*, to them, is Manhattan's Upper East Side in 2007.

While the lack of diversity in *Gossip Girl* is not reflective of Manhattan as a whole, the racial disparity of the Upper East Side is properly represented. New York City is a racial, ethnic and cultural medley in terms of who lives and works there.²⁴⁷ In a study of the transformation of

²⁴³ Alison Gregor, "UES vs. UWS: Uptown rivals bury the hatchet," *The Real Deal: New York Real Estate News*, October 25, 2007. https://therealdeal.com/issues_articles/ues-vs-uws-uptown-rivals-bury-the-hatchet/

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ruth La Ferala, "My So-Called Gossipy Life", *New York Times*, September 16, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/16/fashion/16gossip.html>

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ William H. Frey, "The New Metro Minority Map: The Regional Shifts in Hispanics, Asians, and Blacks from Census 2010," *Brookings*, August 31, 2011.

the racial and ethnic demographic profiles of the largest U.S metropolitan areas, the senior fellow at the Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings William Frey reported that from 2000- 2010 the black population in New York City dropped for the first time.²⁴⁸ The New York area was the second most segregated for black people, the study revealed, and the third most for Hispanic and Asian residents.²⁴⁹ A *New York Times* article, “A Stubborn Racial Disparity in Who Calls the Upper East Side Home,” reported that “The proportion of non-Hispanic black residents on the Upper East Side has remained exceedingly low for decades, rising from 2.1 percent of the area’s population in 1990 to just 2.7 percent about 20 years later.”²⁵⁰ This was determined by an analysis of census data by Susan Weber-Stoger of the Queens College department of sociology.²⁵¹ The Upper East Side here was defined from between Fifth Avenue and the East River, from 59th to 96th Streets.²⁵² The proportion of white residents is at around 81.1 percent to 88.6.²⁵³ The fictional halls of the Constance Billiard all-girls school, based on Von Ziegesar’s own private school Nightingale-Bamford were also largely white. Students and parents have taken issue with the lack of racial, cultural, socioeconomic diversity with the school even over a decade later, in 2018.²⁵⁴

Hence *Gossip Girl* portrays a lavish lifestyle of Upper East Sider’s white elite that is, at times, exaggerated, but recognizable to its 2007 teen inhabitants. The setting signifies a specific social standard. Further, the culture of the high school setting introduces the audience to a Queen

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Elizabeth Harris, “A Stubborn Racial Disparity in Who Calls the Upper East Side Home,” *New York Times*, August 6, 2012.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ For Nightingale Bamford School reviews see: <https://www.niche.com/k12/nightingale-bamford-school-new-york-ny/reviews/>

Bee who owns the Upper East Side—not just her own school. Her social clout and reach is irrepressible. The viewer is intended to be dazed by beautiful iconic Manhattan scenes as the camera cuts to the Bethesda fountain in Central Park and Fifth Avenue luxury shops.

A significant deviance from the novel is that the show amps up the storylines and importance of the parents; here, the parents are given some of the responsibility for the actions and excesses of their children on the show. In addition, the show exhibits a high school lifestyle that is quite fictional as these 16-year old enjoy adult privileges—16 going on 30. The first novel welcomes the reader to “Manhattan’s Upper East Side where my friends and I live, and go to school, and play, and sleep—sometimes with each other. We all live in huge apartments with our own bedrooms and bathrooms and phonelines. We’re smart, we’ve inherited classic good looks, we have fantastic clothes, and we know how to party.”²⁵⁵ This introduction is given by the eponymous blogging voice Gossip Girl. The Queen Bee Blair Waldorf (Leighton Meester) is introduced in the novel when “All Blair Waldorf knows is there is no freaking way Serena’s [Blair’s on again off again frenemy best friend] going to just waltz back in with her Jimmy Choo mules and Kate Spade bag and steal everyone’s heart again.”²⁵⁶ A reference to designers Jimmy Choo and Kate Spade highlights the importance of fashion in *Gossip Girl*.

When the show aired in 2007 and onward, teens would flock into boutiques bearing magazine tear sheets that featured members of the cast and ask for their exact outfits; fashion was a major character for them. Stephanie Solomon, the fashion director for Bloomingdale’s stated that the show had a marked effect on retail.²⁵⁷ Eric Daman, the show’s costume designer,

²⁵⁵ Cecily von Ziegesar, *Gossip Girl*, (17th Street Productions: New York, 2002), 1.

²⁵⁶ Ibid,

²⁵⁷ Ruth La Ferla, “Forget Gossip, Girl; the Buzz Is About the Clothes,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2018.

said that it was an intentional decision to launch trends from the get-go.²⁵⁸ The show served as a walking advertisement for several designers, some who did not pay for the mentions, like Nanette Lepore, and others like Tory Burch, who did.²⁵⁹

The characters frequently wear their school uniforms, yet viewers have observed that these uniforms have little coherence. In short, the students do not fully abide by the school dress code. Each represents their individuality by adding a bow, wearing colorful thigh-high socks, or pairing enamel high-heeled shoes. Blair is the daughter of a fashion designer and she has an insider's access to the fashion world; Brooklynite and lower social and socioeconomic status Jenny Humphrey makes her own clothing to keep up with the expensive designer labels of her wealthy classmates. Serena is usually wearing light shimmery items, and dresses to downplay her obvious beauty so that Blair does not see her as the competition she clearly could be. Even in a context where dress is intended to democratize the classroom, this young white elite finds ways to create hierarchy and emphasize individuality.

Dress has traditionally been analyzed according to a trickle-down-theory of clothing, where the trend began in the aristocratic class and eventually made its way down to the lower class.²⁶⁰ This history lends itself to the idea that the Queen Bee becomes a trend setter. This perspective implies that the only function of fashion is to transmit social status. However, twentieth century theorist Roland Barthes indicates that clothing and fashion is a transmitter of complex signs and is its own language that can be decoded like language linguistics can be parsed. *Gossip Girl* uses fashion to advertise the high-end designer labels, but also to depict a certain quality about a character. The outfits Blair wears signify more to the viewer, and her

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion*, trans. Andy Stafford ed. Andy Stafford and Michael Carter (Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2004),5.

clothes are more than clothing—they also indicate that she is the Queen Bee.

The Upper East Side *Gossip Girl* crew would be much less aesthetically pleasing without their shopping habits and clothing choices; least of all the Queen Bee, who identifies herself through her fashion choices. Blair's signature style combines vintage and modern looks; Audrey Hepburn meets Matthew Williamson.²⁶¹ In *Gossip Girl*, the camera often shifts focus to Blair's regally purple boudoir: purple is connected with royalty and her checkered foyer is reminiscent of a chess board that connotes that Blair is the Queen to be won. At home Blair is usually wears tiny pieces of silky lingerie, long chiffon robes, and high heels on any given morning as she eats French pastries and berries for breakfast; this is her "lounging around scheming" option.

The glimpses into the inner dramas of characters who would typically be stock villains, offer a blatant voyeuristic quality. Oversharing allows the audience to be placed inside something reprehensible and dramatic. The Queen Bee, here, fits particularly well in a setting that is characterized as power-hungry, elite, white, and exclusive, and – notably -- mean-spirited and often focused around interpersonal female drama. These characters have an unquestioned entre into this world: The *Gossip Girl* teens are not carded at clubs or bars and these long-legged heiresses strut the Manhattan streets in red-soled high heels and red lipsticks to match.

In the first episode, the roles of insiders and outsiders are established; this is a Queen Bee world. The audience is introduced to the core cast of the show: Honest-to a fault, a little jealous, "outsider" from Brooklyn, Dan Humphry; Dan's blonde and dainty little sister, the gentle Jenny Humphry who, as it turns out, is nobody's fool; Nate Archibald, Blair's first boyfriend, an innocently blue-eyed shaggy-haired à la mode heartthrob and pothead; Chuck Bass, a roguish

²⁶¹ Matthew Williamson is a renowned British fashion designer whose bold use of color and mixing of prints have gained him international acclaim and an impressive celebrity fan base.

rich boy with a chip on his shoulder the size of his father's empire and his own bank accounts; a posse of three of Blair's minions; Serena Van der Woodsen, best friend Upper East Side's fallen "it" girl; and finally, at the center, Blair Waldorf, the villainous, mean girl you love to hate and then love. She is Queen "B".

Blair's online fandom from 2002- 2012 is not comparable to the love shown Serena's goddess like character. In many ways this is shocking. Blair is not a likeable person, at least, not in a first impression. Maybe not even upon a second. Granted, Blair is very beautiful—and this may make her easy to forgive. Petite and chestnut-haired, she has full heart shaped lips that are characteristically gently accentuated with a classic shiny-glossy finish. She wears minimal make-up, keeping her look fresh and young in a way that accentuates her natural timeless beauty.

Yet Blair, like many Queen Bee portrayals, is mean. She manipulates people to do her bidding, largely for her amusement or benefit. Her flair for dramatic irony makes her one of the funnier characters on *Gossip Girl*. This humor masks the fact that she is caged in by her perfectionism; every time her life is less than perfect, the audience experiences her inner pain through displays of her eating disorder and struggle with being forgotten or left behind. Dan Humphrey describes Blair as "Basically everything I hate about the Upper East Side distilled into one 95-pound, doe-eyed, *bon mot* tossing, label whoring package of girly evil... I would barely be exaggerating if I told you Medusa wants her withering glare back."²⁶² Blair's doe-eye comparison speaks to her ostensible innocence. "Bon mot" references Blair's clever remarks and wit, part of what makes her an appealing Queen Bee. The use of "bon mot" in French rather than English highlights how Dan sees her snobbery. Label whores sell their souls to have the right

²⁶² Dan Humphrey's description of Blair in season 1 episode 4.

designer labels as part of their wardrobe, and the Medusa comparison indicates that even her peers recognize her evil flair is incongruent with her round doe like eyes.

Gossip Girl reproduces myths about women and femininity by perpetuating the signs and images of ultra feminine women. Blair is an example of a stereotypical soft and vulnerable feminine quality, intermingled with a powerful woman. A perfect girl with no fat to spare having an eating disorder is meaningful. Significantly, not a single character on this show can be considered fat in any way. Blair is feminine in her clothing choices, using Audrey Hepburn as a basic concept in every outfit. Yet her portrayal as feminine neither diminishes her power and agency neither does it take away her feminist quality. Blair challenges the second wave conception that in order to be taken seriously, she must dress less provocatively.

Teens not only watched *Gossip Girl*, they read about it. This show is a starting point in raising teen consciousness and instilling critical media literacy, evidenced in the interviews Ruth La Ferla conducted for the *New York Times*; teens consumed this text and were inspired by it. A *Seventeen magazine* article titled “I Based My Entire Life on "Gossip Girl" and I Don't Regret It” demonstrates the 2000’s cultural veneration of the Blair Waldorf mentality. Hannah Orenstein, the assistant features editor at Seventeen.com, wrote a column to showcase her obsession with Blair Waldorf and *Gossip Girl*. Orenstein articulates that she overheard a classmate state that NYU applications went up since the *Gossip Girl* characters went there. This classmate lamented that “it is so pathetic that someone would go there because of that show.”²⁶³ This comment made Orenstein slink down in her chair and take off her headband— “a red silk confection with an

²⁶³ Hannah Orenstein, “I Based My Entire Life on "Gossip Girl" and I Don't Regret It,” *Seventeen magazine*, (2017).

enormous rose appliqué.”²⁶⁴ This hair accessory is a fan recognized homage to Blair Waldorf’s many headbands throughout the series.

As noted above, fashion is a highlighted player in *Gossip Girl*. The characters are defined through what they wear. Blair always wears some form of a silky headband to denote her Queen Bee social status; Blair has a different headband for every single occasion and when the crown signifier is not on Blair’s head this speaks to her social standing. From the moment we first meet Blair Waldorf, the Upper East Side’s prep-school Queen Bee, she’s serving up top-notch headwear. There are fashion blogs and articles that highlight Blair’s iconic headband looks; her outfit is flawless, and she never has a hair out of place—Blair uses fashion to express her feelings.

Like many viewers, Orenstein writes that from the first moment she saw *Gossip Girl* she was hooked. The show is a model for life for buying wardrobe pieces like “a whole pile of her signature headbands.” These painful headbands made her “scalp [ache] constantly, but I didn’t care. When I curled my hair and gave my best withering glare, I looked just like her.... I was inspired by *Gossip Girl*, but I didn’t live it out moment by moment.”²⁶⁵ Wanting to emulate the withering stare was one thing, however, living out the show “moment by moment” would be going too far. The television show has some grains of truth, Orenstein implies, but the dramatic moments are best left for Blair. With an aching scalp and withering stare, this writer was not alone in this reverence of Blair Waldorf. Her magazine article is just one example of the larger devotion to Queen B from 2002 when the first novel was released to 2012 when the television show ended. New generations of Blair-wannabes are ushered in through Netflix.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

A Queen Bee's actions are closely followed and copied, both in the fictional world and by CW's *Gossip Girl* audience. Blogs like "I Lived Like 'Gossip Girl's' Blair Waldorf for a Week & Here's What Happened," is another example of Blair's cultural pervasiveness. This blog is found on Her Campus Media, the number one media and marketing company for college women, one with a network of 33 million unique monthly visitors.²⁶⁶ In 2017, Katie Gray blogged that she wanted to see what it was like to be Blair Waldorf. As an experiment, she decided to fully live like Blair Waldorf for an entire week and employed a 'What Would Blair Do?' (WWBD) mindset. Gray writes that she chose to emulate Blair because: "she's pretty, feisty, sophisticated, driven and ambitious, sarcastic, wealthy and worldly. Blair doesn't take no for an answer, has a strong sense of confidence, knows her worth and does whatever it takes to achieve what she wants. She is the perfect role model for any female!"²⁶⁷ Stating Blair is the perfect role model highlights the cultural fascination with the Queen Bee in its adaptation of the 1990s "you go girl" determination. This message is taken as an affirmation to be strong. Blair inspires strength. There are several blogs that ask WWBD. These blogs lay out steps as to how teen-girls and young adults can be just like Blair.

Machiavelli's Queen B

Blair Waldorf's Queen Bee portrayal is easily assigned themes that define her: Friendship, love, fear, approval, trust, sex, vulnerability, anti-heroine, darkness, social hierarchy, enemy targets, fashion, and independence. To Blair, each of these is intricately enmeshed. Her relationships are based on love, trust, vulnerability, and acceptance; she wants to be accepted as she is, even if that is a raging mean girl. Each of these aspects allow the audience to grow

²⁶⁶ <https://www.hercampusmedia.com/about/>

²⁶⁷ Katie Gray, "I Lived Like 'Gossip Girl's' Blair Waldorf for a Week & Here's What Happened," Blog.

attached to what makes this Queen Bee their Queen B; in these ways she is a positive role model.

In *Gossip Girl's* Pilot episode, “spotted at Grand Central Station” is sixteen-year-old Serena Van der Woodsen (Blake Lively): golden-girl, golden haired, golden-hearted. She is beautiful, blond and bubbly, with an easy going infectious laugh. *Gossip Girl's* omnipresent voice typically says: “spotted,” as a way to introduce a character, their background, and current drama. An onlooker at Grand Central snaps a photo of Serena to send to the blog. The camera then pans in, opening to the Queen B; preppy, polished and delicate faced Blair Cordelia Waldorf at her mother’s party. The two girls are meant to be “best friends.” Both are from white, wealthy, prominent, and respected Upper East Side families with old money.

Blair is introduced to the audience wearing black. She has donned a thick black-flower embroidered headband encircling her crown of brown curls, a black lace dress, black tights, and black high heels. This is a sophisticated, dignified, authoritative and gender-neutral color. Conversely, to juxtapose with the darkness of this Queen B, Serena wears sunny light colors and glitters from her the top of her blond top down. Her colors connote purity and calm. This is the first visual representation of the “dark” Queen B and the “light” (former) Queen Bee, another formulation of the Madonna/ whore complex.

Structuring the show’s narratives through Blair and Serena’s friendship is important for female spectators, because as feminist film critics Lucy Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca point out, it expresses a celebration of love and strength through connection, providing women with a way to identify positively with women in television.²⁶⁸ Supportive female relationships pose a threat to patriarchy; this depiction is a rarity. Women’s friendships are largely based on emotional intimacy. Blair tells Serena her personal and family problems. Serena shares her woes with Blair.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

Blair's insecurities are palpable throughout the series; she needs Serena to support her, no matter what, showing that she does not have to doubt their sister-like connection; she does have reason to doubt her veracity. The list of Blair's soft-spots is nearly infinite—her darkness is informed by her pain. The pilot episode depicts Blair's love life and insecurity when she tries to seduce her longtime boyfriend Nate Archibald at her mother's glamorous penthouse party. Blair reads on *Gossip Girl* that Serena is back in New York. The next second, she extricates Nate from a conversation. Knowing he's always had a crush on Serena she wants to make sure he won't ignore her and that he will remember that he is with her. The screenplay calls for Blair to pull Nate inside her bedroom, kiss him hungrily, then push him toward the bed. Blair says "I want to do this. *It. Now*" She pushes him on the bed, now on top of Nate who responds "I thought you wanted to wait—" Blair shakes her head "Not anymore..." The *Gossip Girl* voiceover narrates "better lock it down with Nate B. Clock's Ticking." In this moment, Blair is a vulnerable virgin, telling Nate she loves him. The *Gossip Girl* whisper slithers through the party alerting them all that Serena is back. Nate suddenly freezes, jolted out of the moment. Nate is up. Tucking. Buttoning. Zipping. He goes out greet Serena leaving behind Blair's half clothed exposed body on her bed. Nate smiles at Serena who looks caught in a situation she'd rather avoid. Blair intentionally steps between them.

The bubbly blond and dangerously silent brunette come face to face, both faking their excitement to see the other. Serena only dropped in to say "hello," but tells Blair she'll see her at school "tomorrow." Blair stands next to her minions, an African American Kati and Asian American Is: "School? So, I guess she's back for good,"²⁶⁹ Blair says under her breath. The minions watch her closely: "Didn't you know she was coming?" they ask in dazed unison. Blair

²⁶⁹ *Gossip Girl*, 1.01, "Pilot," Directed by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, 2007.

catches herself, realizing she almost showed weakness. She whips to attention to say sharply “of course I did,” hiding her disappointment that her best friend did not tell her she was coming back.

The power struggle dynamic between the two girls is made central here. Viewers understand that Serena is trying to change her image from the down for anything and anyone, “party girl,” to a reformed- version of herself, focused on getting into college, family, friends and love. The next day the clique sits on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum. Serena comes back to school, and Blair reacts to her best friend’s reappearance on the steps of the Met. Blair is having a “kiss on the lips” party. She blinks innocently at Serena who is not invited “since until 12-hours ago everyone thought you were at boarding school. Now we are full, and Jenny has used up all the invites.”²⁷⁰ Jenny Humphrey awkwardly gawks at the showdown; she has more invites and is about to say as much when Blair interrupts, “You can go now.”²⁷¹ Jenny uncomfortably inches away. Serena smiles back in understanding. As Blair’s oldest friend she knows this act is Blair asserting her dominance. Blair’s minions smirk, impressed at their evil genius Queen Bee.

The struggle for power continues. The clique stands, ready for school, pushing past Serena who now stands above Blair on the Met steps—Serena spins, her jaw is set: “Blair. Think we could meet tonight?” Blair turns back with a slow smile and saccharine fakeness “I’d love to, but I’m doing something with Nate tonight.” Serena looks down at her best friend, “The palace. At 8 o’clock. Nate can wait.” Blair looks incredulous and reconsiders: “I could probably do a half hour.” Gossip Girl narrates: “spotted on the steps of the Met, an S and B power-struggle. Did S think she could waltz home and things would return to how they were? Did B Think S

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

would go down without a fight? Or can these two hotties work it out? Nothing *Gossip Girl* likes more than a good cat-fight—and this is a classic.”²⁷² The *Gossip Girl* voiceover often indicates how the internet is reacting to S and B’s power struggles. The cat-fight reference to two girls battling over territory is not a new trope. This is especially true of a Queen Bee driven narrative.

The focus on the Queen Bee friendship and clique dynamics is highlighted in the outsider crew Jenny and Dan from Brooklyn. Jenny is what Wiseman would identify as the torn bystander and the pleaser/wannabe/messenger, and sometimes the target of the clique. Wiseman writes that the torn bystander is “constantly conflicted between doing the right thing and her allegiance to the clique.”²⁷³ Jenny is also the wannabe as Wiseman denotes she will “do anything to be in the good graces of the Queen Bee”²⁷⁴ Jenny goes shopping at Bendels with her brother Dan and Serena comes in to the store with her brother, Eric. As noted above, Jenny is the keeper of Blair’s kiss on the lips party invitations. Jenny makes sure Serena gets one: “if anyone asks where you got it, I know nothing”²⁷⁵ This interaction shows that Blair’s power can be usurped. While Jenny is simply attempting to be nice, this move could break the Queen B’s trust and be seen as undermining her authority. Wiseman points out that the target is “the victim, set up by the other girls to be humiliated, made fun of, excluded... Just because a girl is in the clique doesn’t mean she can’t be targeted by other members.”²⁷⁶ From the depiction of Jenny Humphrey, it is clear that the 2007 screen play writers had read Wiseman’s 2002 work and are familiar with the torn bystander concept. Jenny must do Blair’s bidding until she works her way into the clique by completing social tasks for Blair without question.

²⁷² *Gossip Girl*, 1.01, “Pilot,” Directed by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, 2007.

²⁷³ Wiseman, *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, 352.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ *Gossip Girl*, 1.01, “Pilot,” Directed by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, 2007.

²⁷⁶ Wiseman, *Queen Bees and Wannabes*, 354.

Blair's power is precarious. She could be replaced easily if her minions decide to follow another leader. For this reason, mending her friendship with Serena is helpful in two ways: first, she gets her sister back, second, Serena will stand by Blair as the Queen Bee. The episode flits back to Serena and Blair later that night as the two meet up at the Palace Hotel as agreed upon. Dirty gin martini in hand—Blair takes a delicate sip, pulls an olive off the skewer, doe-eyes innocently observing. Serena starts the conversation: “How is your mom doing with the divorce and everything?”²⁷⁷ “Great!” Blair responds over-enthusiastically. Her body language indicates that she is actually heartbroken over the divorce, but she is determined to not show her wounds. Blair continues with a smile, flippantly overcompensating, “So what my dad left her for another man? She lost fifteen pounds; got an eyelift—it’s been good for her.”²⁷⁸ This is the first reference to a homosexual relationship and subtly reveals how Blair may be feeling.

Blair has missed Serena but is too stubborn to let that feeling show right away. She needs to be won back by shows of trust, love and support. Serena leans in and says with candid sensitivity, “I’m really sorry.”²⁷⁹ Blair sips her martini, “Yeah. I could tell since you didn’t call or write the whole time this was happening.”²⁸⁰ Her pain comes through as her voice is intentionally monotone; she holds back her true emotions. Serena stammers “Oh, well, yeah... Boarding school was...”²⁸¹ Blair interrupts: “I don’t even know why you went to boarding school to begin with. Do you know how it felt to call your house and have your mom say ‘Serena didn’t tell you? She moved to Connecticut?’” Saying “do you know how it felt” to Serena

²⁷⁷ *Gossip Girl*, 1.01, “Pilot,” Directed by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, 2007.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Gossip Girl*, 1.01, “Pilot,” Directed by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, 2007.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

distinguishes this social interaction as Blair lets her sadness show. This opens a door to renewed friendship.

Blair's appeal to her emotions here shows her vulnerability; this tactic is reminiscent to both the 1949 Queen Bee, and Paris Geller in the early 2000s. The Queen Bee's wish to be understood. Serena uncomfortably makes a vague excuse that she just had to get away from everything, "Please, just trust me." Blair considers "... how can I trust you when I feel like I don't even know you."²⁸² Trust is important between friends, especially to Blair. Serena smiles, hopeful that there is a chance here: "Lets fix that?" She continues "I see you at school with Kati and Is and I get it. I don't want to take anything away from you."²⁸³ The camera pans to Blair who replies indignantly, "Because it is just yours to take if you want it?"²⁸⁴ Blair feels like she just filled Serna's Queen Bee space—Serena could easily swoop in and usurp her throne.

Blair is concerned with whom she can trust—those in her inner circle hold her trust completely and she would do anything for them as long as they are in her good graces—even sometimes when they are not, simply from her love for them. Back at the Palace, Serena reaches out to touch Blair, telling her, "No, I miss you. I want things to go back to the way things used to be.... You're like my sister... we need each other." At hearing her friend say "I miss you... you're like my sister" Blair's cupid-bowed red lips turn up into a tender smile. She visibly forgives her friend. Blair's true Achilles heel is in how much she wants to be loved by her friends and feared by her minions. She opens up, "Well, you missed some classic Eleanor Waldorf [her mother] meltdowns—if it wasn't such a tragedy it would have been funny... actually, it kind of was." She laughs, and her eyes sparkle. The two girls hug. Both are relieved

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³Gossip Girl, 1.01, "Pilot," Directed by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, 2007.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

to be friends again and make a temporary truce. “I love you B,” Serena tells her. Blair pulls back to look at Serena with a sigh: “I love you too, S.” The love is true here, even if Serena’s previous actions may topple the fragile friendship. Serena takes a deep breath as she unhappily gulps down the rest of Blair’s unfinished martini—later the audience learns why.

Part of maintaining a Queen Bee status, to Blair, relates to trust; she has decided to let her boyfriend Nate have her virginity in the most basic form of trust bond. She assumes that they will lose it together, to each other. This is the moment Nate decides to come clean—feeling guilty about having kept a secret from Blair this entire time and spurred by Serena’s reappearance. He admits that he slept with Serena a year ago. Blair has her hand under his chin trying to understand. Her voice quivers, visibly saddened “But that was it...you guys just kissed?” Her eyes water. It is clear that she hopes for the best-case scenario. Nate looks guilt ridden as the scene flashes back to the party where S and N had sex. Blair cries: “I knew it, I always knew there was something, get out.”²⁸⁵ She falls to the ground sobbing and her arms wrapped around herself.²⁸⁶

Nate’s eyes for Serena draws out one of Blair’s deepest insecurities: being chosen second, or not being chosen at all. Understandably, she wants to be wanted on her own merits. Loved unconditionally. Later that episode, we see Nate struggling with indecisiveness; his father talks him into going back to Blair instead of trying to take a break. What Blair does not yet know is that on Nate’s side breaking the relationship between the kids would harm Nates father’s business prospects with Mrs. Waldorf.

Unbeknownst to Blair, her relationship is nurtured by a familial obligation to marry well and maintain good business ties between the two powerful families. Nate helps out his father. He

²⁸⁵ *Gossip Girl*, 1.01, “Pilot,” Directed by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, 2007.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

promises Blair, of his own volition, that he will never speak to Serena again. “Look,” he says, “I know I’ve hurt you Blair and I want to fix it. . . . I’m never going to see Serena or even speak to her.” She forgives him over sushi: “I think that’s a good idea. Let’s not mention it again. . . . I’m sure you have no feelings for her anymore. I just feel bad for Serena, she’ll really miss you. . . . if you say it’s in the past, it’s in the past.”²⁸⁷ Blair’s attempt at being understanding makes her more nuanced than just a mean girl. She does mean it in the moment, until her wishes are thwarted. What’s more, she believes him, trusts him.

Broken trust and broken promises, to Blair is an offense worthy of total social destruction. Later, Blair learns that Nate was trying to talk to Serena after he had insisted he would never speak to her again. Serena continues strutting around, while guilt ridden, she does not understand why Nate had to tell Blair that they had sex a year ago. Serena is trying to change. Blair does not think Serena can change and lets her know that there is nothing she can do that will ever be as bad as Serena having slept with Nate. In episode 3, Blair and Serena compete to be representatives of their school to College representatives; Blair learns that Serena has been visiting a rehab center and outs her in front of all of her peers—effectively ruining her future. Serena covers for the fact that it is her little brother who is in rehab for attempting suicide. Eric, Serena’s brother confronts Blair. Blair laughs, “you’re a good kid Eric. It’s nice to see you standing up for your sister.” He shows her the scar on his wrist—Blair realizes what she has done and feels terrible remorse.

After this scene, the girls must make up or destroy each other. Blair finds Serena in her favorite spot sitting in the rain by Bethesda fountain. Blair takes out a letter she never sent

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

Serena. The friendship, the viewers learn, is salvageable. Blair reads as tears flow down her face and her voice catches:

Dear Serena, my world is falling apart, and you're the only person who would understand. My father left my mother for a 31-year-old model... a male model. I feel like screaming because I don't have anyone to talk to. You're gone. My dad is gone. Nate is acting weird. Where are you? Why don't you call? Why did you leave without saying good-bye? You're supposed to be my best friend. I miss you so much.

Blair's letter is an evident cry for help and all those closest to her are gone—she is lonely and defenseless; even if she just almost ruined Serena's life, this at least explains why she is so angry now. Serena says that she would have come back if she knew. Blair cries, "You knew, Serena, and you didn't even call." Serena is now crying also, "I didn't know how what to say to you. Or even how to be your friend after what I did. I am so sorry." Blair nods, understanding. "Eric told me what happened. I guess your family's been going through a hard time too." The girls understand each other through their pain—white flags wave as they accept that they both made mistakes. Part of what makes Blair loveable and bearable is that through her awful controlling cattiness, she is true to herself and doesn't back away from what she believes is right—even if it is ethically and morally "wrong." In this case, she never apologizes for outing Serena for a supposed addiction.

Concerned with pleasing those around her, Blair constantly attempts to earn her mother's approval; here is another insecurity. She yearns for that approval. Before going to the kiss on the lips party in the first episode, Blair tries on a brown silk gown. Eleanor Waldorf who is a designer walks in to inspect Blair, telling her: "This one is not as elegant a choice as that one... You will never be more beautiful, or thin, or happy as you are right now. I just want you to make the most of it."²⁸⁸ This scene suggests that Blair's mother is a hard woman to please. She

²⁸⁸ *Gossip Girl*, 1.01, "Pilot," Directed by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, 2007.

indicates that Blair will never be thinner—her mother lives vicariously through Blair unfairly. She then asks Blair to change her dress. Blair thinks about it, “I guess I have time to change,” she acquiesces. Her mother grabs her hair “put some product in your hair, the ends are dry.” Blair looks at her ends, groans and adds product. This is the first moment that the audience sees Blair’s mother criticize and advise her daughter.

In a combination of her discomforts, in episode three, Blair’s mother chooses Serena over Blair as well. The episode opens to Blair walking downstairs after she and Serena just made up. Serena is happily eating a croissant—breakfast with Mrs. Waldorf. Blair reaches to grab a croissant just like Serena as her mother says, “There is a low-fat yogurt right there.” Serena glances at her croissant and smiles awkwardly. Blair puts down the treat. Blair says, “I lost two pounds when you were gone,” her mother walks by Blair, not looking at her and replies, “And you look wonderful.” In this episode, S talks B into modeling her mother’s clothing line. S goes with B to the event and helps her through it since Blair is terrified to fail in front of her mother. The photographers want to photograph Serena instead. Unbeknownst to S, Mrs. Waldorf takes her images and uses them for her clothing line, replacing Blair. This stirs up all of Blair’s fears. Instead of angrily lashing out on Serena, Blair confronts her mother. This shows some level of growth.

When she learns that her Mother keeps secrets from her in the Thanksgiving episode, Blair confronts her mother after her Nanny Dorota informs Blair that her father may have wanted to see her after all. Mrs. Waldorf is throwing a Thanksgiving dinner; after she does her usual inspection of Blair, telling her to change into something “more enchanting.” Blair, now wearing a new outfit, learns that her father wanted to spend Thanksgiving with her after all. It was their holiday. Blair sits not touching her food. Her mother comments “My darling, what has gotten

into you?" Blair looks up "Did you call daddy and tell him I didn't want to see him this Thanksgiving?" Her mother is shocked, saying "Of course not, what a ridiculous accusation." Her mother peers at Blair: "When are you going to get it through your head: he left us!" Blair turns back "He didn't leave *us*. He left *you*." Blair wants to make this distinction clear.

The influence Mrs. Waldorf has on her daughter is saddening; Blair is weak in this relationship. She makes a visible effort to respect her mother. Now, pointing to the dessert table, Eleanor says "Chose one of those delicious deserts." Blair picks up a pie with a smile and goes to eat it in the kitchen. She paces looking at the dessert. Crying. The scene flashes back to not being able to eat that croissant. She has been starving herself, and now she breaks, gorging on pie. Again, S and B have been fighting, but Blair calls Serena from her bathroom weeping in the after-math of having binged and purged. "Everything in the world is totally up to her!" referring to her mother, Blair tells Serena when she arrives. Serena says, understanding "I know," holding Blair she kisses her on the forehead.

Despite Blair's chilly and ruthless behavior, she's loving to those in her inner circle. Her central role in the show is to be Queen Bee, however, the fact that she is also part of the self-titled "non-judging breakfast club" with Nate, Chuck, and Serena shows that she does love. In episodes 17 and 18, the season one finale, Serena is in trouble and Blair brings everyone together to help her. The audience learns that Serena also left for boarding school because she believed she had killed someone. In her party days she witnesses someone overdose. Serena's old friend Georgina attempts to sabotage S's life, blackmailing her with this information. Serena so badly does not want to be discovered that she hides away, lying to her friends at every turn.

Blair talks her into sharing her story and accepts the truth of it. Serena convinced her mom boarding school was a good idea, and she admits “never said goodbye.”²⁸⁹ Blair interjects, “it makes sense now.”²⁹⁰ After she tells her friends, Serena makes them promise they cannot tell anyone. Serena’s mother finds the tape of Serena doing drugs, making a speech that she will have to send her away to a reformatory school. Blair sweeps into the scene and holds a sobbing Serena, asking “What’s wrong, what happened?” Her genuine concern for her distraught friend, unmistakable as she smooths Serena’s hair. Serena does not tell her mother the full story of her embarrassment; Blair goes to Lily Van der Woodsen, because she is “out of her league” here. The issues are too large for the sixteen-year old’s to handle. Blair tells her that she “Has no idea what your daughter’s been going through. She’s in a lot of pain.” Blair’s plea on behalf of her friend is telling of her greater ability to grow and care.

Anti-heroine characters live in a gray area and are adored because of their unpredictability. After this heartfelt plea, Lily goes to her daughter to learn the whole story; Blair walks up to Chuck with a smirk. He is intrigued “What’s going on with you?” Blair knows where Georgina the blackmailer is: Chuck says, “Let’s get the bitch.” *Gossip Girl* narrates: spotted, Blair and Chuck reunited to defend Serena’s honor. With friends like these, who needs armies? This idea is reminiscent of Roxanne Gay’s calls for more nuanced television characters and the importance of likable – unlikable characters. Blair’s Queen Bee breaks from the cultural norm; is at once petty and loving, fully in control and vulnerable, complete and growing.

Portrayals of the anti-heroine seem to be interchangeable with the Queen Bee identity. In a sense Blair – and perhaps Queen Bee—Blair is an anti-heroine; this causes the audience to relate best to her flaws. An anti-heroine is a character outside of the typical trope that best

²⁸⁹ *Gossip Girl*, 1.71, “Woman on the Verge,” Directed by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, 2007.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

serves the male narrative, and pushes the hero's story forward, and the character is usually of a "flawed" female that exhibits a degree of complexity and audiences dislike them to varying degrees. The anti-heroine is not uniformly good or evil, but she often does bad things for good reasons;²⁹¹ she has positive qualities, like being strong, powerful or beautiful and independent, but she can also be ruthless, manipulative, and unethical.²⁹² The counter-trope is necessary to propel the female characters forward, creating complex creatures that are relatable. These kinds of female lead characters are now a typical feature of many television series. Feminist film critiques called for call a multi-dimensional character, and Blair Waldorf's Queen Bee fits into that call for representation.

Love is one of Blair's definers; there are several versions and portrayals of love in *Gossip Girl*, that are filled with passion, envy, and the journey toward honesty. Blair experiences romantic love, friendly love, familial love, and self-love. In a world full of secrets and social intrigue, the Queen Bee must completely trust those closest to her, so they do not see the weakness and usurp her. When considering romantic love, in the first season of *Gossip Girl*, the question becomes; how does a powerful woman give and receive love? Does she have the love of men that fear her, respect her, or worry that her power will over-power their masculinity? There is tension between feminism and love, as feminists have historically wondered whether they wanted love or could accept the love men are willing to give.

Romantic love has been portrayed throughout television history, and the relationship between feminism, romantic love, and female sexual empowerment is addressed in *Gossip Girl*. Feminist scholar—bell hooks posits that in a patriarchal culture, romantic love is typically

²⁹¹ Margaret Tally, *The Rise of the Anti-Heroine in T. V's Third Golden Age*. (Cambridge Scholars, U.K, 2016), 8.

²⁹² Ibid.

understood to make someone powerless and out of control.²⁹³ As such, hooks writes, “feminist thinkers called attention to the way this notion of love served the interest of patriarchal men and women.”²⁹⁴ Love in patriarchal culture, according to hooks “was linked to notions of possession, domination and submission wherein it was assumed one person would give love and the other receive it.”²⁹⁵ hooks outlines that, historically, a feminist critique of love was not complex enough; rather than specifically challenging patriarchal misguided assumptions of love, it just presented love as the problem.²⁹⁶

In this paradigm, the heroine does away with love and desire, and is concerned with gaining rights and power. hooks suggest that rethinking and reevaluating love and insists on the importance of reevaluating how feminists explore love.²⁹⁷ Here, being a strong feminist female does not mean that this character should not experience romantic love. Television and consumer culture feeds off of depictions of love; the first love, the deep all-consuming love, is a trope that affects our Queen Bee; at 16 years old, and in her sexual peak, she starts exploring sexual relationships.

Scholar Laura Mulvey notably coined the term the “male gaze.” “Male gaze” theory refers to the artistic act and choice to portray women in visual texts (and literature) from a heterosexual male point of view; women are thus depicted as passive objects. Mulvey asserts, with this phrase that the dominant male gaze in mainstream Hollywood films reflects and satisfies the male unconscious. Most filmmakers are male and heterosexual—thus—the predominant and voyeuristic gaze of the camera is male and heterosexual. Male characters in the

²⁹³ bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, (South End Press, 2000), 101.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 105.

²⁹⁶ bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, (South End Press, 2000).

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 109.

film's narratives make women the objects of their gaze. Inevitably, the spectator's gaze reflects the voyeuristic male gazes of the camera and the male actors. The result are film narratives that marginalize women and encourage spectator identification with male protagonists.

Gossip Girl, however, differs from this. Female characters, while highly sexualized through the male gaze, take ownership of their love and sexuality. As feminist scholar bell hooks point out in her essay "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" hooks rejects Mulvey's conception; instead, hooks conveys that there are many different gazes from different points of view. Spectators may sometimes take the power back; they have agency to gaze back. The oppositional gaze creates power. The voyeuristic gaze has shifted to a more equal representation of gender in *Gossip Girl*, which takes place at the level of looking (the gaze), as well as the level of being looked at (the object), in which activity and passivity are shared among both sexes. Queen Blair takes this chance and gazes back to defy the male gaze that sexualizes her.

Theorist Jacques Lacan explains how audiences can be drawn to a character like Queen Blair with his notion of the mirror stage, where an audience member imposes their views upon Blair. This process of identification allows the spectator with the cinematic apparatus, to identify with the hero or heroine. The concept of the mirror phase also applies to the spectator. By identifying with the powerful, attractive anti-heroine, the spectator relives the identification with an ego ideal.²⁹⁸ In this way, the female spectator can identify with the ideal image of a woman who has influence and agency, but who is also beautiful and attractive without losing her independence.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 14.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

Blair's power comes in the form of a Machiavellian question: whether it is better to be loved or feared. Machiavelli concluded that "...love endures by a bond which men, being scoundrels, may break whenever it serves their advantage to do so; but fear is supported by the dread of pain, which is ever present."³⁰⁰ Blair believes fear will win. "You can't make people love you, but you can make them fear you," Blair says in season two episode 25 when attempting to understand love and fear. For Machiavelli social and political tyrants choose pain and viciousness over love and benevolence in all aspects of their lives. This influence is tied to social supremacy, success, and seeming happiness. This is largely true of the Queen Bee.

Gossip Girl exaggerates portrayals of love, and the viewer is sometimes left to wonder if they are doing it wrong; Blair does not experience "normal" teen romantic love—that is reserved for Serena in season one. After her ups and downs with Nate: Serena, Nate keeping his family drama secret, and him generally being a bad boyfriend, Blair's love life takes a turn. Nate and Blair break up because he is not able to be open and honest with her—he is not able to trust her. Mutual trust and respect fuel this Queen Bee in her personal life. Blair becomes part of a "will they, wont they" love cycle with Chuck Bass that lasts throughout the series. Chuck's reputation precedes him wherever he goes. He is the male-version of Blair; she sees him as misunderstood. Blair is the first person to see who he really is because he trusts her. Blair is attracted to Chuck as he challenges her. Overcoming challenges make her stronger. From the start of the show he is portrayed as a "pig" and he is the biggest debaucher in the *Gossip Girl* world, but when Blair is feeling dejected, she runs to Chuck because he accepts and values her darkness instead of being repulsed by her.

³⁰⁰ Machiavelli, Niccolo, and David Wootton, *The Prince*, (Indianapolis, 1995).

Taking control of the sexual narrative, feminist discourse can allow for a young woman like Blair to give herself to someone like Chuck Bass; the relationship's mantra is "challenge accepted." In this way, Blair does not have to give up her power and strength to love a man. After an emotionally upsetting day at school, she goes to Chuck's speakeasy to get away from everything; this is the spark into their relationship and eventual love story. Chuck challenges Blair to get up on the stage in the bar where other women are stripping, "I know you won't do it," he challenges, and she pointedly gets up in her high heels, and dances on the stage—accepted. First, she takes off her symbolic Queen Bee headband, and throws it at Chuck, she drops her green lace dress to reveal a white silk slip with embroidery and pearl trim, while Chuck looks on in awe. Love and pleasure intersect, as Blair "succumb[s] to inebriation, perform[s] at a speakeasy, and give[s] [her] virtue to an ass."³⁰¹

A struggle whether to be loved and vulnerable and succumbing to weakness is a focal point of Blair's dynamic in all of her romantic relationships—she is a hopelessly blind romantic. This tension between being strong or being loved by a man is also a focal point that feminist culture has critiqued. In *Outlaw Culture*, feminist theorist, cultural critic, artist, and writer bell hooks details the need to transform the structure of women's desire as participants in the patriarchy and to "actively construct radically new ways to think and feel as desiring subjects."³⁰² This interpretation of the heterosexual woman's residual attachment to conventional masculinist erotic desire could be effectively applied to the feminist viewer of television culture.

The masculine standard is what all other standards are measured against—including the female body and female sexuality.³⁰³ Female sexuality is measured against the male sexual

³⁰¹ Blair Waldorf on losing her virginity to Chuck Bass, *Gossip Girl* Season 1 episode 7.

³⁰² bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, (Routledge Classics: New York, 2006).

³⁰³ *Ibid*, 310.

script, and as a result, is fragmented into “is fragmented into opposite possibilities: “good girls” submit themselves to a male-defined double standard that says women should not consummate a sexual relationship too often, too quickly, with too many men, or under the wrong circumstances, while “bad girls” proudly defy this standard.

The Queen Bee embodies several oxymora; one of these paradoxes is the relationship between Serena and Blair. Blair needs Serena to balance her out and genuinely accept all of her. However, since the nature of the Queen Bee is fluid, and the social position can be usurped, Blair has great fears of losing this power to her balancing character. Blair both loves, and envies Serena; the power struggles between the tall blond and tiny brunette are highlighted throughout show. Paradoxically, the sisterly love between the two is also a meaningful part of their relationship when Serena needs Blair, Blair genuinely tells her that she is her “Sister. What is you, is me. Tell me what’s wrong and I can help you.”³⁰⁴ Blair is exceptionally loyal to Serena as Serena tries to be to Blair.

Serena is the light version of a Queen Bee helps others rise up with her while Blair derives her power through her friends being her subsidiaries. It is no accident that Serena’s name means “tranquil, and serene,” as she shakes out her golden tresses laughingly and happily helps those in need. Conversely, Blair’s name means “plain, field,” also connoted as “battle ground,” and she will go to the depths of hell to either socially eviscerate her enemies or to help her friends—especially Serena. The “light” version of the Queen Bee uses her power and “light” to raise others up, while the “dark” portrayal, uses her power to keep others in their place.

The juxtaposition of a “light” Queen Bee and a “dark” Queen Bee and the reciprocal relationship between Serena and Blair and their sisterly love lends itself to the conversation of

³⁰⁴Gossip Girl, 1.71, “Woman on the Verge,” Directed by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, 2007.

Blair as the “anti-heroine,” who can still be feminist and thus, a worthwhile character to explore. The implications of the semiotics of fashion plays a large role in how Blair is portrayed as the Queen Bee, and what fashion items are used to identify her as the Queen Bee. The metaphorical feminist “waves” effect on the 2002 television landscape helps to place the Queen Bee in her sociohistorical and cultural moment, through a feminist analysis approach.

The changes in the television’s media landscape have created a space for the Queen Bee to be an anti-heroine and be a feminist icon. The 21st century sociohistorical television culture and audience was ready to accept a Queen Bee icon who was not kindhearted, and gentle, breaking from the common television tropes of feminist womanhood. Blair’s darkness and scheming is dramatic and relatable on some level—her exposed vulnerabilities in the face of her meanness creates a new cultural understanding of the power-hungry Queen Bee. The viewer may not relate personally to Blair’s interest in the total social evisceration of her enemies and sometimes her friends, Blair’s flaws that make her personable and real.

Dress also suggest a character’s emotions; Blair dresses in a way that controls how she is perceived to the outside world—that she is put together and unbreakable. She has full control her fashion choices that then speak for her. Blair starts the show as a demure Queen Bee, saving herself for the “right moment” to give up her virginity; she dresses in high-necked décolletages and white eyelet lace and pearls, and yet is usually wearing a black accessory (necklace, broach, headband). This signature look reminds the viewer of her “darkness.” Coco Chanel once reflected on the cultural shift of the time claiming that a woman “could do or say whatever she wanted as long as she was wearing pearls;”³⁰⁵ Blair wears them frequently. Doing this, she is able to tear down her social opponents and maintain her Queen Bee status. After a few episodes

³⁰⁵ Karen Karbo, *The Gospel According to Coco Chanel: Life Lessons from the World's Most Elegant Woman* (Skirt!, 2011), 169.

of trying to rekindle her romance with her boyfriend, making up with Serena, Blair goes rogue at Chuck's speakeasy. Other than her boudoir scenes where she is in lingerie, she is always with her clique girls.

These clothing items also show when Blair is going to be scheming, sexy, playful, or melodramatic; each fabric choice even connotes her mood and manipulation skills. When she loses her virginity to Chuck Bass, Blair breaks free of the persona, still in pearls that but she takes off her green lace dress to expose an embroidered silk slip. Silk has shifted as a signifier from a hard-masculine rich fabric to a feminine, smooth and soft fabric, steadily associating itself with a smooth, erotic feminine feel.³⁰⁶ The use of lace as garment fringes has evolved as well from medieval Europe, where it used to be considered a masculine signified of wealth, to a feminine.³⁰⁷ These fabrics signify a light, fine and frivolous identity that relates to Blair's Queen Bee persona.

Gossip Girl is riddled with contradictions like Blair herself— a powerful Queen-Bee at school and in her public social life. A fragile vulnerable and isolated figure in her private life. She suffers from an eating disorder that the show begins to touch upon in the first season: her parents are divorced, her boyfriend cheated with her best friend, and that same best-friend [Serena] easily attracts the spotlight in Upper-East Side society. Blair's biggest fear is being alone, without boyfriend, minions, or friends, because she is greatly dependent on her social standing as a Queen-Bee.

“You Know You Love Me, Xoxo” Conclusion

³⁰⁶ Marshall Cavendish, “Sex and Society,” *Abstinence- Gender Identity* (Paul Bernabeo, 2010).

³⁰⁷ Gregory Bolich, “Crossdressing in Context: Dress, Gender, Transgender, and Crossdressing.” *Psyche's Press*, (Raleigh, N.C,2006), 214.

The Queen Bee is a palimpsest figure—reincarnated in similar, but distinct forms serving as an icon that inspires pop cultural media speculation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. During what is academically considered first wave feminism, Edna Lee wrote *Queen Bee* in 1949. The film version of *Queen Bee* was made in 1955. Highlighting the feminist movements as they are related to the Queen Bee is necessary to indicate history of the fact that the Queen Bee has been and continues to be a vehicle for feminism. The Queen Bee embodies the feminist movement in which she, like a genie in a bottle, is rubbed into being. She absorbs the feminist sentiments of that historical, political, social and cultural moment. The Queen Bee plays a pivotal role in leading generations of teen girls through discovering feminism into young womanhood. Rosalind Wiseman when writing *Queen Bees and Wannabes* in 2002 missed the Queen Bees potential to use her influence as good. A Queen Bees actions are closely followed and imitated. This is true both in her fictional world as well as by people like me in the 2000s: teen girls watching *Gilmore Girls* and *Gossip Girl*.

The anti-heroine shows the audience that the female character does not have to be any one thing. She can be complicated and have intersecting qualities. Terms that often seem paradoxical suit her. This character has no “or” she is all about the “and.” Not sweet or salty—but a mixed treat; nuanced and tangible. She is a breed of the Hermione Grangers, and Anne of Green Gables—all are depictions of girlhood and womanhood that are complicated and challenge prototypical female protagonists. Often, she has been portrayed as the “flawed” girl because she is intricate. She embraces it, true to herself: inspiring.

Eva, Blair and Paris’ concealed likeability is what makes each Queen Bee an important character to examine. Her love and respect is not easily won, but once given, she does not hold anything back. She can be smart, educated, feminist. It takes a moment to be able to watch her

story line without audibly gasping, smirking, shaking one's head—partially in awe—then remembering to mentally chastise her. This persona has had audiences admiring her charismatic strong will, and her viciously sharp and opinionated tongue. Each has received considerable backlash as a result of the cultural misunderstanding of her power.

Strong women like the Queen Bee continue to represent in popular culture and media; this speaks to the point as to why the Emma experience is not represented in popular media. It is too entertaining to pit women against women and undermine the feminist movement instead of celebrating its success. The Queen Bee image and American cultural anxieties around girls, tweenhood and teen-dom drama and interpersonal relationships peaked in the early 2000s. Unfortunately, the 2000s Queen Bee did not depict an intersectional representation of that Queen Bee persona, however, in 2018 that is not the case. The new landscape of Queen Bee-dom allows for a positive inflection of her character. A positive recognition has been lacking since 1949.

The Queen Bee reflects social and cultural attitudes regarding feminism in her moment—this is why the powerful Beyoncé Knowles is also a Queen Bee. An intersectional feminist Queen. In 2018 feminism loves women who bring others up with them and create a space for others as she raises in the ranks. 2018 is ready for Queen Beyoncé. While it seems that she stands as an anthesis to Eva, Paris and Blair, this history shows this is not true. While Beyoncé's power does not stem from being “mean” she does represent the feminism of her cultural and historical moment. Beyoncé embodies what Eva's Queen Bee would have dreamed of. Beyoncé's feminism is acceptable to the 2018 media rhetoric in a way Eva's in 1955, was not. Even Paris and Blair as feminists were not palatable in the 1990s third wave and post-feminist moments. Queen “B”eyoncé uses her power and influence to pull women up together with her, rather than undermining their accomplishments. To millions of fans (called “Beyhive”— another Queen Bee

association), Beyoncé is an iconic woman of the twenty-first century, who takes pride in being independent and successful. She is the ultimate girl-next-door with affectionate, warm smiles. She has a powerhouse persona to balance out her honeyed southern drawl with a melodious and strong singing voice. In addition to this, she is a motivational business woman with a massive fan-base who hail her as Queen B. This current devotion of “B”eyoncé shows the fluidity of the Queen Bee persona and the changeability depending on the historical framework, cultural moment, and feminisms.

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