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Marking Their Territory: Male Adolescence Abroad in Recent Italian Teen Film

Dan Paul

Introduction: Ungendering a Gendered Genre

Due to its alignment with popular culture, the teen film is often considered a feminized genre or mode, one ideally addressed to, and consumed by, a primarily female audience. As Catherine Driscoll argues in *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*, “[r]egardless of their audience and even in spite of some of their content, teen films are received as girl films because of the transience of their form and content—their romantic narratives of transformation mediated by overt commodification.”¹ Since traditional teen films foreground, and at times make light of, adolescent heterosexual romances, they are easily classified as melodramas, chick flicks, or romantic comedies (romcoms), genres which are likewise part of mass culture and, consequently, feminized. Roz Kaveney’s study of teen film also implies a gendered assumption: the title of her tome, *Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television from Heathers to Veronica Mars*, draws particular attention to two female names/titles.² Furthermore, the cover design of her book—a notebook page reminiscent of a girl’s diary, featuring an image of Alicia Silverstone as Cher in *Clueless*,³ another image of J.D. (Christian Slater) and Veronica (Winona Ryder) from *Heathers* enclosed in a heart,⁴ and a set of deep red kiss lips—are highly suggestive of the type of audience which consumes teen films.

Recent Anglophone scholarship on Italian teen film contributes to the perpetuation of this gendered assumption about the genre. For example, in addition to drawing attention to the themes and characteristics of the conventional teen film, Dana Renga investigates a group of films created by female directors and centering on female protagonists. Renga argues that these films do not necessarily conform to the standard practices of the genre, and she demonstrates how this recent spate of woman-directed films “resist[s] the postfeminist project that positions women as consumers who can ‘have it all’.”⁵ Danielle Hipkins, in her appraisal of teen films such as *Come tu mi vuoi [As You Desire Me]*⁶ and *Un giorno speciale [A Special Day]*,⁷ draws attention to a postfeminist narrative wherein girls choose to employ “technologies of sexiness” in order to accomplish their objectives—in academia and television, respectively.⁸ By their adherence to beauty standards through, for example, the makeover motif common to the genre,

¹ Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 217.

² Roz Kaveney, *Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film from Heathers to Veronica Mars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

³ *Clueless*, dir. Amy Heckerling (Hollywood: Paramount Home Entertainment, 1995), DVD.

⁴ *Heathers*, dir. Michael Lehmann (Troy, MI: Anchor Bay Entertainment, 1999), DVD.

⁵ Dana Renga, “Italian Teen Film and the Female Auteur,” in *New Visions of the Child in Italian Cinema*, ed. Danielle Hipkins and Roger Pitt (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 310.

⁶ *Come tu mi vuoi*, dir. Volfango De Biasi (Milan: Medusa Film, 2007), DVD.

⁷ *Un giorno speciale*, dir. Francesca Comencini (Rome: Lucky Red, 2013), DVD.

⁸ Danielle Hipkins, “The Showgirl Effect: Adolescent Girls and (Precarious) ‘technologies of sexiness’ in Contemporary Italian Cinema,” in *International Cinema and the Girl: Local Issues, Transnational Contexts*, ed. Fiona Handyside and Kate E. Taylor-Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 23.

adolescent female protagonists are granted access to the public spheres of academia and television and subsequently must grapple with the consequences of their decisions.

While their analyses provide useful and, indeed, much-needed insight into the female adolescent experience presented onscreen, my interest lies in the representation of masculinity in Italian teen film. Catherine O’Rawe’s “Mad About the Boy: Teen Stars and Serious Actors” is one of the few, if not the only, reflections on masculinity in the genre.⁹ As her point of entry, O’Rawe takes actor Riccardo Scamarcio, whose roles in the films *Tre metri sopra il cielo* [*Three Steps Over Heaven*]¹⁰ and its sequel, *Ho voglia di te* [*I Desire You*]¹¹ firmly situated him as a teen idol. More specifically, O’Rawe analyzes Scamarcio’s transition from “teen heartthrob” to “serious protagonist of middlebrow drama,” a process which requires a certain disavowal of both beauty and the feminine.¹² The successful transformation of Scamarcio’s identity as an actor leads O’Rawe to conclude that “[s]eriousness is something [...] that can only be claimed by mature men.”¹³ In other words, to be serious is to be—and to act like—a man. In my discussion of teen film below, I argue that the disavowal of the feminine and, as we shall see, of the childish, is an essential trait of hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is a highly loaded term. Generally speaking, it refers to the “most honored way of being a man,” and is a form of masculinity which requires that “all other men [...] position themselves in relation to it” as it insures ideological legitimation of the idea that women are subordinate to men.¹⁴ Because different iterations of masculinity become hegemonic depending on social, cultural, historical, and even racial factors, hegemonic masculinity is often theorized as fluid and as a site of contest.¹⁵ The four films I examine in this article promulgate a rather traditional form of hegemonic masculinity, wherein young men engage in heterosexual intercourse in order to demonstrate their adherence to the hegemonic norm. Hegemonic masculinity, as formulated by the films, requires that male adolescents negate and/or repress any qualities they embody that could somehow characterize them as less than a man—showing emotion, caregiving, homosexual desire, or even lisps and other feminizing impairments, as I discuss below. Ultimately, however, the boys’ masculinity is shored up through the reinstatement of homosocial bonds and the creation of female-free, homosocial utopias comprised of the all-male group of friends privileged in the closing moments of each film. In this way, the films assert both heterosexuality and homosociality as key features of hegemonic masculinity.¹⁶

⁹ Catherine O’Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 23–44.

¹⁰ *Tre metri sopra il cielo*, dir. Luca Lucini (Rome: Warner Home Video, 2004), DVD.

¹¹ *Ho voglia di te*, dir. Luis Prieto (Rome: Cattleya, 2007), DVD.

¹² O’Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities*, 35.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁴ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19/6 (2005): 832.

¹⁵ See, for example, R. W. Connell’s *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 76; R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt’s “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” 832–33; and Michael S. Kimmel’s *The Gender of Desire: Essays on Male Sexuality* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 25–6.

¹⁶ Although homosociality, and the latent homoerotic or homosexual threat inherent to it, could be viewed as in opposition to heterosexuality, sexuality scholars argue that the two work hand-in-hand in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. For example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that “men’s homosocial and heterosexual desires need not be opposites but may be entirely complicit” (*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1992], 57). Jane Ward even goes so far as to propose that “homosexuality is an often invisible, but nonetheless vital ingredient—a constitutive element—of heterosexual masculinity” (*Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men* [New York: New York University Press, 2015], 5). Thus,

Intrinsic to this formulation of masculinity are compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity. Simply put, to be a man—to be masculine—is to have sexual desires for, and sexual intercourse with, women. For a long time, the construction of the heteronormative family—composed of a father, mother, and child(ren)—was considered the standard assertion of an adherence to heterosexuality. However, as is apparent in the films I discuss, the heteronormative family no longer represents a necessary aspiration espoused by young men. Instead, heteronormativity, as epitomized by the heteronormative family, is shown to be failing, with fathers deserting their wives and families, paying too much attention to their jobs, their mistresses, or both; being emotionally unavailable to their sons; or dictating every facet of their children's lives. By engaging in heterosexual intercourse, the young protagonists demonstrate their willingness to conform to society's norms. Yet, by subsequently breaking off their relationships with women and establishing homosocial utopias, they express their suspicion of, and dissatisfaction with, the standard heteronormative model.

That the young men take pleasure in—and indeed, seem to prefer—their relationships with their male friends suggests a significant alteration of the classical melodramatic denouement which so often privileges the heterosexual couple. Laura Mulvey, in her work on the genre, draws attention to the dust that melodramas raise, “the cloud of overdetermined irreconcilables which put up resistance to being neatly settled, in the last five minutes, into a happy end.”¹⁷ In conventional melodrama, these finales (whether happy or bittersweet) usually consist of marriage, a mother's self-sacrifice for the benefit of her child, a man's return to the homestead, or some miraculous rescue that saves a protagonist—male or female—from a brutal demise, with each of these ultimately ensuring the restoration and perpetuation of the heteronormative family. Linda Williams suggests that melodrama begins, and hopes to end, in a space of innocence characterized by the (heteronormative) home: “The narrative [...] ends happily if the protagonists can, in some way, return to this home, unhappily if they do not.”¹⁸ I argue, however, that this happy end is significantly lacking in the four Italian teen films I examine, where young men, disillusioned by their own failing families, reinforce homosocial bonds, despite their experimentations with, participation in, and apparent enjoyment of, heterosexual relationships and intercourse.

In order to demonstrate this tendency, I discuss four films, produced over the course of about a decade, which highlight this trend: Giovanni Veronesi's *Che ne sarà di noi* [*What Will Become of Us*],¹⁹ Francesca Archibugi's *Lezioni di volo* [*Flying Lessons*],²⁰ Francesco Falaschi's *Last Minute Marocco* [*Last Minute Morocco*],²¹ and Luigi Cecinelli's *Niente può fermarci* [*Nothing Can Stop Us*].²² In each of these films, an all-male group of friends flee Italy's confines, arriving in exotic locations—Greece, India, Morocco, and Spain respectively—in search of love, sex, and adventure. In these foreign spaces, the young male protagonists are free to explore their sexuality and, consequently, begin to construct adult identities. More importantly, they begin to establish and experiment with their masculinity by engaging in

neither the homosocial nor the homosexual are out of place in contemporary iterations of hegemonic (heterosexual) masculinity.

¹⁷ Laura Mulvey, “Notes on Sirk and Melodrama,” in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 40.

¹⁸ Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 28.

¹⁹ *Che ne sarà di noi*, dir. Giovanni Veronesi (Rome: Filmauro, 2004), DVD.

²⁰ *Lezioni di volo*, dir. Francesca Archibugi (Rome: 01 Distribution, 2007), DVD.

²¹ *Last Minute Marocco*, dir. Francesco Falaschi (Rome: 01 Distribution, 2007), DVD.

²² *Niente può fermarci*, dir. Luigi Cecinelli (Rome: 01 Distribution, 2013), DVD.

relationships with women. By fulfilling their erotic desires, male protagonists disavow their youthfulness and, in so doing, are eventually accepted into Italian normative society. In addition, heterosexual relations often provide the means by which these men may reconcile with their absent or inattentive fathers and ultimately demonstrate their adherence to hegemonic masculinity.

The films naturally divide into two categories: those taking place outside of Italy, though still within the European Union (*Che ne sarà di noi*, *Niente può fermarci*); and those set in more exotic locations, far from the comfort and safety of that confederation (*Lezioni di volo*, *Last Minute Marocco*). In the first two films, the young men share a liminal existence, inhabiting spaces untouched by tourists, such as deserted beaches, hard-to-access habitations, and rural farms lacking an internet connection. Furthermore, they participate in “youthful” activities: they drink, get high, and attend music festivals. Despite this context, the protagonists are seldom confronted with individuals that are coded—linguistically, racially, or visually—as explicitly “other.” Rather, the protagonists themselves are othered through a process of infantilization often foregrounded by the presence of a physical impairment (a lisp in the case of *Che ne sarà di noi*; rufophobia, narcolepsy, addiction, and Tourette’s Syndrome in the case of *Niente può fermarci*). These ailments must subsequently be overcome, a process that is accomplished, as the films suggest, by traveling abroad and, more importantly, through heterosexual couplings.

In the second group of films, otherness is foregrounded through the racialized bodies and linguistic differences of the inhabitants of India and Morocco, respectively. Faced with more radical images of otherness than those presented in the two previous films, the young men must come to terms with their privileged position—as white, heterosexual Italians—while simultaneously discovering their own (Italian) heritage. One of the characters in *Lezioni di volo*, Marco ‘Curry’ (Tom Kharumaty), represents an exception to this white privilege: born in India and adopted by an Italian family, his dark skin sets him apart from the other young men examined in this section. As I discuss below, Curry’s coming of age is also different from that of his (white) Italian counterpart, Apollonio ‘Pollo’ (Andrea Risi).

My claim is that a number of recent Italian teen films have constructed a male-only space through the journey abroad despite, as I have mentioned, the long-standing assumption that the genre is specifically directed at, and consumed by, adolescent girls. These four films displace the crisis of masculinity from “the thirty- or forty-something male professional” and nostalgic Italian men of contemporary Italian comedies and melodramas onto adolescent boys, creating what might in fact be a trans-generational male crisis.²³ These films open up new and exciting areas for the study of masculinities and melodrama within contemporary Italian cinema.

Growing out of Infantile Masculinity in *Che ne sarà di noi*

In her discussion of the contemporary Italian coming-of-age narrative, Ilaria Masenga defines the coming-of-age process as “a ‘delaying of age’, a postponement of adulthood (and a retreat into youth) as a reaction to an increasingly unstable and unwelcoming adult society.”²⁴ Many, if not

²³ O’Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities*, 15.

²⁴ Ilaria Masenga, “The ‘Delaying of Age’ Novel in Contemporary Italian Literature (1980–2011)” (Ph.D thesis, University of Exeter, 2013), 63. See also Jan Kozma’s take on arrested maturation in “Grow Up! Grazia Deledda’s Adult-Adolescent Males of Arrested Maturation,” *Annali d’Italianistica* 15 (1997): 329–40, available at <<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA182336889&v=2.1&u=colu44332&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=788e92dcf593891c27cbd9a544892cf6>> [accessed Nov. 18, 2017], and Michael S. Kimmel’s *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (New York: Harper, 2008).

all, of the adolescent protagonists in these four films exemplify just such a reaction: the young men are sons of emotionally distant fathers. Young men thus turn to their male friends for support and camaraderie, and it is in these groups that they begin to experiment with their own (adult) identities. Lacking any real adult male role models, however, the young men in these films struggle to develop—and conform to—traditional forms of masculinity, often becoming infantilized, at times through some physical impediment and at others through their romantic relationships with motherly women.

One such instance of this infantilization occurs with Matteo (Silvio Muccino) in *Che ne sarà di noi*. Despite attempts to assert his power over his girlfriend Carmen (Violante Placido), Matteo takes a passive position in their relationship. The voiceover when Matteo drops Carmen off at home clearly demonstrates his passivity. He fantasizes how she will stop, come back to him, kiss him, and say that she loves him, though he makes no attempt to go after her himself. On another occasion, Matteo grabs Carmen by the neck when she tries to rejoin her friends; she immediately rebukes him, however, telling him that he is “such a baby” when he lashes out in jealousy. Her remark makes literal Matteo’s infantilized masculinity. In yet another instance, Matteo refers to himself as a “ragazzino” [“little boy”]; and elsewhere he confesses to Carmen that he is a little kid in both age and physique. He even suggests that he has the lisp of a little kid. Matteo’s identity crisis is thus bound up with his sense of masculinity, both of which represent an almost insurmountable obstacle in his progression towards manhood.

Matteo’s friends Paolo (Giuseppe Sanfelice) and Manuel (Elio Germano) undergo a similar process of infantilization at the hands of their parents. After Paolo loses to his father in a game of squash, his father emphasizes his own masculinity, insinuating that he plays with his strength while his son plays with his brain. By drawing attention to his own virility and physical prowess, Paolo’s father diminishes his son, characterizing him as weaker. Paolo’s inability to look his father directly in the eye, his downcast glances, and his submissive posturing, here and throughout the film, further situate him as childish. Manuel’s mother’s behavior is equally degrading: after she orders him to help around the shop, Manuel lashes out in a childish manner, exclaiming that he doesn’t want to live like a dog, as his father had. By refusing to fill the void left by his deceased father, he exemplifies the “commonsense view” that “[y]oung people are believed to be biologically and emotionally immature and therefore unsuited to be admitted to society as full-fledged members.”²⁵ When Manuel’s mother slaps him and refers to him as a dandy, the viewer is reminded of his failure to conform to normative ideals of adult masculinity; indeed, the slap marks Manuel as a child being chastised by his mother.

As an attempted rebellion against this infantilization, the boys embark on a formative journey to determine their identity and desires. While the main goal of the boys’ travel is to establish their masculinity and to develop their own subjectivity, self-discovery is not the sole impetus for their trip. John Stephens has observed that teen films focus on the representation of subjectivity and inter-relationality as well as the ways in which young adults lose, or are failed by, their families.²⁶ The latter concept is central to the narrative of *Che ne sarà di noi*: Manuel’s father died of cancer; Paolo’s father, though still alive, fails to take on the role of the “good” father, nurturer, and guide. Instead, he micromanages his son’s future, depriving Paolo of agency. Thus, Paolo’s father is also an ineffective parent. Matteo’s father, by abandoning his

²⁵ James Côté and Anton Allahar, *Generation on Hold: Coming of Age in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), xii.

²⁶ John Stephens, “‘I’ll Never Be the Same After That Summer’: From Abjection to Subjective Agency in Teen Films,” in *Youth Cultures: Texts, Images, and Identities*, ed. Kerry Mallan and Sharyn Pearce (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 124.

wife and son to live with his girlfriend, is equally absent from his son's life. This moment of drastic change in the composition of Matteo's familial unit functions as a traumatic event, provoking Matteo's crisis of identity. Even when Matteo pleads with his father to come home, if only to get his mother to stop crying, his father refuses. A second objective of the boys' voyage, then, is to come to terms with this loss, to become men in their own right so that they can replace the missing—or ineffective—patriarch.

After their arrival in Santorini, each boy pairs off: Matteo finds Carmen and tries to convince her that she loves him; Paolo develops an interest in Bea (Valeria Solarino), a mysterious tourist he meets on the ferry and subsequently courts; and Manuel develops a bond with a stray dog that follows him around. These relationships have a significant effect on the young men and condition their maturation. The pregnant Bea, for example, helps Paolo become a caring and nurturing father figure, stepping in for her baby's absent father. The dog that follows Manuel recalls the earlier comment he made to his mother and, at the same time, functions as a haunting reminder of what Manuel does not want to become. The apparent link between dog and father is made obvious when the animal is beaten by a group of men and Manuel comes to its defense. By rushing to the animal's aid, he takes on the role of protector, a trait that his father did not exemplify. The young men's relationships thus expose parental lack and are the impetus for developing a masculinity that is counter to that embodied by their fathers.

Through a shared voiceover that effectively signals the transition to adulthood, Paolo, Manuel, and Matteo express their desires for the future. In so doing, they also draw attention to the kind of men they do not want to become. Paolo's wish to control his life eventually finds fulfillment with his decision to go to Turkey with Bea. The concern that Paolo shows for Bea's well-being and that of her unborn child opposes the harsh treatment exemplified by his father. Although Paolo's tendencies towards caregiving could be viewed as feminizing and therefore not masculine, they instead situate him as somehow manlier than his domineering father. Manuel, during his own section, reiterates his disdain at the prospect of becoming like his father. After Manuel sacrifices his own well-being for that of the dog, however, he changes his mind, having realized the time and effort his father spent to provide for his family. While his father was clearly not nurturing in the most traditional sense, Manuel comes to understand his father's masculinity as connected to his breadwinning. When Manuel phones his mother to inquire about the store, we get the sense that he can now return home to take on his father's familial responsibilities, having accepted this new—for him—type of masculinity.

Matteo, by contrast, wants to wake up the next day as a thirty-year-old to see what will have become of him, Paolo, and Manuel in the future. Matteo's desire could be understood as a rather juvenile dream: he wishes to be older so that Carmen will date him. However, his comment becomes more meaningful when taken in conjunction with the aspirations of Paolo and Manuel. Their expressions function as a disavowal of their misconceived notions of, and assumptions about, masculinity as embodied by their fathers. On the one hand, Matteo's wish is not simply to be an adult, but to *not* be a child. On the other hand, Matteo, like Paolo, refuses to become like his father, who is disloyal to his family and unfaithful to his marriage vows. In the end, this is the reason why Matteo cannot settle for Carmen even when she reciprocates his love, seeing in her a female version of his father.

The shared voiceover is significant in that it forges a homosocial bond that excludes Carmen altogether while it unites the young men, making collective their individual quests to find their own identities and develop their own versions of masculinity. While Matteo does have heterosexual intercourse with Carmen, and thus participates—albeit temporarily—in a form of heteronormativity, the relationship between the two falters and then fails. Therefore, unlike traditional melodramas and romantic comedies, which end happily with the perpetuation of

heteronormativity through the privileging of the heterosexual (married) couple, *Che ne sarà di noi* disallows a similar felicitous finale. Instead, it proposes a new kind of happy ending that centralizes the homosocial couple of Manuel and Matteo as they return home to Italy. At the same time, this new, male-only happy ending calls into question the gendered paradigm of teen film and melodrama as inherently feminine.

Re-Enabling Disabled Masculinity in *Niente può fermarci*

Whether or not heterosexual sex actually takes place seems irrelevant in these films, as long as the young men abandon their female love interests by the end of the film and return to each other. While sexual intercourse inhabits a central position within the narratives of all four films, it is most ubiquitous, and is treated most comically, in Luigi Cecinelli's *Niente può fermarci*. The film shares common themes with Paul Weitz's iconic iteration on coming of age in the United States, *American Pie*,²⁷ which also follows a group of male adolescents who attempt to lose their virginity as an essential step in the transition to adulthood. These films adhere to the conventions of what John Troyer and Chani Marchiselli have termed "dude cinema," in that "the new dude's [i.e. the protagonists'] subjective awakening always takes the form of an epic quest, the pursuit of some Holy Grail," exemplified here by the first intimate liaison with the opposite sex.²⁸ Due to its primary focus on the male friendship, the dude movie is "fraught with homosocial anxieties: its heroes are confused adolescent homophobes, frightened of, yet also bent on escaping, paternal controls and fixated on the talismanic bodies of women."²⁹ The looming threat of erotic encounters between men is often made apparent in these films through the inquiry as to whether or not the young men are gay. Heterosexual couplings therefore function as a means of staving off this threat by shoring up hegemonic masculinity and reinforcing heteronormativity. At the same time, the disallowance, often on the part of young women, of the heterosexual relationship results in new approaches to hegemonic masculinity.

Despite the similarities between these two films, *Niente può fermarci* complicates the somewhat simplistic coming-of-age narrative presented in *American Pie*. Unlike their American compatriots, who whet their sexual appetites more or less from the comfort of their own homes, the Italian teenagers in *Niente può fermarci* seek sexual fulfillment abroad, traveling to Ibiza in search of recreation and copulation. The protagonists of Cecinelli's film must not only grapple with the difficulties of adolescence itself, but they must also do so as impaired individuals whose health challenges position them on the margins. As the viewer discovers through the film's opening sequence, each of the boys suffers from some kind of disability: Leonardo (Federico Costantini) has ruphobia, the fear of dirt and uncleanness; Mattia (Guglielmo Amendola) has narcolepsy; Augusto (Vittorio Emanuele Propizio) has an internet addiction (impulse control disorder); and Guglielmo (Vincenzo Alfieri) has Tourette's Syndrome. As disabled adolescents, then, the group inhabits a position of double marginalization vis-a-vis normative Italian society.

Leo, Mattia, Augusto, and Guglielmo meet for the first time at Villa Angelika, a treatment and recovery clinic. They are united by a common bond: their parents have placed them in the facility in hopes that the boys will be cured of their maladies and, as a result, will—like their non-impaired peers—grow into adulthood as functioning subjects. James Côté and Anton

²⁷ *American Pie*, dir. Paul Weitz (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 1999), DVD.

²⁸ John Troyer and Chani Marchiselli, "Slack, Slacker, Slackest: Homosocial Bonding Practices in Contemporary Dude Cinema," in *Where the Boys Are: Cinemas of Masculinity and Youth*, ed. Murray Pomerance and Frances K. Gateward (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 265.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 267.

Allahar insist that a necessary step in that transformative process is developing appropriate biological and emotional maturity; those who fail to accept this necessary part of the life cycle, they argue, indicates that “there must be something wrong with them.”³⁰ Not only do these adolescents already have “something [biologically] wrong with them”—that is, their impairment—but their impairments have kept them from establishing the emotional maturity expected for adulthood. In this way, the young men are doubly disapproved of by society and it is this disapproval that causes their parents’ concern. The outsourcing of the young men’s care to an institution underlines a parental lack, that is, that the adults are unable, unwilling, or perhaps too ashamed to appropriately nurture their children. The boys’ impairments represent a physical manifestation of that parental deficiency.

None of the parents, moreover, appear to be married, nor do they adhere to a normative vision of the family. The forfeiture of conventional parentage and parental responsibilities, I argue, creates an identity crisis within the young men who subsequently escape from Villa Angelika, an act that signals the commencement of their coming-of-age journey. *Niente può fermarci* legitimates Stephen’s claim that because adults are too realistic, idealistic-minded teens often attempt to avoid the constraints of adulthood.³¹ Indeed, only after his father fails to accept him as he is (i.e. impaired) does Guglielmo agree to Mattia’s proposal to flee the country. In their parents’ eyes, the boys must overcome their disabilities in order to effectively transition from adolescence to adulthood. However, it is only by demonstrating their masculinity through heterosexual couplings that the boys ultimately succeed in overcoming their impairments and then integrate into normative society.

As these complex interactions suggest, masculinity, sexuality, and (dis)ability are problematically intertwined. R. W. Connell asserts that “[t]rue masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies—to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body.”³² What happens to masculinity, then, if the male body is also a disabled one? Ronald Berger has argued that disabled masculinity is feminized and inherently in crisis, whereas Tom Shakespeare observes that the disabled are infantilized, denied agency, and deemed unworthy as sexual subjects.³³ In this way, Leo, Mattia, Augusto and Guglielmo are similar to Matteo from *Che ne sarà di noi* in that, like him, they suffer—albeit through no choice of their own—from an infantilized masculinity, an effect of their impairments. For disabled men, masculinity and sexuality are barriers that must be overcome in order to successfully navigate the transition from adolescence to adulthood. In other words, by overcoming their impairments, the boys can engage in heterosexuality which in turn allows them to adhere to hegemonic masculinity and subsequently be accepted into normative society.

Niente può fermarci foregrounds the boys’ sexual inadequacies, positioning them as virgins or sexually inexperienced. Travel is a means for them to expunge this marker of naivety. Due to their impairments, the boys see sexual pleasure as somehow unattainable. The decision to travel to Ibiza therefore represents a first step towards achieving sexual pleasure. In fleeing from both the medical clinic and their parents, the young men assert their agency and, by so doing, begin to take an active role in their own future, a trait that exemplifies masculine ideals.

³⁰ Côté and Allahar, *Generation on Hold*, XII.

³¹ Stephens, “I’ll Never Be the Same,” 134.

³² R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 45.

³³ Ronald J. Berger, *Introducing Disability Studies* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013), 37; Tom Shakespeare, “Power and Prejudice: Issues of Gender, Sexuality, and Disability,” in *Disability and Society: Emerging Issues and Insights*, ed. Len Barton (New York: Longman Publishing, 1996), 192.

The journey as well as the development of the boys' masculinity culminate at the music festival in Ibiza. Here, Leo, Mattia, Augusto, and Guglielmo break down the barriers of their disabilities, showing their true selves to the youthful masses attending the festival. During an awkward silence caused by Guglielmo's clumsiness, he lets fly an expletive-filled outburst onstage. His father is quick to cheer him on, with the crowd soon following suit. As the music starts back up, Guglielmo begins to sing along—in his non-native English no less—as two scantily clad women dance beside him. He suffers no other outbursts, the music having apparently cured his ailment, however temporary this remedy may be. As Guglielmo's flawless performance makes clear, the young men have learned how to make their own choices, and their decisions thus far have led them towards heterosexual relationships—manifested in this instance by Mattia's interaction with the attractive DJ Helen Reed (Carolina Crescentini) and Guglielmo's dance with the two women onstage. As Robert McRuer notes “compulsory heterosexuality is intertwined with compulsory able-bodiedness; both systems work to (re)produce the able body and heterosexuality.”³⁴ What is most worrisome to the young men's parents is that their children's disabilities might keep them from conforming to heterosexual norms, that is, that they might never lose their virginity and consequently never reproduce. By babying their children, instead of letting the boys be boys, the parents have become an additional obstacle in the development of their sons' masculinity.

The boys' impairments likewise impede their access to (hetero)sexual intercourse, the primary manifestation of hegemonic masculinity. According to Cynthia Barounis, an active voice in disability studies, in a narrative like *Niente può fermarci*, “the [impairment] provides the opportunity for the reassertion of masculinity, but only insofar as [impairment] is made into the obstacle which the subject must overcome in order to access normative categories of gender and sexuality.”³⁵ Therefore, by engaging in sex, the young men conquer their disability and, as a consequence, reassert their masculinity. This is apparent in Leo's interactions with Regina when, in response to his confession of fear regarding sexual intercourse, she orders him to “sii uomo” [“be a man”]. Facing that fear and overcoming his impairment, then, is the means through which Leo can indeed become a man. However, Leo can only demonstrate his masculinity by hugging and subsequently coupling with Regina, an act likewise requiring the suppression of his disability.

Having gained control over their impairments and fulfilled their sexual desires, thereby asserting their masculinity, the boys return home as men. When Leo, Mattia, Augusto, and Guglielmo attend a wedding in the film's final moments, the youths manifest no signs of ever having suffered from any disability. Considering Mark Sherry's argument that “disability is often used as a metaphor for the problems experienced by a nation,” then, what *Niente può fermarci* intimates is that the crisis of masculinity currently taking place in Italy, like the boys' impairments, can be cured through participation in heteronormativity.³⁶ The happy ending of heterosexual marriage, despite its obvious presence in the wedding reception, is disallowed for the four protagonists, who do not get married themselves. Instead, the young men happily place arms on shoulders and fall into a pool, a symbolic christening of their newly constructed all-male utopia.

³⁴ Robert McRuer, “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2010), 389.

³⁵ Cynthia Barounis, “Crippling Heterosexuality, Queering Able-Bodiedness: *Murderball*, *Brokeback Mountain* and the Contested Masculine Body,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Davis, 446.

³⁶ Mark Sherry, “(Post)colonizing Disability,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Davis, 95.

Learning Masculinity and Ethnicity in *Lezioni di volo*

The films under scrutiny thus far suppress images of cultural difference due to their setting within the European Union, where the protagonists encounter bodies that, for the most part, resemble their own. Because these films are organized around the coming-of-age of a group of white, heterosexual boys, little attention is given to the individuals populating the foreign countries they visit. When foreigners are present in these two films, it is usually for comic effect—as with the Greek landlady in *Che ne sarà di noi*, with her broken Italian and eccentric rental rules—or because they play an important role in one of the boys' coming-of-age process, as is the case of Monique (Anna Dalton), the French girl whom Augusto connects with along the journey. Ai (Jun Ichikawa), the Asian girl with whom Guglielmo copulates, is an exception to this suppressed alterity, as she is primarily coded as “other” through the pair's use of English as the *lingua franca*, and not necessarily by her cultural background. In this way, *Che ne sarà di noi* and *Niente può fermarci* disregard questions of race and ethnicity.

In opposition to the previous two films, *Lezioni di volo* and *Last Minute Marocco* draw attention to issues of race, ethnicity, and cultural belonging by constructing narratives that, as Berghahn argues, “frequently centre on pivotal moments in which the adolescent protagonist makes a choice between two cultures that will determine his or her adult identity.”³⁷ *Lezioni di volo* follows the friendship of Apollonio, “Pollo,” an Italian adolescent of a bourgeois family, and Marco, “Curry,” a boy born in India who was adopted (we assume as a child) and raised by a wealthy Italian family. The two boys travel to India with the declared intention of finding themselves. For Pollo, this journey functions as a requisite step towards adulthood and grants him the possibility to experiment with his sexuality and masculinity through his relationship with Chiara (Giovanna Mezzogiorno), an Italian doctor living and working in India as part of the organization *Medecins sans frontières* (Doctors Without Borders). While the voyage is certainly an essential rite of passage for Curry to enter normative Italian society, his journey is also technically a return home. Thus, Curry faces the challenging task of simultaneously constructing his identity vis-a-vis his ancestral ties to India as well as in relation to Italy. Thus, what is at stake in Pollo's self-discovery is sexual difference and appropriate gender and sexual norms. Curry's coming of age, on the other hand, revolves around racial and cultural difference and learning how to bridge the gap between the two cultures he embodies.

In India, Curry is clearly aligned with the native population through his racialized body, here employed as “a visual and narrative stratagem to foreground questions of cultural, gender, and sexual identity.”³⁸ For example, patrons tip him, thinking him a hotel worker when he holds the door for them out of courtesy. The scene is comic, yet, the gesture codes Curry as different from Pollo. Earlier, during a night spent at an abandoned train-station-turned-hostel, Curry observes one of the squatters and comments, “mi assomiglia!” [“He looks like me!”]. The camera cuts to reveal an elderly balding man, someone with whom Curry shares no physical similarity other than the pigment of his skin. Racial difference is once again foregrounded when Curry is sent away to join the crowds of indigenous people protesting outside their hotel while Pollo is ushered safely inside.

³⁷ Daniela Berghahn, “Coming of Age in ‘the Hood’: The Diasporic Youth Film and Questions of Genre,” in *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 240.

³⁸ Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg, “Introduction,” in *European Cinema in Motion*, ed. Berghahn and Sternberg, 8.

This separation causes an initial interruption of the homosocial bond; Pollo soon falls ill and seems pale, emaciated, and feeble. Although he is heartened somewhat by Chiara and the discovery that she is Italian, he is happiest when he is reunited with his best friend. Upon glimpsing Pollo in his sickbed, Curry runs to his friend, jumps into his bed, and gives him a full-body embrace, a gesture imbued with homoeroticism. In keeping with the failed male love story in the bromantic comedy, as theorized by Tania Modleski, in an effort to subvert the threat of homosexuality, the boys must displace their desire onto other objects.³⁹ While Pollo focuses on developing his relationship with Chiara, Curry diverts his attention to discovering his Indian heritage through his relationship with Apu and his pregnant, teenage wife.

Eventually, Chiara takes Pollo and Curry with her to the desert village where she works. Situated at a distance from the nearest city of Jodhpur, the small settlement is a liminal space. This peripheral location is crucial to the coming-of-age narrative as it represents “il luogo in cui si interrompono le relazioni sociali normali, in cui la morte simbolica degli iniziandi si riflette sulla sospensione delle leggi sociali che normano la vita della comunità, al punto che il giovane novizio può «giocare» liberamente con gli elementi antistrutturali che segnano i fenomeni liminali” [“the space in which normative social relations are interrupted, in which the symbolic death of the initiates is implied by the suspension of normative social laws of the community, [such] that the young novice can freely ‘play’ with the antistructural elements that mark the liminal phenomenon”].⁴⁰ One such suspension of normative social relations is had in what could be considered an erotic encounter between Chiara and Pollo. With her back to the boy, Chiara removes her clothes, much as a mother might in the presence of a young child. Pollo’s focus on Chiara’s foot as he removes her sock, and on the scar on Chiara’s back, recalls the child’s fetishization of parts of the mother’s body. Pollo’s willingness to perform chores around the clinic, coupled with his inability to start the crank generator, further characterizes him as childish and emphasizes his lack of masculinity. Thus, like the young men in the other films, Pollo, too, is infantilized and feminized.

Although Pollo does not copulate with Chiara in this instance, he is eventually successful in his sexual conquest of her and it is the consummation of their coupling that another suspension of normative social relations occurs. Whereas the age difference between Chiara and Pollo might be considered taboo in normative society, it appears acceptable in this marginal existence. And while Chiara likely would not cede to the sexual advances of someone of Pollo’s age and stature in normative society, she seems to only half-heartedly resist him here. Pollo’s erotic encounter with Chiara allows him to assert, at least to some extent, his dominance and demonstrate his masculinity. Once intercourse occurs, however, Pollo’s masculinity is no longer contingent on his relationship with Chiara and he eventually reunites her with her husband, the (assumed) biological father to her unborn child. By so doing, Pollo helps perpetuate the heteronormative family, here—as elsewhere—represented by father, mother, and child.

Whereas Pollo’s coming of age facilitates heteronormativity, Curry’s maturation is facilitated by heteronormativity, specifically the heteronormative couple composed of Apu and his young wife, Tara (Nirmala Knichi). As a self-proclaimed Indian orphan, Curry is primarily concerned with understanding his roots and with comprehending where he fits in as a foreigner in Italian society. By traveling to India, Curry attempts to come to terms with his dual identity by interrogating what it means to be Italian, yet of Indian descent. He accomplishes this by seeking out his biological mother and finding his sister. His journey therefore functions as a type of racial

³⁹ Tania Modleski, “An Affair to Forget: Melancholia in Bromantic Comedy,” *Camera Obscura* 29/2 (2014): 134.

⁴⁰ Pierangelo Barone, *Traiettorie impercettibili. Rappresentazioni dell’adolescenza e itinerari di prevenzione* (Milan: Guerini Studio, 2005), 24.

and ethnic mirror stage in which he rather literally sees himself—as I have previously noted—in the natives’ faces and subsequently situates himself in relation to an Other, embodied by Pollo.

Lezioni di volo obsessively returns to this question of racial difference through a series of separations and reunifications that occur between Pollo and Curry. Not only are they physically separated early on in the film, but they are also separated by their various pursuits once in the Indian village. Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg note a certain link between maturation and the culture with which adolescents identify;⁴¹ by choosing Chiara, and the Italian-ness she embodies, Pollo distances himself from India and from Curry; by identifying with Apu and his wife, and sympathizing with their plight, Curry likewise accepts his Indian heritage more fully, casting aside, at least in part, his cultural upbringing. When Curry finally discovers his sister, and symbolically—and later, legally—adopts her into his Italian family, Curry stands in as a father figure for her. Akin to Pollo’s sexual encounter with Chiara, this moment functions as a demonstration of Curry’s masculinity and allows him to reconcile his Indian heritage with his Italian identity.

The boys’ absence from home also exposes the failures of parental relationships and the crumbling rapports between husbands and wives. Although both sets of parents permit their children to travel abroad, neither couple understands the boys’ motivations for doing so. As with all the parents represented in the films discussed here, Pollo’s and Curry’s progenitors give their children either too much or too little attention. On the one hand, Curry’s mother, like Paolo’s father in *Che ne sarà di noi*, forces her own interests onto her son to such a degree that she becomes overbearing rather than supportive. Pollo’s father, on the other hand, pays his son and his wife too little attention, focusing his efforts on his religion and his business rather than on his family. Instead of helping their children progress along the path to adulthood, the parents represent an obstacle to be overcome, as was the case with *Niente può fermarci*.

The parental crisis in *Lezioni di volo*, however, is subtler than in the other films. Here, the family unit is implicitly critiqued and shown to be lacking. Indeed, the signs revealing the destruction of familial relationships are obfuscated: a bruise around Pollo’s mother’s eye—with the insinuation that her husband struck her—hidden beneath a pair of sunglasses; an intimate dinner with a female colleague, which suggests an impending affair on the part of Curry’s father. It is the sons’ attainment of masculinity, however, which allows them to be reconciled with their fathers, and husbands to reconcile with their wives. After Pollo decides to reunite Chiara with her husband, an act requiring a measure of maturity, his father in a hospital in Italy momentarily regains consciousness and expresses concern about his son’s well-being for the first time in the film. His wife rushes to his side, forgetting any violence he may have inflicted upon her. In a similar vein, Curry’s father receives a phone call from his son—another first—informing him of his son’s decision to find his biological mother. Curry instructs his father to pass the news on to his mother, thus encouraging his parents’ coming back together. Curry’s phone call home, then, both accentuates and provides the remedy for the familial crisis at the core of his personal identity crisis. Curry’s successful navigation of adolescence is projected onto his father and reinscribes the homosocial bond between the two.

The final moments of *Lezioni di volo* privilege another homosocial bond, that between Pollo and Curry. Standing on the terrace of an apartment building, the two take turns spitting seeds onto pedestrians below. In both the beginning of the film and here, their victims are female: first, a busty blonde woman who somewhat resembles Pollo’s own mother and, in the end, Curry’s mother and sister. The boys thus forge their bond at the expense of women, particularly the

⁴¹ Berghahn and Sternberg, “Introduction,” 10.

maternal figures in their lives. And although the heteronormative is present throughout the final sequence through images of Chiara and her baby boy, it is ultimately the male-male relationship which is privileged. As in the other three films, although the young men return home, to the classical space of melodramatic innocence, they do not find a heteronormative family—or even the possibility of one—waiting for them there. Instead, the boys find happiness in the arms of their male cohort.

Trans-Generational Maturation in *Last Minute Marocco*

“Congratulations, Dad.” These two words, scrawled on a scrap of paper, exemplify the relationship between father, Sergio (Valerio Mastandrea), and son, Valerio (Daniele De Angelis), who adopt this manner of communication in place of face-to-face conversations. Valerio’s relationship with his mother, Valeria (Maria Grazia Cucinotta)—whose name explicitly links her to her son—is equally problematic. Valerio’s ringtone for his mother (a tune reminiscent of the *Jaws* soundtrack), together with the picture of a shark baring its teeth and the name “DANGER!” immediately suggest that Valerio is overwhelmed by her unbearable coddling. Scenes such as these intimate the reasons for Valerio’s decision to journey abroad and also imply that the parents’ relationship is in crisis.

The heteronormative family, once united, is now in shambles: Sergio and Valeria are separated—if not divorced—and constantly blame each other for their destroyed marriage. Sergio’s failure to keep his family together situates him as lacking masculinity, a conclusion confirmed by his mistress, who tells him “non sai nemmeno scopare” [“you don’t even know how to shag”]! The journey to Morocco, undertaken by both father and son, therefore functions as a moment of what Gaoheng Zhang refers to as “masculine marginalization,” in that neither male adheres to ideal hegemonic masculinity and therefore both inhabit the peripheries of normative society.⁴² Sergio’s ill-conceived obsession with constructing windmills in Italy, reminiscent of Don Quixote, positions him on the margins. Because the voyage represents the possibility of engaging in (sexual) conquests for both Sergio and Valerio, the two become complicit in their efforts to (re)attain appropriate levels of masculinity. By so doing, the two create an “extensive homosocial collaboration” in an effort to eventually reestablish “the patriarchal society and derive benefit from it.”⁴³ This homosocial bond, forged despite their geographical and temporal separation, grants them the opportunity to (re-)learn appropriate sexual norms and (re-)discover their individual agency, both essential traits for adulthood.

On the ferry to Morocco, Valerio takes a liking to Jasmina (Esther Elisha). As a daughter of a first-generation Moroccan immigrant to Italy, she embodies both sexual and racial difference and almost immediately becomes Valerio’s object of sexual desire. The exotic setting of the journey emphasizes Jasmina as Other, and causes Valerio, like the other adolescents under discussion in this article, to reflect on his native culture.⁴⁴ Thus, when Valerio discovers that Jasmina’s father has promised her in an arranged marriage, he demonstrates his masculinity by attempting to colonize her, imposing his cultural mores upon her. He insists that Jasmina join the boys on their trip to Essaouira, confident that by doing so, he will save her from her father—the

⁴² Gaoheng Zhang, “Comedy Film and Immigration to Italy: Reading Masculinity, Hybridity, and Satire in *Lezioni di cioccolato* (2007), *Questa note è ancora nostra* (2008), and *Into Paradiso* (2010),” in *The Cinemas of Italian Migration: European and Transatlantic Narratives*, ed. Sabine Schrader and Daniel Winkler (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 267.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Andrea Corrado and Igor Mariottini, *Cinema e autori sulle tracce delle migrazioni* (Rome: Ediesse, 2013), 82.

stereotypical embodiment of third-world “backwardness”—and, at the same time, potentially fulfill his desire for sexual conquest.

Last Minute Marocco significantly diverges from the narrative structure of the previous films I have discussed, however, in that heterosexual intercourse never occurs for Valerio. Although he accompanies Jasmina throughout the entirety of the film, their romance never develops beyond intimate conversations, shared scooter rides, and late-night partying. Nevertheless, her abiding presence centralizes heterosexuality by leaving open the possibility of engaging in sexual intercourse. In addition, the film insinuates the successful sexual conquests carried out by Valerio’s friends, Giacomo (Lorenzo Balducci) and Andrea (Nicolas Vaporidis): back aboard the ferry heading home, the former is seen kissing a girl, and the latter shows the others a picture of the girl he apparently bedded. Valerio’s masculinity is not contingent upon having sex, however, but on “saving” Jasmina from marriage, arranged or otherwise.

Although she does not copulate with Valerio, Jasmina has a key role in his developing masculinity. More than once during his journey, Valerio draws attention to his ineffective parents, confessing to Jasmina that his mother is oppressive and his father is more like a (younger) brother. For him, the severance of parental and nuptial bonds, and the failure of relationships between parents and son and between husband and wife, represents the collapse of heteronormativity. In Valerio’s eyes, Jasmina’s parents represent another negative kind of heteronormativity, one that forces a daughter into an arranged matrimony, evidently void of any emotional connection or affect. However, Jasmina pushes against the entrenched patriarchal structure embodied by her father by convincing him to allow her to pursue her relationship with her Italian boyfriend. By so doing, she inadvertently shows Valerio that he does not have to end up like his parents and that he can take control of his own future. By beginning his journey abroad, he starts to accomplish this; by assisting Jasmina in standing up to her father, he moves closer to attaining ideal masculinity; by accepting the punishment for “kidnapping” Jasmina—a punch from his friend Samir (Jamil Hammoudi)—, he becomes a man.

Returning briefly to Sergio and his journey, it is notable that, in opposition to his son, he does engage in heterosexual intercourse. Indeed, his is the only explicit instance of an erotic encounter in the entire film. Although at the beginning of his voyage abroad he evinces an infantilized masculinity, through his relationship with the exotic Tamu (Kesia Elwin), he is able to recuperate his lost masculinity. When Sergio eventually finds his son, Valerio suggests that his father finally did something “da padre” [“fatherly”], a conciliatory remark that valorizes Sergio’s quest to reassert his masculinity. Because Sergio’s identity was initially ambiguous (father or brother?), he was unable to guide his son through the process of self-discovery required to construct an identity and become a functioning adult male subject.⁴⁵ Such ambiguity creates a dual crisis, glimpsed in both adults and their offspring. However, what *Last Minute Marocco* makes clear is that coming of age abroad remains a strictly male endeavor. Although *Last Minute Marocco* allows the heterosexual coupling between Sergio and Tamu, it disallows any romantic satisfaction for Valerio. Instead, it is the reconnection between father and son, as well as the reunion of Valerio with his group of male friends, that marks the journey to Morocco as a success, thus situating the homosocial as the site of the happy ending.

⁴⁵ Côté and Allahar, *Generation on Hold*, 71.

Conclusion: Italian Teen Film as National Cinema?

In their assessment of adolescence, Kerry Mallan and Sharyn Pearce assert that “youth-centered images and narratives open up spaces of possibility for young people in their efforts to give expression to the meaning of their lives—their desires, dreams, and fears.”⁴⁶ For the young Italian men that populate the films under consideration in this essay, their desires and fears are the same: in the boys’ decisions to flee adult responsibilities by traveling abroad, they demonstrate their anxieties regarding adulthood; at the same time, the voyage qualifies them for, and ultimately pushes them towards, acceptance into normative society. And normative society seems more than willing to welcome them, even despite their evident disavowal of heteronormativity and subsequent construction of homosocial utopias. That these films privilege the all-male groups of friends suggests a new formulation of the traditional happy ending, one that insists on the reinforcement of homosocial bonds and simultaneous disavowal of heterosexual coupledness and the heteronormative family.

In his work on national cinema, Higson argues that generic repetition and reiteration are crucial to the production and promulgation of a cultural identity.⁴⁷ The repetitive images of Italian, middle-class, (primarily) white adolescent males in crisis draw attention to how this particular cultural identity is privileged in Italian teen film. Indeed, films such as those discussed here depict teenaged boys as a community defined by fears, anxieties, pleasures, and desires. Their mode of address thus invites this diverse group of individuals “to recognize themselves as a singular body with a common culture, and to oppose themselves to other cultures and communities.”⁴⁸ By so doing, such films construct a homosocial bond which transcends a singular, set identity. The protagonists’ individual journeys abroad become a unifying gesture that marks their shared undertaking of transitioning from adolescence to proper adulthood. The voyage, then, functions as a means of negotiating childish, feminized, or yet-to-be-attained masculinity and, at the same time, presents innovative examples of what adherence to hegemonic masculine norms might look like in the Italian coming-of-age process.

The emergence of male-centric coming-of-age narratives and the reformulation of the traditional happy ending that characterize these Italian teen films are phenomena requiring further attention. What Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie observe about national cinema could just as easily apply to genre films: as with all genre films, we must be attuned “not only to the expressive dimensions of [genre] films, but to what these films and their categorization as elements of a [particular genre] may elide or strategically repress.”⁴⁹ In the films under scrutiny in this essay, that which is clearly yet strategically ignored is precisely the maturation of young women.⁵⁰ Within this recent trend of films, girls and women are confined to the margins. Though they facilitate their male counterparts’ coming of age, they are destined, in many cases, to a state

⁴⁶ Kerry Mallan and Sharyn Pearce, “Introduction: Tales of Youth in Postmodern Culture,” in *Youth Cultures*, ed. Mallan and Pearce, XII.

⁴⁷ Andrew Higson. *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁹ Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie, “Introduction,” in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

⁵⁰ In addition to the films highlighted by Dana Renga in “Italian Teen Film and the Female Auteur,” Danielle Hipkins analyzes *Dillo con parole mie [Ginger and Cinnamon]* (dir. Daniele Luchetti [New York: Film Movememnt], 2003, DVD), another film featuring female coming-of-age in “‘Figlie di papà’?: Adolescent Girls Between the Incest Motif and Female Friendship in Contemporary Italian Film Comedy,” *The Italianist* 35/2 (2015): 248–71.

of limbo. The male adolescents of these films use women strategically, calling on them to make them men—often, though not solely, through sexual intercourse—before casting them aside on their way to adulthood. The women are thus an essential part of the narratives and are, in this way, made highly visible in these filmic texts. In other words, women are rather contradictorily both central yet peripheral, both everywhere and nowhere in Italian teen film. This apparent conflict leaves many questions about whether Italian teen film should continue to be considered, as I mention above, a genre primarily addressed to, and consumed by, young women.

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- Che ne sarà di noi*. Directed by Giovanni Veronesi. 2004.
- Clueless*. Directed by Amy Heckerling. 1995.

Come tu mi vuoi. Directed by Volfango De Biasi. 2007.
Dillo con parole mie. Directed by Daniele Luchetti. 2003.
Un giorno speciale. Directed by Francesca Comencini. 2012.
Heathers. Directed by Michael Lehmann. 1988.
Ho voglia di te. Directed by Luis Prieto. 2007.
Last Minute Marocco. Directed by Francesco Falaschi. 2007.
Lezioni di volo. Directed by Francesca Archibugi. 2007.
Niente può fermarci. Directed by Luigi Cecinelli. 2013.
Tre metri sopra il cielo. Directed by Luca Lucini. 2004.