INTRODUCTION:
WOMEN, POSTFEMINISM AND ROMANCE

Half a century separates the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, the book commonly credited with igniting the second wave of the women’s movement, and Facebook Chief Executive Officer Sheryl Sandberg’s 2013 best-seller *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, which assesses the challenges that American working women continue to face today. Reading the two volumes side by side, one cannot help being struck by the dramatically different cultural landscapes they describe. Socially and professionally, American women have soared to unprecedented heights in this fifty-year period, yet the elevated terrain they occupy today is something of a plateau. In 1963, Friedan identified the ‘problem that has no name’ experienced by those who ‘learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights – the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for.’¹ Five decades later, Sandberg admits that in the United States of 2013, ‘women are better off than ever’ but that the ‘revolution has stalled’; women remain ‘hindered by barriers that exist within ourselves’ by internalizing ‘the negative messages we get throughout our lives.’ As a result, in Sandberg’s view, American women today ‘compromise our career goals for partners and children who may not even exist yet.’²

Sandberg’s argument is corroborated by a 2012 Pew Research Study that showed that in 2010 women made up almost half – 46.7 percent – of the American labor force. This represents an 8.6 percent increase over 1970 when women comprised only 38.1 percent of the labor force. The same study found a correlation between these changes in women’s professional lives with a major
shift in their personal experiences, that is, that women married at ‘lower rates and later ages than ever before.’ Thirty-three percent of 18- to 34-year-old women in 2012 were married, a decrease of 40 percent from 1960’s 73 percent of women in this age range. Clearly, American women have made great strides in the public sphere, realizing significant achievements that they seek to balance with their personal lives.

What, then, do we make of the fact that in contemporary popular film, the lives of these women are still represented almost exclusively in the romance genre, which is not only one of the oldest and most classic of female-oriented forms, but a form in which marriage is the desired narrative resolution? Looking at some of the most popular films with female protagonists made in the recent past, including Working Girl (Nichols, 1988), Sleepless in Seattle (Ephron, 1993), Bridget Jones’s Diary (Maguire, 2001), and Bridesmaids (Feig, 2011) reveals a dramatic gulf. While this 46.7 percent of women in the labor force may be unprecedented, the fictional representation of their lives is anything but. The exciting social and political developments of the past five decades have challenged, provoked and opened up new avenues of thinking about gender expectations, with affairs of the heart as only one aspect of a broad spectrum of issues that are central to women’s lives. Yet, romance itself remains the dominant concern of the contemporary woman in American cinematic narratives as she negotiates the complicated interplay between and among private and public, political and personal, and self-identity and group identity.

American Postfeminist Cinema examines these interrelated issues as portrayed in a series of movies made from 1980 to 2012 that I call the postfeminist romance cycle. These films provide compelling evidence that the complex and mixed messages that have permeated American culture since the turn from the feminist rhetoric of the 1960s to the postfeminist rhetoric in the 1980s have found their most potent realization in popular romance films for and about women. These films depict and reflect contemporary women’s anxieties, and perhaps more importantly, anxieties about women, in light of these profound changes. This close study makes apparent how the romance film became the safe, dependable and often pleasurable terrain on which these knotty and provocative female-centered issues are negotiated.

This book expands upon the rich body of scholarship on postfeminist media culture by arguing that the romance genre plays an essential role in that culture, and that the cycle’s patterns reflect and inform the postfeminist era’s most potent anxieties. Case studies delineate how the symbiotic relationship between postfeminist discourses and romance results in these popular films’ mediation of the illusory notion that contemporary women’s lives can be reduced to either/or options. The most significant of these is the age-old choice between career versus love and family, but such dilemmas also include
the choices between sexual expression or abstinence, and self-absorption or community investment, among others. The films represent this conundrum of personal and often political alternatives for women, and, typically in their concluding moments, offer resolutions that, at least on the surface, appear to resolve these quandaries.

I analyze the machinations of these heterosexual romance films not to render them as bad objects or to suggest that there is a fundamental opposition between feminist politics and romantic desire. Rather I argue that it is illuminating to examine how this span of films that targets ‘everywoman,’ uniformly appropriates a type of narratological and discursive framework as a way of reconciling these two elements of the contemporary female experience, in an attempt to smooth out the bumps and fissures that can arise when they meet.

In fact, pitting serious, explicitly political sentiments against seemingly more pleasurable feelings related to romantic love or consumerism constructs a conflict that is buttressed by the postfeminist cultural landscape. In postfeminist thought, feminism takes on a negative connotation, what Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra have described as ‘an “othering” of feminism.’ Feminism is either construed as ‘extreme, difficult and unpleasurable’ or, in keeping with neoliberalism, is turned into a self-serving, self-absorbed discourse about one’s own personal choices that lacks social or political resonance.

Popular media is where postfeminist discourses are most visible and persuasive because they are usually intertwined with an otherwise appealing individual, product or narrative. In this context, ‘choice’ and ‘empowerment’ are defined quite differently than in decades past. Diane Negra argues that ‘across the range of the female lifecycle, girls and women of every age are now invited to celebrate their empowerment in a culture that sometimes seems dedicated to gratifying their every desire.’ Susan J. Douglas concurs, arguing, ‘buying stuff – the right stuff, a lot of stuff – emerged as the dominant way to empower ourselves.’

Not surprisingly, in light of this shift that worked ‘to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer,’ successors to political feminist figureheads such as Betty Friedan or Gloria Steinem are nowhere to be found. Instead one sees consumable fictional characters and contexts that serve as stand-ins for real women. An oft-cited example of this tendency is TIME magazine’s hotly debated June 1998 cover story, ‘Is feminism dead?’, which featured pictures of Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem fading into a picture of the television character Ally McBeal. Indeed, during much of the postfeminist era, the media has used fictional characters as a way of talking through women’s social and political progress.

The films in the postfeminist romance cycle are perhaps the prototypical examples of how appealing, consumable elements of postfeminist culture can also provide illuminating glimpses into the mechanics of that culture.
Examining postfeminism and romance side-by-side, I argue, is fundamental to truly understanding how both function. Romance, surprising as it may seem, shapes the postfeminist mindset. But even more interestingly, postfeminism is reshaping romance. The postfeminist romance film is always about a woman who has choices, but the most important choice – of a romantic partner – has already been predetermined and made for her by the conventions of the cycle. In spite of this predicable and reliable structure, and the degree to which the mythology of heterosexual romance has worn thin over the last thirty years, the films have remained incredibly popular.9

Why has the cycle lasted so long and remained so resilient? As we will see, it is because these films, like other postfeminist media, elicit and reward complex spectator engagement in which pleasure and critique can coexist, and romance can be both seductive and problematic: there can be problems and solutions. When one watches a postfeminist romance film, there is pleasure from observing the changing nature of contemporary women’s everyday lives along with the intoxicating allure of the traditional ‘happily ever after’ resolution. Rather than traverse explicitly political ground that might pit these two kinds of pleasure against each other (as is often the case in postfeminist culture), the postfeminist romance cycle films reframe these debates into a question best summed up by self-help author Lori Gottlieb: ‘What does it mean to be empowered and also want happily ever after?’10

The Conventions of the Postfeminist Cycle

Anyone who has viewed even a few of the postfeminist romance films under discussion in this book is acquainted with what Amanda Ann Klein has called a film cycle’s ‘slavish repetition’ of ‘the same images, characters and plots that they enjoyed in previous films.’11 Postfeminist romance films follow, or at least gesture toward, the reliable, familiar, formulaic plot structure that mythologizes the redemptive qualities of love and heterosexual coupling that has characterized the film genre for decades. However, as much as romance is about ‘what happens’ in the film, it also exists as a subject for discussion apart from individual films and groups of films, that is, romance informs the ways in which we discuss our own love lives. As David Shumway has argued, discursive analysis is essential to understanding romance so that one can ‘emphasize the role that stories and other representations play in shaping experience.’ He further says that ‘discourses are not doctrines or systems of ideas but rather groups of related narratives in terms of which men and women have projected the “natural” course of their lives.’12

Shumway’s use of the word ‘natural’ here is notable because it is exactly the tension surrounding changing cultural conceptions of what is ‘normal’ for both genders that infuses postfeminist romance films with their own his-
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Historically situated set of concerns. Romantic love is an oft-desired part of a full and happy life for both heterosexual and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals alike. However, we will see that in the postfeminist period, the language of heterosexual romance is appropriated to speak not just about love, but also to advance normative assurances in an era when traditional conceptions of gender are in a state of upheaval.

Admittedly, this study focuses on only one piece of this much larger landscape, specifically that which deals with straight women and heterosexual romance. There still remains much to be written about the limited representation of non-heteronormative romantic love in American cinema. The exclusion from this study of lesbian and queer romance films such as Go Fish (Troche, 1994), Kissing Jessica Stein (Herman-Wurmfeld, 2001), and Imagine Me & You (Parker, 2005), among others, is not an endorsement of the industry’s resistance to offering a wide range of diverse representations of love. On the contrary, the book’s focus on the complex operations of the postfeminist cycle highlights the uniformity of the industry’s resistance to dealing with anxiety-provoking deviations from heterosexual gender norms. It aspires to contribute to the conversation of how such models might be challenged in the future.

The postfeminist romance cycle is what Amanda Ann Klein would call an intrageneric cycle because it adheres to the traits and tropes of the romance film genre, but ‘serves as a cross-section of one specific moment in time, accurately revealing the state of contemporary politics, prevalent social ideologies, aesthetic trends, and popular desires and anxieties.’ Its thirty-plus years is significantly longer than the cycles about which Klein speaks, but this longevity results from the persistence of postfeminism’s particular combination of politics, ideology, desires and anxieties. Subdividing the contemporary crop of romance films into smaller cycles or subgroups would not provide this kind of revealing glimpse into how the discourses that sustain ‘one specific moment in time’ can endure for decades. Isolating how romance speaks through postfeminism, and how postfeminism speaks through romance, allows us, as Raphaëlle Moine describes, to ‘“reconnect” film texts and their contexts’ by integrating what he calls structural and textual theories of genre with its functional definitions.

Romance’s Narrative Stages

As David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger have argued, the romance plot is highly ubiquitous in Hollywood films. The narrative structure and the formal elements engaged to support this structure have become so reliable that they frequently tread on the terrain of cliché. My characterization of romance’s ‘stages’ pertains to the postfeminist romance film, but relies on, and has relevance for, the structure of films released prior to the 1980s.
framework is broad and flexible enough to account for both comedies and dramas – a matter that I will discuss at more length – and for films that experiment with the typical narrative trajectory. Indeed, it is not uncommon for these stages to be presented out of order or even skipped altogether.

For instance, there are many popular films – such as *When Harry Met Sally* (Reiner, 1989), *Something to Talk About* (Hallström, 1995), *High Fidelity* (Frears, 2000), and *Someone Like You* (Goldwyn, 2001) – that feature relationship breakups as the impetus for romance narratives. Some but not all of these employ the well-known ‘remarriage’ framework as outlined by Stanley Cavell.17 By contrast, in some texts, like *The Night We Never Met* (Leight, 1993), *Sleepless in Seattle*, and *The Lake House* (Agresti, 2006), the two protagonists never actually meet until the end of the film.

In addition, many contemporary films work within the chaste tradition of classic romance films and feature protagonists who never actually consummate their love for each other, but remain in a state of longing, including *Broadcast News* (Brooks, 1987), *The Age of Innocence* (Scorsese, 1993), and *Lost in Translation* (Coppola, 2003).

By and large, however, romance texts can be expected to follow the following trajectory:

**The First Meeting**

The two primary characters’ first meeting is one of the least consistent of the structural elements of the romance narrative. In fact, the manner of meeting (the ‘meet cute’ as described in screenwriting manuals) can be one of the primary points of differentiation among romance texts. This stage is of chief importance because the (early or delayed) meeting sets the tone for the rest of the film.

**The Courtship**

The courtship involves a series of interactions between the two characters that endear them to each other, even if they are not looking for love. This occurs either through in-person exchanges, or through letters, phone calls, or e-mails. Montages, usually set to lively, popular music, are the most frequently used stylistic device used to visually convey the courtship process in the postfeminist romance. The characters share comedic moments, or engage in activities that expose their qualities, talents, and backstories, and which render them ‘special’ or ‘different.’

There is usually a scene or a series of scenes that signal a sort of ‘falling in love’ moment for one or both of the characters. For instance, in *Pretty Woman* (Marshall, 1990), Edward’s (Richard Gere) ‘falling in love’ moment is evident
when he uncharacteristically takes a day off from work to engage in equally uncharacteristic activities, such as sitting in a park and having a picnic, and eating dinner in a diner. At the end of this day, Edward’s moment is joined with Vivian’s (Julia Roberts) when she finally kisses Edward on the mouth (something that she vows she does not do with her clients).

Similarly, in *The English Patient* (Minghella, 1996), when Katharine (Kristen Scott Thomas) accidentally comes across Count Laszlo’s (Ralph Fiennes) journal and discovers that it contains repeated amorous references to someone named ‘K,’ she asks him if she is the K in his book. His expression reveals that she is, and their exchange of glances indicates the shift of their relationship into the romantic realm. Often characters are represented as unaware that they are falling in love, or they resist the feelings; however, even if there are extenuating circumstances that may prevent the two protagonists from ending up together, they will inevitably act on or admit their feelings for one another during this courtship sequence.

**The Consummation**

The tone with which a film represents the sexual consummation of a romance depends largely on whether it is comedic or dramatic. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, romantic comedies do not usually portray the sexual act in an explicit manner, and if they do, it tends to be rendered comedic in some way. Because most contemporary romance films aim for a PG (Parental Guidance) or a PG-13 rating in order to attract the widest possible audience,
the consummation is generally limited to the ‘falling in love’ moment. If the two protagonists have sex, they are often shown in bed after the fact, with an edit serving to keep most of the sexual act hidden. And, if sex is discussed, it is generally done with comedy that diffuses the associated emotions.

Romantic dramas, on the other hand, tend to be more explicit in their representation of sexuality. In fact, Catherine Preston argues that sex and the display of the female body is the main point of differentiation between what is generally designated as romantic comedy versus romance drama. What is notable about sexuality in romance dramas is that it is often represented most explicitly when the love affair is ‘forbidden’ in some way, usually in the act of infidelity or rebellion, such as in Cousins (Schumacher, 1989), Legends of the Fall (Zwick, 1994), The English Patient, The End of the Affair (Jordan, 1999), Titanic (Cameron, 1997), Unfaithful (Lyne, 2002), and The Notebook (Cassavetes, 2004).

The Problem

After the cathartic consummation of the relationship through sex or the ‘falling in love moment,’ problems arise. These problems can derive from one of the other plot points of the film, initially unrelated to the romance, but more often than not they are a result of one of the protagonists not being completely honest with him or herself or the other about something. For instance, in Kissing Jessica Stein, Jessica is not honest with her family about the fact that she is dating a woman, and thus does not tell her girlfriend Helen about her brother’s upcoming wedding.

Often the conflict is caused by one character’s unwillingness to overcome his or her own stubbornness to accommodate the relationship, as in Keeping the Faith (Norton, 2000), when Jake (Ben Stiller) will not commit to a relationship with Anna (Jenna Elfman) because she is not Jewish, or in Something’s Gotta Give (Meyers, 2003), when Harry (Jack Nicholson) is unwilling to give up his womanizing ways. Often miscommunications arise between the two protagonists, or one or the other is merely scared to commit to the relationship. The two characters part, convinced that the relationship is at an insurmountable impasse. Montage sequences are frequently employed at this stage of the narrative to depict one or more of the characters mourning the loss of the relationship. Their daily routine is seen to have lost its luster. This – what we might call post-breakup – montage regularly reveals the passage of time through visual cues, such as seasons changing and holidays being celebrated.

Notting Hill’s (Michell, 1999) digitally composed sequence, set to Bill Withers’s ‘Ain’t No Sunshine’ that shows William (Hugh Grant) mourning the loss of his relationship with Anna (Julia Roberts), is a classic example of this type of montage. The sequence shows William walking through his Notting
Hill neighborhood, first during the summer, then through the rainy fall, then the snowy winter, and then back into the summer, in one long continuous, digitally manipulated shot. In addition to differing weather patterns, the course of time is clear from William’s use of his coat. He begins with it slung over his shoulder, then he puts it on while shivering in the winter, and then he removes it again in the spring. Time is also clear from the progression of his sister’s relationship with her boyfriend. At the beginning they appear blissfully in love, and toward the end they are fighting and presumably in the midst of a breakup. We understand that the length of time chronicled is around a year, based on both the seasons and the prominent placement of a woman in the mise-en-scène: she begins the sequence pregnant, and ends it with a baby in her arms. The montage successfully and succinctly conveys mood, narrative information, and a fairly precise idea of how much time has passed since William and Anna’s breakup.

The Resolution

In order for a problem or problems to be resolved, one character must either admit to being wrong, and/or be willing to change whatever it was that brought on the problem in the first place. Thus, love functions as a transformative agent, causing one or both of the central characters to become better versions of him or herself, or themselves, than they were at the film’s outset. The transformation serves as both the impetus and the reward for a character’s willingness to progress beyond the emotional place in which he or she began the narrative. This resolution stage commonly comes by way of a dramatic scene in which one of the leads (usually the one with the problem) has a revelatory moment in which he or she realizes the other character’s importance to his
or her life. This typically is followed by a rapidly edited sequence in which the character with the problem runs, or employs some form of rapid transportation, to tell the other of the revelation. The problem character’s efforts to get to the destination are usually crosscut with scenes of the object of affection’s activity at the same moment, that sees the latter entirely oblivious to the dramatic denouement that awaits. Sometimes he or she is on the verge of making a decision or taking an action that will betray the romance, raising tension and suspense about whether the problem character will get there ‘in time.’

This type of sequence has its origins in pre-1980s classic romances such as *The Apartment* (Wilder, 1960) and *Manhattan* (Allen, 1979). Some of the best-known postfeminist romance cycle examples include Zack carrying Paula out of her blue-collar factory in *An Officer and a Gentleman* (Hackford, 1982), Harry’s run at the stroke of midnight on New Year’s Eve in *When Harry Met Sally*, Jerry’s run through the airport and ‘you complete me’ interruption of a women’s group therapy session in *Jerry Maguire* (Crowe, 1996), a scooter ride through a gay pride parade in *The Wedding Planner* (Shankman, 2001), and a rapid drive down New York City streets in *Friends with Kids* (Westfeldt, 2011).

The End

The happy ending is a mainstay of the romance narrative structure, and its promise of long-term happiness is what drives romance’s continued cultural
currency. The happy ending generally sees one or both of the protagonists admitting love and having learned an important lesson from the problem stage, along with acknowledgment that forming a long-term partnership will bring them the happiness and fulfillment they seek.

For heterosexual partnerships, the narrative either implies or visually demonstrates that marriage is the next step. But not all romance narratives end happily. One of the most common exceptions to the happy ending stage is death as the primary factor that prevents the formation of a couple. Harkening back to the classic melodramas and women’s films such as Dark Victory (Goulding, 1939), Letter from an Unknown Woman (Ophuls, 1948), and Love Story (Hiller, 1970), death is the ultimate source of pathos, and one of the few obstacles that cannot be overcome. Contemporary films such as Titanic, Sweet November (O’Connor, 2001), Autumn in New York (Chen, 2000), Ghost (Zucker, 1990), Moulin Rouge (Luhrmann, 2001), and P.S. I Love You (LaGravenese, 2007) present death as the ultimate transformer, teaching the character who lives about the importance of love. These films suggest that romance has the capacity to withstand or overcome death, continuing in spirit beyond the grave.

Variations on the happy ending structure in the romance film have been the subject of some discussion by film scholars. For instance, Celestino Deleyto has argued that some contemporary romance films’ alternative endings suggest that ‘heterosexual love appears to be challenged, and occasionally replaced, by friendship.’ He cites the film My Best Friend’s Wedding (Hogan, 1997), in particular, as questioning the redemptive possibilities of heterosexual romance through its ‘unhappy’ ending that sees the female protagonist – Julianne (Julia Roberts) – failing to lure her best friend Michael (Dermot Mulroney) away from his fiancé (Cameron Diaz). After watching the two get married, she finds solace in the company of George (Rupert Everett), her gay best friend. The two end the film twirling away happily on the dance floor.

Deleyto raises a compelling point in suggesting that this film’s ending contests heterosexual love. However, two qualifications should accompany his case. First, the film does, for all intents and purposes, have a happy ending that reinforces heterosexual coupling; it’s just not the central female protagonist who gets the classic happy ending, but her friends instead. She is a perfect example of the quirky, discombobulated postfeminist romance heroine who is pitted against a more conventionally feminine counterpart (a common trope on which I will elaborate more in Chapter 1’s case study of 27 Dresses (Fletcher, 2008)). She does not win in this narrative, but given her resemblance to so many other female protagonists, we as viewers have confidence that she will win the love of another man sometime in the future. The fact that she is played by Julia Roberts only further confirms this belief.
This presumption leads to what I consider as Deleyto’s second oversight, which is that we should take the ending of *My Best Friend’s Wedding* at face value within the confines of the text. Even if we were to accept that Julianne has chosen a friendship with George over heterosexual love (a problematic assumption in itself since Julianne does not choose this position, but is forced into it when Michael rejects her), the film’s allegiance to all other romantic comedy conventions broadens its message and instantiates a discourse beyond the text. The ending is not an ending for her but a beginning. Julianne has come to recognize throughout the course of the narrative that she values romantic love, and it is assumed that she will seek a more willing heterosexual love match in the future.

My counterargument is not meant to dispute Deleyto’s assertion that contemporary films can offer an alternative approach to romance structures, but merely to suggest that films like these have implications beyond the confines of their plot structures, and that they should also be read through this supplemental lens. Julianne’s pairing with George does not posit a real alternative to the romance narrative any more than do individual episodes of the wildly popular postfeminist television show *Sex and the City* (1998–2004), which exhibit and reinforce the staying power of Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha’s friendships in the absence of fulfilling romantic relationships.

Certainly, in reality, many women live perfectly happy and successful lives without a man and in the company of close friends; but films like *My Best Friend’s Wedding* are so steeped in romance narratological strategies that one should approach the ascription of truly alternative paths with caution. Even films such as *The Break-Up* (Reed, 2006) or *Celeste & Jesse Forever* (Krieger, 2012) that chronicle the dissolution of a long-term relationship between each of their two main characters, suggests that there is a possibility for a romantic future, beyond the ending: a ‘to be continued’.

In other words, as Woody Allen aptly surmises following the similarly ‘unhappy’ ending of *Annie Hall* (Allen, 1977), even when one affair ends, people will keep looking for love because they ‘need the eggs.’ As Deleyto argues in a more recent work, a film does not necessarily need to have a happy ending in order to be defined as a romance. And David Shumway has contended, ‘While relationship stories end both “happily” and “sadly,” no ending can ever be assumed to be final. Another breakup or another relationship is always possible, if not likely.’ Happy ending or unhappy ending, consummated or unconsummated, popular culture perpetually reinforces the notion that romantic love is integral to a fulfilling life. As Shumway suggests, what a film communicates about love and romance trickles into, and out of, the culture at large.
ROMANTIC COMEDY AND ROMANTIC DRAMA

It is already clear that my definition of the postfeminist romance cycle includes both comedic and dramatic films. Admittedly, this is an unorthodox approach, as scholars tend to separate romantic comedies and romantic dramas (usually called melodramas or women’s films) into two mutually exclusive genre categories. More contemporary discussions of female-focused and female-targeted films have challenged these boundaries, including Karen Hollinger’s discussion of the female friendship film, Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young’s book on the ‘chick flick,’ and Diane Negra’s work on the neo-liberal bent of postfeminist media. My case studies will further illustrate how instructive and necessary such a comparison can be. Examining trends that cut across previously demarcated genre lines allows us to delineate how romance ebbs and flows in accordance with ideological shifts. Sometimes, as described in Chapter 4’s consideration of sexuality, the marked difference between comedies and dramas is integral to the discussion of how discourses of romance differ based on a film’s tone. Without considering both types of films concurrently, this contrast would be muted and the richness of romance underestimated.

The ubiquity of the romantic comedy in contemporary culture has made it the default discussion category for film critics. Consequently, ‘rom-com’, not ‘rom-dram’, has become common industry and lay-person parlance for any film having a romantic plot, with the consequence of a proliferation of books on the subject. However, even romantic comedy scholars have addressed the blurred boundaries between comedies and dramas. For instance, Tamar Jeffers McDonald has argued that the lines of demarcation between the two forms are unstable: ‘while films of the genre [romantic comedy] generally end well and may elicit laughs along the way, I am also aware of the importance of tears to the romantic comedy.’ Indeed, ‘the mixed emotions these films commonly depict and elicit’ that lead to the simultaneous laughter and tears of which McDonald speaks, can just as easily be applied to dramas.

As Peter William Evans and Bruce Babington have conceded, a film’s ending can be a tricky barometer for identifying its category. They argue, ‘In some films . . . the happy ending is often little more than a precarious arrangement, as likely to be breached as honored. On these occasions romantic comedy seems at times to draw very close to melodrama.’ Many of the most seminal romantic comedies do not have a traditional happy ending. For instance, as I noted previously, Annie Hall is considered one of the great romantic comedies of all time, but it does not see Alvy and Annie’s relationship end happily. The same is true of the more contemporary film 500 Days of Summer (Webb, 2009). Likewise, dramatic films such as An Officer and a Gentleman and The Notebook can have happy endings, and numerous other texts defy these happy versus sad parameters. What are labeled dramatic films can have comedic
moments, and comedic films can have dramatic scenes. Definitive codification is difficult because both types of films elicit feelings of sentiment, nostalgia, affection and pleasure.

To be sure, there is a great deal to be gained from expanding the parameters of romance. Doing so allows us, as Celestino Deleyto’s work has evinced, to acknowledge the ‘variety of discourses, approaches and ideologies articulated by the texts.’ In *The Secret Life of Romantic Comedy*, Deleyto argues that the romantic comedy genre has been defined too narrowly, excluding otherwise appropriate films from the canon simply because they do not fit scholars’ preordained criteria. This type of compartmentalization can ‘obscure the importance of the interrelations between the various types of stories.’ His aptly titled book points to the crossover between dramatic and comedic elements in films such as *Rear Window* (Hitchcock, 1954), *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (Allen, 1989), and *Before Sunset* (Linklater, 2004). The fact that romance can stray from romantic comedy and find a ‘secret life’ in unexpected places is a clear sign of its fluidity.

My objective is not to refute the past and it scholarly discussion of genre categories such as romantic comedy or melodrama but only to argue that they are not appropriate for an examination of the postfeminist romance cycle. As Rick Altman has argued, ‘genre theorists have generally sought to describe and define what they believe to be already existing genres rather than create their own interpretive categories, however applicable or useful.’ In this case, creating an expansive, rather than limiting, framework helps us delineate how romance is structurally stable and cyclical, ebbing and flowing in accordance with historical shifts.

**Visual/Cinematic Style in the Postfeminist Romance**

The aesthetics of most postfeminist romance cycle films are quite conventional, exemplifying what David Bordwell has called ‘intensified continuity,’ which merely heightens classical style through various narrative and aesthetic techniques. In fact, one of Bordwell’s illustrations of this style – which includes rapid editing, bipolar extremes of lens lengths, reliance on close shots, and wide-ranging camera movements – is *Two Weeks Notice* (Lawrence, 2002), a postfeminist romance film. He discusses how a dialogue scene among the female protagonist, Lucy (Sandra Bullock), the male protagonist, George (Hugh Grant), and June (Alicia Witt), another female love interest, uses rapid editing, close shots, and camera movements to contribute to the developing love triangle where ‘the straightforward technique throws all of the weight into the flow of the action.’

Most films in the postfeminist romance cycle, like *Two Weeks Notice*, conform to Bordwell’s model, which he characterizes as a ‘vanilla-flavored
version of intensified continuity’ in which form is engaged to support plot. A quintessential example of this heightened yet still safe use of formal conventions is the aforementioned montage sequence from Notting Hill. It adapts the montage to convey the passage of time using what we might call an intensified style of digital manipulation, rather than classical editing. In fact, the montage sequence is one of the most oft-used, cliché-ridden devices for conveying story information quickly in romance films. As Bordwell states, ‘nothing indicates more clearly the persistence of classical construction than this summary device.’ It is most commonly seen in comedic texts, usually in the courtship or problem stage, to convey the passage of time and the progression of feelings, and features one or more pop or rock songs from the film’s soundtrack.

Another key formal element of the cycle is what I call a ‘mise-en-scène of luxury.’ It may be most noticeable in romance-of-manners films that feature period sets and costumes; Jim Collins has characterized this as the ‘excessive mise-en-scene’ of the adaptation film that sees the ‘interplay between narrative and spectacle . . . forming an entire taste culture.’ However, it is equally significant in films set in contemporary times, wherein clothes, settings, and particularly the décor of domestic spaces are key to orienting the viewer not just to historical time, but also to class, and the protagonist’s relationship to commodity culture. Most of the films I will discuss in the case studies were made with sizable budgets, which results in production design filled with products and décor that sometimes indicate middle class, but usually signify upper-middle-class economic status. Indeed, class plays a largely unspoken but significant role in the postfeminist romance film, as the wealth and upward mobility of the female characters undergird their personal dilemmas, but also enable a pleasurably commodified backdrop for their love affairs.

Certainly, the class dimensions of love are evident in films dating back to the silent period. However, class in the postfeminist romance is rarely discussed. Romance’s transformative effects, and its momentum toward a permanent commitment (and quite possibly marriage), suggest its promotion of middle-class values, and as a result, capitalist structures. The high production values and glamorous, well-appointed décor and costumes in many of these films create an attractive environment for product placement, and sell romance, even if it is a failing romance, as an attractive lifestyle.

Contemporary texts such as Sex and the City, as well as The Devil Wears Prada (Frankel, 2006), Confessions of a Shopaholic (Hogan, 2009), and director Nancy Meyers’s entire oeuvre (a subject of one of Chapter 5’s case studies) are excellent examples that market the link between an attractive, upwardly mobile lifestyle and romance. In these texts, even if our protagonists stumble through their efforts to achieve a sense of satisfaction in their romantic relationships, their lifestyles – filled with designer clothes and accessories, spacious and attractively decorated apartments, and expensive restaurants – remain
desirable to viewers. In the postfeminist period, these intersections among commodity culture, female desire, and feminist ideas of choice, function, as Negra has argued, to attach ‘considerable importance to the formulation of an expressive personal lifestyle and the ability to select the right commodities to attain it.’

The History and Politics of the Postfeminist Cycle

The reliable structure of the romance film and the subtle variations on it outlined thus far have, throughout film history, resonated closely with American historical, cultural, and political developments. For instance, Virginia Wright Wexman has discussed the degree to which film’s early history reflected cultural acceptance of shifting conceptions of love. Inspired by John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman’s *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, Wexman tells how movie theatres became the site of romantic coupling (for example, ‘making out’ in the balcony, which was so popular in the 1950s and ’60s), and that ‘the movies were ideally positioned to instruct audiences about the changing mores regarding romantic love.’ Stanley Cavell has famously argued that screwball comedy films of the 1930s, such as *It Happened One Night* (Capra, 1934), *The Awful Truth* (McCarey, 1937), *Bringing Up Baby* (Hawks, 1938), *The Philadelphia Story* (Cukor, 1940), *His Girl Friday* (Hawks, 1940) and *The Lady Eve* (Sturges, 1941) were ‘fairy tales for the Depression.’ Thomas Wartenberg and Wexman’s work has contributed to our understanding of how the evolution of types of couples in movie romances tells us a great deal not only about performance style and presentation, but more significantly about broader social trends concerning race, class and sexual orientation.

The social, political and industrial changes that occurred from the early 1980s to 2012 contribute to our understanding of the postfeminist romance cycle, like any cycle, as, in Klein’s words, a ‘mold placed over the zeitgeist, which, when pulled away, reveals the contours, fissures, and complicated patterns of the contemporary moment.’ By entwining the romance genre with current-at-the-time socio-political issues, the films of this period maintain a balance between fluctuating conceptions of romantic ideals as well as evolving portrayals of the position of the woman at its center. Thus, over thirty-plus years, the films in the postfeminist American cycle present women’s personal and professional gains (per the aforementioned Pew statistics), including the slow and often conflicted cultural embrace of female sexuality and rights.

As we know, both comedic and dramatic pre-1966 romance films were predicated on the suppression of sexuality. These code-era films adopt aesthetic and narrative techniques that suggest but do not explicitly represent the sexual chemistry between the female and male protagonist. Influential romance films,
like *Kitty Foyle* (Wood, 1940) and *An Affair to Remember* (McCarey, 1957), feature autonomous women with their own careers and strong convictions. However, the romantic affairs in which they are entangled, with their witty repartee, longing glances, and strategic elliptical edits necessarily require marriage, the only socially acceptable place – narratively speaking – in which these romantic feelings can be fully realized.

The classical era of the romance film began to decline in the late 1950s and early 1960s, seeing its last gasps in a subgenre of films often referred to as ‘sex comedies.’ Best exemplified by the Doris Day and Rock Hudson trilogy, *Pillow Talk* (Gordon, 1959), *Lover Come Back* (Mann, 1961), and *Send Me No Flowers* (Jewison, 1964), these films reveal the increasing tension between the constraints of the classical romance conventions and the suddenly ubiquitous discussion of women’s sexuality, heralded by cultural milestones such as the publication in 1953 of *Playboy Magazine* and the Kinsey report on Female Sexuality, as well as the introduction of the birth control pill in 1960. Tamar Jeffers McDonald suggests that these films ‘could in fact be called “Battle of the Sexes comedies” since this more accurately encapsulates their dynamic.’

By the beginning of the transitional period of the 1970s, which saw the restructuring of the big studios and the advent of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings system, Hollywood was actively searching for ways to connect with a younger audience because the classical romance films lacked currency: they no longer matched the mood of the time. There is no better example of this era’s attitudes toward romance than the ironic ‘happy ending’ of *The Graduate* (Nichols), made in 1967, a turning point year for Hollywood. The lead character Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman) makes the seemingly romantic gesture of rescuing Elaine (Katharine Ross), the daughter of his older lover, Mrs Robinson (Anne Bancroft), from her wedding to another man. They successfully escape the disapproving crowd of wedding attendees and catch a passing bus, but their celebratory smiles soon fade into blank stares when they realize that they do not know what they are supposed to do next. They share no loving embraces, no promises of love, but merely sit silently next to each staring off into the distance.

Similarly, the 1970s saw a handful of classically inspired romance films such as *The Way We Were* (Pollack, 1973) and *Love Story* achieve popularity and box-office success but the decade was dominated largely by revisionist romance films, also called ‘nervous romances,’ and ‘radical romantic comedies,’ both of which are best described as reflecting a sense of romantic ennui. Either by experimenting with form or questioning the stability and perseverance of the institution of heterosexual marriage, the 1970s romance film reflects many of the social and political movements whose platforms challenged the assumptions at the heart of the genre. Of these movements, second-wave feminism was the most significant. Its precepts subtly, but rarely explicitly, were voiced
through these films’ disenchantment with marriage as a desirable conclusion for both female and male protagonists.

Flora Davis argues that while the feminist movement was frequently blamed for the rising divorce rate, which increased by 100 percent between 1963 and 1975, it was as likely that the ‘second wave was, in part a response to the insecurity of marriage.’ Whether feminism led to divorce or divorce led to feminism, it is clear that the tone of 1970s’ romance films was inextricably tied to the fact that as of 1975, ‘there was one divorce for every two marriages.’ There were not only fewer romance films produced, but the films that were released, such as *An UnMarried Woman* (Mazursky, 1978), which I discuss in Chapter 1, reflect a more cynical perspective on the conventions and expectations of the classical romance, and maintain a tenuous connection to feminist politics.

This landscape began to shift again in the early 1980s, with an increase in the production of romance films and a marked change in tenor that saw cynicism slowly turn again to lightheartedness, optimism and nostalgia. Catherine Preston claims that in the 1960s and 1970s, the average number of romance films per year was in the single digits – seven and five per year, respectively. Yet by 1984 the numbers began to increase into the double digits, to an average of twenty per year. By 1991, the average peaked at forty romance films per year. Steve Neale has called this contemporary cycle film the ‘new romance’ film that incorporates ‘markedly – and knowingly – “old-fashioned”’ attributes. Mimi White similarly highlights the retrograde tendencies of this new crop of films, as she discusses their implications for the female protagonists at their center. Focusing on a group of 1984 films – including *Romancing the Stone* (Zemeckis), *Thief of Hearts* (Stewart), and *American Dreamer* (Rosenthal) – that ‘reintroduce romance with a vengeance,’ she contends,
On the one hand they attempt to construct, address, or fulfill the socially perceived and circumscribed demands of an audience with an increasingly feminist consciousness, as female protagonists are afforded narrative agency within fictions that engage strategies of self-conscious fictionality. At the same time the films can be seen in terms of postfeminist and neoconservative pressures, as the weight of narrative development hinges on and concludes in the formation of a traditionally conceived couple.47

The dynamic of ambivalence that is central to White’s examples is central to the postfeminist romance cycle. That is, the coexistence of a feminist consciousness by way of a female protagonist who is professionally and personally autonomous (and has narrative agency), and a narrative structure that foreshadows the formation of a heterosexual romantic partnership.

As I will describe in more detail in Chapter 1, the postfeminist romance cycle relies on the structure of stages outlined in a previous section, but this structure has a subtext that reflects the socio-political and cultural position of the woman at its center. The female protagonist’s status as a single woman or as a participant in an unfulfilling relationship is seen as a result of some problem from which she suffers. Although it is not socially mandated, heterosexual romantic partnership is presented as a desired complement to this female character’s otherwise fulfilling life. However, the choice she makes to be or not to be in a relationship, and the subsequent success or failure of that relationship, are both inextricable with, and often representative of, her perceived failings or quirks. These idiosyncrasies are implicitly, if not explicitly, linked to her social position, and the ‘problem’ she must overcome.

The postfeminist romance film gestures towards the political precepts of second-wave feminism, and absorbs, without necessarily reinforcing or negating, its ideals. It is frequently self-conscious and self-reflexive, and reveals, through plot structure and characterization, an awareness of romantic cultural tropes as circulated by other past and present media texts. The postfeminist romance film cautiously reconciles past and present narrative conventions and how those conventions align with past and present conceptions of womanhood.

These postfeminist romance films operate in an experiential space between multiple sets of oppositional tendencies, resulting in their deeply ambivalent and often contradictory affect. What is particularly fascinating about postfeminist culture for the purposes of this study is that, as the opening Pew statistics and Sheryl Sandberg’s book attest, there are still traces of political feminism’s forward momentum toward equality for women woven with a shift backward toward women’s embrace of more traditional conceptions of individualized femininity. Angela McRobbie’s characterization of postfeminism as a ‘double-entanglement’ is particularly useful here. For her, this double-entanglement is comprised of ‘the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender,
sexuality and family life . . . with processes of liberalization in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations. Or, as she argues specifically in reference to the film *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, postfeminism ‘seems to mean gently chiding the feminist past, while also retrieving and reinstating some palatable elements, in this case sexual freedom, the right to drink, smoke, have fun in the city, and be economically independent.’

McRobbie’s double-entanglement paradigm has a great deal in common with White’s discussion of the return of ‘romance with a vengeance,’ and both frameworks inform how postfeminism will be characterized throughout this book. The double-entanglement term provides a historical and ideological demarcation, by marking the shift away from the political feminism of the 1970s. Postfeminism also describes a mentality that simultaneously looks backward and forward, both politically and historically. In other words, my spotlight is on how the postfeminist romance cycle films attempt to convey, sometimes successfully, occasionally not, the possibility of the coexistence of ideas and desires that postfeminist culture frequently posits as being at odds. *American Postfeminist Cinema* uses case studies of cinematic ‘either/or’s to explore the potential of the ‘both/and.’ In this context, the term postfeminism reveals a struggle and/or conversation, not an impasse.

Unlike scholars like Diane Negra who argue that postfeminist media culture leaves no ‘open spaces’ for spectator negotiation, with ‘conservative norms . . . as the ultimate “best choices” in women’s lives,’ I argue that despite the conventionality of the postfeminist romance cycle, these films do provide a range of experiences and provoke a range of interpretations, some of which might reflect progressive, politically engaged feminist attitudes and others that celebrate decidedly ‘old fashioned’ and conservative ideas of femininity. Heterosexual romantic coupling is always the desired resolution of postfeminist romance films and for that reason they might be considered retrograde and, even more extremely, antifeminist. However, to pigeonhole these films and stop the conversation there is to ignore the many complex issues with which they engage, and to assume that women spectators cannot find a variety of pleasures in the same texts that they simultaneously understand to be limited in their representations of women’s choices.

In fact, the truly interesting work begins once we recognize the cycle’s normativity. Because these films speak to one another and to the same sets of issues, an individual text’s full meaning is revealed only when viewed within both the context of the cycle more generally, and the set of false binaries that underlie our case studies. The cycle promotes and elicits an ongoing process of oscillation, narratively and spectatorially, between the past and the present, between the realities of one life and the fictional realities offered by film and other media, between being sexually active and demure, and between being completely independent or occasionally dependent. While particular films and
some issues taken up within the cycle are more antagonistic and conservative than others, the process of engaging with them as a group better reveals their ambivalence and sense of indecision. In other words, the postfeminist romance cycle films mirror the balancing act at the heart of the contemporary female experience.

Framing the Book

My case studies are organized according to both how, and in what ways, romance has become interwoven with women’s own anxieties, as well as the broader cultural anxieties about women’s changing social and political status. By arranging the case studies into clusters of the fallacious ‘either/or’s, we can gain a broad view of how seemingly different films actually have a great deal in common. This approach also enables some chapters’ case studies to consider multiple media at once.

As illustrated by such seminal 1980s feminist works as Tania Modleski’s *Loving With a Vengeance* and Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance*, romance has the capacity to flow in and out of multiple media forms, and even to circulate into the language women use to discuss their own relationships. The tendencies of which they speak have proliferated by leaps and bounds over the last thirty years, and there has been a veritable explosion of forms through which romance has extended its reach, including self-help books and new media such as YouTube, blogs and dating sites. In addition, ‘reading’ or watching romance has itself become a performative act: media consumption is (sometimes) embedded in the texts themselves.

The lines between reality and fiction have never been more blurred, particularly when it comes to the way that women articulate their own relationship to the mythology surrounding both real and fictional romance. However, film remains the most effective and persuasive medium for disseminating ideas about heterosexual romance even in the midst of our romance-saturated media environment. Consequently, when I mention other media texts in the case studies, the emphasis is on the way in which they connect to or establish a discursive relationship with films.

Chapter 1 places the postfeminist romance cycle into historical context by examining in more detail how it both follows and deviates from the traits and tropes of its predecessors, the classical romance film and the ‘feminist’ romance film. We will better understand how this continuity and deviation operate by tracing how variations on the structural and discursive tendencies outlined earlier operate in the examples of films from different historical periods: *Kitty Foyle*, *An UnMarried Woman* and *27 Dresses*. The chapter demonstrates how the anxiety over women’s changing social and political status over the last thirty years creates new problems for the romance narrative to solve in old
ways. By delineating, as a starting point, the landscape of the romance film throughout different periods of Hollywood cinema, we acquire a historically nuanced understanding of the postfeminist romance before delving into the case studies that trace the anxieties that permeate the postfeminist romance cycle.

Chapter 2 presents the first of these case studies. It examines how the postfeminist romance film serves an ameliorative function, a bridge, so to speak, that is bolstered by contemporary transmedia and intertextual media landscape. The binary ‘either/or’ that emerges from this cluster of films and related media texts pits a fantasy-driven sentimentality, often associated with women and driven by fictional or historically retrograde conceits, against a more practical and calculated outlook associated with a masculine, business-oriented present day. We will see how this tension in the films *The Jane Austen Book Club* (Swicord, 2007), *He’s Just Not That Into You* (Kwapis, 2009), *You’ve Got Mail* (Ephron, 1998) and *Must Love Dogs* (Goldberg, 2005) circulates into and/or takes inspiration from Jane Austen novels, chick lit, YouTube videos, self-help books, and Internet dating commercials.

Chapter 3 elaborates on Chapter 2’s analysis of sentimentality versus pragmatism, in one particular area: it addresses how the postfeminist romance cycle poses questions about the historicity and temporality of ‘true’ romance. This chapter’s case studies are grouped according to how they work through questions of the relationship between constructions of time and women’s subjectivity, and include analyses of *Somewhere in Time* (Szwarc, 1980) versus *Kate and Leopold* (Mangold, 2001); *Me Myself I* (Karmel, 1999) versus *The Family Man* (Ratner, 2000); and an episode of *Sex and the City* entitled ‘Ex and the City’ and the film *Sleepless in Seattle*. These texts bring to light the political implications of the ‘post’ in postfeminism and how these historical questions are channeled through the ‘gendering’ of time. Ultimately, the chapter considers whether the alignment of female characters with a discourse of romance risks placing women in an ahistorical and overly subjective position that minimizes their agency and investment in the objective present.

Chapter 4 continues the previous chapters’ examination of the reverberations surrounding the postfeminist romance’s preoccupation with the past, but here the past is that of girlhood. Postfeminist culture’s fixation on naive girlishness and hyper-sexualized boldness simultaneously results in a paradoxical representation of sexuality and romance. Case studies of comedy films – *When Harry Met Sally*, *Pretty Woman*, and *13 Going on 30* (Winick, 2004) – alongside thrillers – *Fatal Attraction* (Lyne, 1987), *Unfaithful*, and *In the Cut* (Campion, 2003) – make it clear that the postfeminist romance film struggles to maintain a balance between depicting women as demure girls and sexual coquettes. The chapter concludes with a brief consideration of how these contradictory sexual identities find some degree of balance in the more recent films
No Strings Attached (Reitman, 2011) and Friends with Benefits (Gluck, 2011), and in the television program Girls (2012–), even amidst increasingly contentious political conversations about women’s sexual rights.

Chapter 5 continues a consideration of the postfeminist romance cycle’s fluctuation between female dependency and autonomy, but expands the framework to consider industrial context. Focusing on the films of two of the most prominent writer-directors of the contemporary era, Nancy Meyers and Nicole Holofcener, it argues that there are illuminating connections between the representation of romance and the mode of production in which a filmmaker works. Meyers’s Hollywood films have huge budgets and construct a particular brand of lifestyle fetishism unquestionably mixed with heterosexual romance. By contrast, Nicole Holofcener’s small budget, independent films contemplate the connections between money and romantic relationships. Meyers, in It’s Complicated (2009), combines a satisfying romantic catharsis with the consumption of material goods, while Holofcener, in Friends with Money (2006), deviates from typical romantic structures and calls attention to what lies beneath acts of consumption. By illustrating that ‘having it all’ can mean different things to different women (both real and fictional), we can see some variations on the structural and discursive characteristics that typify different concepts of romance.

All of these case studies trace the ways in which the postfeminist romance cycle films are dynamic and complex vehicles through which some of the central issues facing contemporary women are rehearsed and negotiated. Close narrative analyses of film and other forms of media help us parse the false binaries that unite these films, and thus reveal how they deal with multi-layered concerns where politics meet personal choices, and fantasy meets reality. Or, to return to our opening example, where we see traces of Friedan’s ‘feminine mystique’ mixed with Sandberg’s ‘leaning in.’ Romance functions, in the words of Northrop Frye, as a ‘wish-fulfillment dream’ that, despite the great changes that may ‘take place in society ... will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on.’ This book illustrates the specific hopes, desires and contradictions that romance has fed on for the last thirty years and how, through its reliability, the narrative structure of romance continues to create new hopes and desires to be fed on in the future. In other words, we will see that the romance film is not merely symptomatic or reflective of the postfeminist era’s political and cultural shifts; it is inextricably linked to these changes.

Notes
3. American studios produced most of the films that I discuss in my case studies. The few postfeminist romance films that did not originate in Hollywood – including *Me Myself I* and *In the Cut* – were international coproductions that received wide distribution in the United States, usually through the major studios.


9. A March 2013 *Atlantic* article comments on the tough times that have befallen the romantic comedy in recent years concluding that ‘the easy profitability of the past decade was the worst thing to happen to the romantic comedy – an invitation to stale formulas and ridiculous conceits alike – and a few lean years might do the genre good.’ Christopher Orr, ‘Why are romantic comedies so bad?: The long decline from Katharine Hepburn to Katherine Heigl’, *The Atlantic*, March 2013, 42–3.


15. David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 16. In a 1979 interview with Janet Bergstrom, Raymond Bellour states, ‘If you think about it, you notice that after a certain situation posed at the start as a problem or as an enigma, the film gradually leads to a final solution which allows the more or less conflicting terms posed at the beginning to be resolved, and which in the majority of cases takes the form of marriage. I’ve gradually come to think that this pattern organizes – indeed, constitutes – the classical American cinema as a whole.’ Janet Bergstrom, ‘Alternation, segmentation, hypnosis: interview with Raymond Bellour – an excerpt’, in Constance Penley (ed.), *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 187.

16. Indeed, there are a great many commonalities in how people account for the essential components of romance plots. For instance, in *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy*, film scholar Leger Grindon outlines romantic comedy in terms of its narrative ‘moves’. These moves consist of: (1) unfulfilled desire; (2) the meeting; (3) fun together; (4) obstacles arise; (5) the journey; (6) new conflicts; (7) the choice; (8) crisis; (9) epiphany; (10) resolution. On the other side of the cultural spectrum, mass-market book author Kim Adelman, author of *The Ultimate Guide to Chick Flicks*, also writes of what she calls romance’s ‘steps’. In her first, and appropriately named, chapter, ‘From Meeting Cute to the Ultimate Happy Ending: How to Create the Perfect Romance,’ she outlines the steps of this ‘perfect romance’: (1) create a sympathetic heroine; (2) offer up a love-worthy hero; (3) don’t forget the best friend; (4) something’s wrong with the heroine’s life; (5) they meet; (6) toss in impediments to the romance; (7) they dance; (8) pack in as many memorable moments as possible; (9) the hero employs the three magic words; (10) achieve


25. Ibid.


28. Ibid.

29. Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), p. 11.


31. Ibid. pp. 163.

32. Ibid. p. 161.

33. Ibid. p. 49.


38. See Thomas Wartenberg, Unlikely Couples: Movie Romance as Social Criticism (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), and Virginia Wright Wexman, Creating the Couple.
39. Klein, American Film Cycles, p. 20.
41. See Frank Krutnik, ‘The faint aroma of performing seals: the “nervous” romance and the comedy of the sexes’, Velvet Light Trap, 26 (1990), and Jeffers McDonald, Romantic Comedy.
43. Ibid. p. 287.
44. Preston contends: ‘Between 1960 and 1969 there were an average of 7 romances released a year. In the 1970s that figure went down to 5 per year. In 1980 the production of romances began to rise and between 1984 and 1989 an average of 20 were released each year. Between 1990 and 1996, the annual average rose to 26, peaking at 40 in 1991.’ ‘Hanging on a star’, p. 229.
47. White, ‘Representing romance’, p. 41.
49. Ibid. p. 12.
52. Chapter 3’s final case study was originally published as ‘“Misty Water-Colored Memories of the Way We Were” postfeminist nostalgia in contemporary romance narratives’, in Vicki Callahan (ed.), Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010). © Used with the permission of Wayne State University Press.
53. A version of Chapter 5’s case study of Nicole Holofcener’s Friends with Money was originally published as ‘Independence at what cost?: economics and female desire in Nicole Holofcener’s Friends with Money (2006)’, in Hilary Radner and Rebecca Stringer (eds), Feminism at the Movies: Understanding Gender in Contemporary Popular Cinema (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011). Republished with permission of Taylor and Francis Group LLC Books; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.