

Pleasing

THE PATRIARCHAL PLEASURE HIERARCHY
REVEALED IN 2010S COMING OF AGE FILMS



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AN EMORY UNIVERSITY FILM AND MEDIA HONORS THESIS
HIGHEST HONORS

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Minnie



Alike



Kayla



Lady Bird



Molly
& Amy



Alice

How often is young female pleasure depicted and valued as much as male pleasure in American film? Film often reflects a patriarchal pleasure hierarchy that presents the male sexual experience as more important than that of females. Even female-focused films are guilty of this. Coming of age films with young female protagonists have an opportunity to subvert dominant social ideologies around gender and sexual pleasure. They can show real girls coming of age and into their sexualities that they deserve pleasure as much as anyone else. In this thesis, I analyze when and how six coming of age films from 2011 to 2019 present and respect authentic female pleasure. Representing these exceptions in film and scholarship is integral in order to make young female pleasure a norm rather than an anomaly. Still, these films mirror norms of the patriarchal pleasure hierarchy at times as well. In Chapter 1, I examine how *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (Marielle Heller, 2015) and *Eighth Grade* (Bo Burnham, 2018), while giving the protagonists power over their desires, represent their drive to please others rather than to seek pleasure. In Chapter 2, I explore the ways *Booksmart* (Olivia Wilde, 2019) and *Pariah* (Dee Rees, 2011) display how platonic and familial discourse around sex can reinforce or challenge the patriarchal pleasure hierarchy. Finally, in Chapter 3, I analyze how *Lady Bird* (Greta Gerwig, 2017) and *Yes, God, Yes* (Karen Maine, 2019) show the possibility of positive dialogue on sex counteracting the impact religious power structures can have on sexual shame. This thesis will contribute to a future in which it is common for sex in films, and scholarship about sex in film, to prioritize young female pleasure at least equally to that of males. All of the protagonists in the films learn that their authentic selves matter, including when it comes to sex and pleasure.

All girls deserve to know this.

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