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Leading Ladies?: Feminism and the Hollywood New Wave

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My favorite film memories were never the large blockbusters of my childhood in the 1990s. Action films with special effects never appealed to me; they always seemed too staged. My favorite films were always those that taught me something, entertained me with stories, characters, and plotlines instead of how stylized a killing sequence could be. The era of filmmaking that always fascinated me was the 1970s in America, particularly the films known as part of the Hollywood New Wave. I never lived through the Vietnam War, civil rights movement, women's liberation, and all the social tumult that came in the 1960s and 1970s. However, I studied these films in college courses and viewed many on my own, finding that their stories really meant something to me, even if I was viewing them forty odd years after they had debuted at the box office. My birth coincided with the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, during a time of relative social peace and economic prosperity. Yet these stories still spoke to me in the 21st century as stories about people that transcended time and place.

I wanted to explore the Hollywood New Wave in a different way than the literature I had previously read on the subject, and explore the limited role of women in the filmmaking process as well as the limited development of realistic stories about women in this period. I viewed the documentary *A Decade under the Influence*, which is about the Hollywood New Wave and it had a section that discussed women's roles in film and the limitations society put on those roles. The treatment of women in this period of filmmaking in regard to storylines usually put the female character in a subservient role to the male character. Feminist film criticism arose during this period because of the women's liberation movement, and sought to show how male dominated Hollywood filmmaking really was, in regards to the concept of the "male gaze," which is the way men objectify women onscreen to be unrealistic and false representations.

I sought out two examples of films that explore the roles of women beyond the traditional wife, mother or sex object motifs and show female characters can be just as complex as male characters. The first example film I chose was *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), specifically for its characterization of Bonnie Parker, the female lead role. I found this female character as an exception to the rule of Hollywood New Wave as male dominated because it involves a storyline and characterization of a strong realistic female lead. The second example I chose was the film *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974), whose main character is Alice Hyatt. What is particularly interesting is the multifaceted character development of Alice throughout her journey to self-realization and independence from toxic male relationships. I chose these films because they go beyond the typical male gaze and objectification of women that was typical of the period, woman as sex object or woman as perfect mother and wife. The portrayal of these characters adds a level of realism rarely explored in this period.

The Hollywood New Wave was a period in American cinema beginning in the mid-1960s until the early 1980s. This movement occurred directly after the fall of the Hollywood studio system that had lasted from the 1930s to the mid 1960s. Politically and socially driven films reflected the tumult of the time and characterized the period. Peter Biskind explains the promise and possibility in his book *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*: “It was the last time Hollywood produced a body of risky, high-quality work—as opposed to the errant masterpiece—work that was character-, rather than plot-driven, that defied traditional narrative conventions, that challenged the tyranny of technical correctness, that broke the taboos of language and behavior, that dared to end unhappily” (17). Hollywood New Wave brought new content to American audiences, who had experienced fare that is more generic since the beginning of film.

Geoff King describes this as an era when “Hollywood produced a relatively high number of innovative films that seemed to go beyond the confines of conventional studio fare” (13). The studio system had limited the creative process of filmmakers from 1934 with the Production Code, which censored content in film for sexuality, drugs, behavior, etc. The period of the late 1960s to the late 1970s marked a time when directors and screenwriters did not have to censor their content as closely, and thus were able to cover issues in film that had never been touched on before in Hollywood (King 11-20).

The filmmakers of the period were mostly young men who had attended the first film schools and thus knew a great deal about cinematic history. They called themselves “auteur,” artists who made films to highlight certain aspects of society rather than to make money and gain fame and power. Directors such as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich, Brian De Palma, and Robert Altman made films that starred actors like Jack Nicholson, Al Pacino, Robert DeNiro, and Peter Fonda (King 11-49). These men would become the icons of the era, appearing in and directing many award winning and moneymaking pictures in the 1970s. However, powerful women both behind and in front of the camera were not as prevalent in this period. Despite the women’s movement, strong females demanding realistic character portrayals were very rare, or at least their voices not heard in the mass media.

The New Wave Era featured many new male faces in the acting and directing world, while women largely played bit parts and rarely ever behind the camera. Some actresses felt this pressure, such as Julie Christie, who says in the documentary *A Decade Under the Influence* that the period of filmmaking was much like “boys being let out of school.” The men had creative freedom, but the women of the cinematic world did not have the same freedoms and privileges (King 11-48).

The Hollywood New Wave overlapped with Second Wave Feminism, or the Women's Liberation Movement, in the United States. The Women's Liberation Movement was a period in American history beginning in the 1960s and lasting through the 1980s in which women demanded equal rights and fought for social, political, and economic freedoms. One important piece of legislation that helped give the movement national attention was the Equal Rights Act bill, which passed in 1970. The Women's Movement was an offshoot of the civil rights movement in the 1960s (Freeman 512). One of the cornerstones of this movement was the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan in 1963. Friedan was also the president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), founded in 1966. The National Women's Party, founded in 1916, was another key organization that fueled the movement.

Women were advocating for social and political change at protests, but they were not yet lobbying in the entertainment world. Actress Ellen Burstyn, of *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974) explains in her memoir *A Lesson in Becoming Myself* reprinted in *Oprah Magazine* what roles were available for women in Hollywood in the early 1970s: "Every woman in them was either the victim, the understanding wife of the hero who was out saving the world, a prostitute, or some other style of sex object. There was no script where the woman was the protagonist."

Polly Platt, a film producer during the Hollywood New Wave who worked on films such as *The Last Picture Show* (1971), *Targets* (1968) and *Paper Moon* (1973), knew that there was inequality in Hollywood. "When a woman woke up in bed and her hair and makeup were perfect, it was hard to believe those stories." Platt wanted to tell real stories on screen, not those of a bygone era where women always had to look and act perfect. Platt would be one of the only female producers in the 1970s, when she mostly worked on projects

with her then-husband Peter Bogdonavich. Platt may have not become a producer in her own right if she was not married to such an influential director of the period, because it was very difficult for a woman to get a foothold in Hollywood at this time. If she did not have connections in the world of film, she may have never worked in the Hollywood industry because of the gender barriers of the time.

During the Hollywood New Wave, women were largely absent from the filmmaking process in terms of character creation and storytelling techniques. This lack of involvement was directly counter to the fact that the Women's Liberation Movement in America was occurring at the same time. Hollywood New Wave is often thought to be a "boy's club" where they told macho stories and had strong male leads instead of females. I explored the women who broke through this male barrier, and will discuss the successes, failures, and limitation of prominent roles for women. I studied two box office and Academy Award winning films of the period, namely *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974) and discussed the treatment of women in these respective films.

Both the films *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and *Bonnie and Clyde* are products of the Hollywood New Wave period, but come from very different times within the period. *Bonnie and Clyde* marks the beginning of a time when sexuality became more openly expressed onscreen, and thus the male/female binary could be explored and interrogated by filmmakers. *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* premiered seven years later to a different society. The women's movement was more organized and powerful in 1974, with the passing of key legislation such as ERA and Roe vs. Wade. *Bonnie and Clyde* is not merely about Bonnie Parker, but about her function in the Barrow Gang and her romantic relationship with Clyde Barrow. *Alice* is solely about Alice Hyatt and her struggles and triumphs in life, from her point of view.

The characters of Alice and Bonnie are important to discuss because they both portray a woman's struggle to find her own voice and independence in a man's world. These women are shown as sexual beings that had wants and desires just as male characters shown in previous generations of filmmaking. Both women were powerful in making decisions that would affect their lives and ultimately both find happiness with men not threatened by their heightened sense of power. Liberation from societal norms is an important theme in each of these films and was an important theme in women's liberation. The characters of Bonnie and Alice provide sharp contrasts to many of the male dominated themes discussed in many Hollywood New Wave films, which is why it is important to explore what they stood for in a feminist context.

Often referred as one of the movies that defined the beginning of the Hollywood New Wave era, *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) typifies the movement in its daring subject matter and unique editing and shooting techniques. Geoff King describes the camera movements as giving the impression of "restlessness, edginess, and a palpable sense of sexual hunger, or longing" (King 12). The film centers on the subject of the historical American bank robbers Bonnie and Clyde in Texas of the 1930s. Warren Beatty plays Clyde Barrow, leader of the gang and Faye Dunaway plays Bonnie Parker, Clyde's lover and co-conspirator.

When *Bonnie and Clyde* premiered in 1967, the United States was in the height of the sexual revolution. The film reflected these themes, shocking older audiences who had become complacent with the 1934 Production Code, which censored sexual content. *Bonnie and Clyde* showed for the first time in a long history in Hollywood the sexual experiences of a couple onscreen, and dealt with issues of impotence, sexual desire, and objectification. Bonnie is a sexually frustrated woman, because the man she loves is initially impotent in their sexual encounters. Bonnie gets sexually turned on by violence and crime, another

concept rarely before explored onscreen. Gangster movies, violence, and crime were rarely associated with female sexuality before the 1960s, and *Bonnie and Clyde* shattered those stereotypes.

Faye Dunaway in her breakout role as Bonnie Parker plays the woman with sexual heat and independence. Bonnie Parker wanted a life of adventure and intrigue and independence from her upbringing and small town life. In the film, she becomes a sex symbol, and a published poet, as she embarks on a life of fame through crime spree.

“A giant pair of red lips fill the screen. The face turns away and we see the reflection in the mirror. The distinctive arched features of Faye Dunaway” (King 11). Even in the opening scene of the film, we notice the raw sexuality of Faye Dunaway’s Bonnie Parker, in her lips, naked body, and shiny blond hair. Director Arthur Penn describes the opening scene as, “a close-up of her hungry lips...that’s what it is—a hunger for something more than her present existence” Bonnie’s dissatisfaction with her situation is further emphasized as the camera draws back from Bonnie’s lips and we are given first a view of her face, and then her naked body” (Lunstad 15).

Moreover, her sexuality empowers her, and does not lend a one-dimensional representation to her character. “While Dunaway dazzles the audience as a sexual image, Bonnie’s nudity, sexuality, and autoeroticism dazzle Clyde. The last sequence of our introduction to Bonnie is when she hurriedly pulls a dress out of her closet (the closet door has a picture of a house on it), throws it on, and runs out to meet Clyde. Bonnie literally runs away from home and the domestic sphere” (Lunstad 16).

Bonnie is struggling to find her own way in life, away from poverty and a dead end waitress job, and on the track of newfound fame and ultimately the love of Clyde. Bonnie transforms into a woman who carries a gun, as well as herself, with confidence and a

heightened sexual awareness. Her sexual appetite is not satisfied however, because her lover, Clyde, has sexual performance issues. “I ain’t no lover boy,” says Clyde when Bonnie makes her first sexual advances toward him. He is affectionate toward her, but every time they attempt the physical sexual act, Clyde cannot perform, which frustrates Bonnie to no end. Bonnie instead channels all of her unrequited sexual energy into the violent crime spree she embarks on with her lover and her creative energy into the poem “The Story of Bonnie and Clyde,” eventually published in newspapers across the United States.

Even in the beginning of the film, when Clyde shows Bonnie his gun for the first time the viewer notices a heightened sexual awareness in the body language and expression of Bonnie. She also becomes sexually aroused after viewing Clyde as he robs a grocery store and flings herself on him with reckless abandon. Bonnie and Clyde eventually are able to consummate their physical love toward the end of the film, but the reason why Clyde performs better at this time is unclear to the viewer.

Few film critics have talked about feminism in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), especially in the 1960s. However, academic Jana Kay Lunstad, in her essay “But You Wouldn’t Have the Gumption to Use It”: *Bonnie and Clyde* and the Sexual Revolution” discusses the feminism in this film as well as the gangster genre. She particularly focuses on the concept of the male gaze, the objectification of women in the context of film, shown as men wanted to see them rather than how they really were. The topic of male gaze is a key element of feminist film criticism. The male gaze is discussed in different criticisms but the concept is rejected concerning Bonnie Parker’s character in Lunstad’s article. “The image of her on the screen does not play into male fantasies regarding the female body, but rather her presence as a fully sexual woman, within the context of the women’s movement, affirms women’s rights to exert sexual desire” (17). Other critics could argue that she is a sexual object, but I agree

with Lunstad's interpretation of her character as a fully rounded human being, with emotions and substance as well as a sexually pleasing body shape.

Later in the decade, more films tended to be made from an actual woman's point of view, rather than the way a man might see how a woman lived. About women and for women, these films featured famous leading women such as Ellen Burstyn, who rose to fame in *The Exorcist* and *The Last Picture Show*. The film *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974) gives a mid-1970s portrayal of feminism through a young single mother, in the style characteristic of the Hollywood New Wave. A young Martin Scorsese, who would become one of the most influential directors of the period, directed this film. An unknown writer named Robert Getchell, who had submitted his screenplay to Warner Brothers Studio, wrote this film. Burstyn was invited to star in the film by the studio, on the tails of her success in *The Exorcist* (1973), which was also distributed by Warner Brothers. She was given a stack of scripts to choose from, and was allowed to pick a director for the script. She chose *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and asked her friend Francis Ford Coppola to recommend a director for the piece, and he referred her to Martin Scorsese, who was filming *Mean Streets* (1973). *Oprah Magazine* says that when Burstyn approached him to direct the movie, she asked him what he knew about women. "Nothing, but I'd like to learn," replied Scorsese. Scorsese directed one of the first major motion pictures that were not only about a woman, but also for a female audience. "What I wanted to do in *Alice* -- and what nobody was doing at the time -- was to tell a story from a woman's point of view," said Burstyn. Indeed, we are shown Alice's life from her point of view, with without a sense of romanticizing her story. Her life is hard after the death of her husband, because the life of the working class is never pretty. Alice learns to live her life out of the shadow of her abusive husband, and makes a

new life for herself and her son in a new place. Her character is a real woman who struggles, has failures and successes, and is sometimes inept at parenting.

Some critics of the film, such as Robert Hatch of *The Nation*, did not consider *Alice* successful in the portrayal of an independent woman in film, and agreed that the film did not break any sexual barriers of the time. He characterized her instead as a woman who is only looking for a man to break her fall. “We’d better consider Alice from the viewpoint of women’s rights. I don’t know what women are saying about it, but it would surprise me if they’re pleased. For all her zing and intrepid defiance, she is bluffing her way along in search of a man” (Hatch 190). I would further complicate Hatch’s argument to say that Alice is the story of one woman who struggles amidst a world of men who put her down and diminish her role. She transforms from a subservient wife to an independent single woman, who can make her own decisions about love and about her son’s future. She is not actively seeking a man; rather she falls into two relationships along her journey to self-realization.

Robin Wood argues in his article “Images of Women,” that the women’s movement did not exist in Hollywood. “In Hollywood films—even those most determinedly progressive—there is no “Women’s Movement”; there are only individual woman who feel personally constrained” (Wood 337). He goes on to discuss that fact that two films usually spoken about concerning the Women’s Movement are *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore* and *An Unmarried Woman*. He also talks about how these films “render feminism safe,” as they do not break boundaries when speaking about the plight of women in the 1970s.

However, I believe that individual film stories can tell a wealth of information about the social climate of a particular time and place. Feminism may have had specified limits in films during the 1970s, but it actually appeared onscreen as opposed to earlier decades of filmmaking. The very presence of feminism onscreen suggests that it was socially and

politically acceptable to discuss in society and no longer had a taboo. The role of feminism may have been limited and put into a “safe” place by directors who did not want public outcry and controversy, but it still existed in the minds and hearts of American women. By telling one woman’s story, you can often find parallels to the stories of other women in the process. Women needed to know that other women felt what they felt, did what they did and wanted to live as freely as men did. The human condition has similarities in many aspects and feminism existed within all races, classes, religions and other societal constraints and categories. In order for the movement to spread, women needed to be conscious of what other women were feeling and without realistic film portrayals, mentions in the media, books, television and other examples the movement would have been far more limited and smaller in scope.

In order to find feminist undertones in Hollywood New Wave film, I had to explore the actual texts themselves for close textual analysis. My close analysis uses the primary female characters from my example texts, *Alice Doesn’t Live Here* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, in order to show their initial characterizations before their transformations in each of their respective films into liberated women.

In the first scene, we meet Alice Hyatt, who the opening titles tell us is 35 years old and living in Socorro, New Mexico. The camera pans across what appears to be a clumping of suburban houses with a backdrop of hills. In the background, we hear the 1973 song “All the Way from Memphis,” by the British glam rock band known as Mott the Hoople. Tommy, Alice’s 11-year-old son, gets his love of music from his mother, who was a singer before her marriage. Their shared love of music strengthens their bond and alienates them from Alice’s husband and Tommy’s father Don, who thinks all music is just loud noise. This song also serves as a foreshadowing for when Alice takes her son on their own journey, because it

centers on a man going on a journey to Memphis to find a lost guitar. Alice and Tommy will go on a journey also fueled by the pursuit of making music.

The camera zooms in on a particular house, and we are able to see inside a room where Alice Hyatt is using a sewing machine. Her son Tommy lies on the green-carpeted living room floor, between two speakers, listening to the song. From the bedroom bellows a male voice, the husband and father, who screams for the loud music to be turned off. His presence and tone are not playful, but rather angry and full of rage and annoyance. The wife quickly obeys the husband and turns the music off, while reproaching her son, telling him that they need a “meaningful family relationship.” Her son does not of course know what a meaningful family relationship is, because he is constantly at odds with his emotionally and physically abusive father. Alice wants her son and husband to cohabitate peacefully, so she will not have to be on edge all the time, waiting for her husband to fly into an angry rage.

Alice then prepares dinner, and the three family members sit around the table; the camera movements become shaky as they follow the family’s actions. Alice slices a peach pie for Tommy and Don, and Don reproaches Alice for giving Tommy “that sugar crap.” Don notices that his iced coffee does not taste right, and figures out that there was salt instead of sugar in the sugar bowl. He becomes infuriated and blames Tommy for the prank, at which point Tommy runs out of the house. Don also yells at Alice for “not showing enough respect,” which he believes is why Tommy misbehaves. He throws objects off the table and creates a mess, and then storms off from a visibly upset Alice. Alice opens the glass sliding door to the outside and proclaims, “Socorro sucks!”

Alice begins this scene doing normal household tasks, sewing and making dinner for her family. When we see her sewing, she is singing along to the music and looks rather content, that is until her husband begins yelling. Alice displays a split personality in

accordance with her relations to her husband and her son. When Alice speaks to her husband, she usually speaks in sweet, hushed tones, and usually includes an “I’m Sorry,” with every phrase she speaks. Her body language seems stiff and physically uncomfortable when she is around her husband. The camera movements when Don appears in a scene are very sporadic and shaky, suggesting tension in the room when he is present, such as in the scene in the kitchen.

Bonnie and Clyde opens with the image of the lips of Bonnie Parker (Faye Dunaway). She is putting on makeup in a bedroom, and her hair is coiffed. From fast camera movements and cuts, we see that she is naked from the waist up. She only wears a pair of white sheer underwear as she moves around the bedroom. Her nakedness heightens the viewer’s awareness of her sexuality and foreshadows her sexual frustration later in the film. She flops on the bed, hitting the bed frame and then clenching the frame and looking through it. She symbolically is trapped behind bars, trapped in a small town in a dead end job barely existing. She hears a noise outside and goes to the window, still nearly naked. She notices a young man in a suit outside eyeing her mother’s car that is parked in front of the house. She asks him what he is doing, and then she throws on a dress and runs down the stairs to go and speak to him. The man, Clyde Barrow, was trying to steal the car from her mother, a “little old lady.” They walk into town together, talking about their lives. Bonnie asks him what he has been doing, and he announces that he has just been released from State Prison, where he was charged with armed robbery. Clyde guesses that Bonnie works as a waitress in the small town, which turns out to be true. They then proceed to go get sodas at a local grocery store.

The first scene of *Bonnie and Clyde* is incredibly important in terms of characterizing who Bonnie is, and how she feels about her life in West Dallas, Texas. Even in the opening scene of the film, we are assaulted with the raw sexuality of Faye Dunaway’s Bonnie Parker,

in her lips, naked body, and shiny blond hair. Director Arthur Penn describes the opening scene as, “a close-up of her hungry lips...that’s what it is—a hunger for something more than her present existence” (Lunstad 15). Her lips and makeup are perfect, no smudges, the perfect rosebud shape for her mouth and not a hair out of place. This could signify that she strives to achieve perfection in her appearance, even if she cannot achieve perfection in other areas of her life. She is naked in these scenes, although her genitals and breasts are covered. Her nakedness signifies her raw sexual energy to the viewer. She flops on her bed, and has a restless and angry expression. Her face is framed by the bed frame, which she grasps and looks through. Her bedroom could be a prison of her innate sexuality, the only place where she feels she can express herself.

Bonnie’s frustration is apparent in her facial expressions, and the longing that she exhibits when gazing out the window, nearly naked, into her front yard. Her house is two stories, but it does not seem to be in the best condition, mostly run down. This suggests that perhaps she is part of the working class, and cannot afford the luxuries in life that would complement her beauty. When she notices Clyde Barrow outside attempting to steal her mother’s car, something in her mood shifts. She suddenly becomes flirty and ditzy, ready to use her sexual energy in order to captivate his attentions. Her expression of shock and perhaps excitement when Clyde mentions that he was released from State Prison makes us believe that Clyde might inject adventure and excitement to her mundane, unhappy existence in a small Texas township.

Walking on Main Street in town, Bonnie walks backwards and often faces Clyde when she speaks with him. He is a novelty in her life, and perhaps a new beginning. He asks her, “are you a movie star?” in one of their first exchanges. She is clearly flattered by his charm, good looks and presence. He is aware that she is the small-town waitress, but

rightfully assumes that she is willing to break free of the mundane life she leads in order to become a “movie star” or something equally as notable.

The first glimpses that the viewer has of Alice and Bonnie’s personalities and life circumstances help set up their journeys for their respective films. Bonnie is characterized from the very first images of her lips as a sexual object, something that men can play with and manipulate for their own uses. She is not yet shown as a multidimensional person, because that will be part of her cinematic journey to self-realization and liberation. Alice is set up as the “dutiful housewife,” who knows her place in life is to please her unpleasant husband and raise her unruly son. Each woman feels the pressures of society’s roles for women, as well as the pressures from their own families to conform to the norms of the period.

The protagonists in the two films that I will study both display aspirations for dreams that are bigger than their working class lives. The films *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore* and *Bonnie and Clyde* are about the journeys of two working-class women who wish to gain independence through notoriety and success in their respective lives. Their stories reflect the larger feminist themes of the 1960s and 1970s, female independence, and equality in all aspects of private and public life.

Alice Hyatt is a 35-year-old homemaker in suburban Arizona, whose husband works for the Coca Cola Company as a truck driver. We know this because he wears the Coca Cola uniform in the first scene of the film, and later his dead body is shown in the Coca Cola truck that he drove. We can reasonably presume that he is a working class man without a college education, due to his profession. Alice Hyatt is the dutiful homemaker in the early scenes of the film, but we learn from her dialogue that before her marriage to Don Hyatt, she was a nightclub singer in Monterey, California. When he dies, she is left poor and jobless with a

12-year-old son to care for, so she decides to move to California and try to revive her singing career. “Alice is driven by the practical necessity to start a new life and to give her son an education, but she also (sic) harbours the more romantic desire to (sic) realise her dream of being a singer” (Whitton).

In one particular scene early in the film, after Don has died, Alice and her son Tommy, discuss their options for living. Alice tells Tommy she wants to make a living singing, and Tommy doubts her. “I mean... you can’t get a job singing, can you?” says Tommy to his mother. Alice sang in her hometown, so why not try again in the same place. After all, the film tells us that she has no other formal job training or experience other than motherhood and her minor singing career.

Alice then becomes not only an independent single mother after she is widowed, but also rather a woman chasing her dreams and aspirations in the hope of personal fulfillment and happiness. Her dreams of success and independence are a metaphor for the dreams of American women at the time for equal rights and freedoms. Her journey with her son Tommy on the road, from Socorro, Arizona with stops and jobs in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona chronicles her subsequent career choices of singer and waitress. Her dream is to be a singer, but the viewer comes to understand immediately when she sings that she will never be a major star, because she does not have amazing talent. Alice, in reality, is only a moderately talented singer and her career will not progress past singing in bars. “She's determined to find work as a singer, to ‘resume’ a career that was mostly dreams to begin with, and she's pretty enough (although not good enough) to almost pull it off” (Ebert).

Bonnie Parker is a blonde young Texas woman, who Clyde Barrow guesses correctly works as a waitress in her small town of West Dallas. When Bonnie and Clyde meet, Clyde asks Bonnie if she is a “movie star,” which she replies no. However, Bonnie is clearly

flattered by the fact that a man would even consider that she might be an actress, because she has bigger dreams than can be contained by her small town working-class life.

Bonnie and Clyde in their first meeting walk to town together, and discuss their lives while drinking Coca Colas. Bonnie is fascinated by the exciting life that Clyde leads as a minor bank robber. When Clyde is convincing Bonnie to come live a life of crime with him, he appeals to her unhappiness in small town life, and promises her fame and fortune.

“You and me travelin' together, we could cut clean acrost this state, and Kansas, too, and maybe dip into Oklahoma, and Missouri or whatnot, and catch ourselves highpockets and a highheeled ol' time. We can be somethin' we could never be alone. I'll show you...when we walk into the Adolphus Hotel in San Antone', you wearin' a silk dress, they'll be waitin' on you and believe me, sugar, they're gonna know your last name.”

Clyde offers Bonnie an exciting alternative to her lifestyle, and Bonnie takes that opportunity. Her character longs for not only economic mobility and fame, but also the sexual liberation that goes along with that fame. As an outlaw, she would not be limited to the strict sexual code mandated by her small town in the 1930s Texas. She wants to be like a “movie star” with the trappings of fame that include more social power and the chance to be with a man without being married.

Her waitress job and boredom is called into question when Clyde pleads her to go with him and lead a life of crime:

Clyde: And now you wake up every mornin' and you hate it. You just hate it. You get on down there and you put on your white uniform...

Bonnie. Pink, it's pink.

Clyde: And them truck drivers come in there to eat your greasy burgers and

they kid ya, and you kid 'em back. But they're stupid and dumb boys with the big ol' tattoos on 'em, and you don't like it. And they ask ya on dates, and sometimes you go but you mostly don't because all they're ever tryin' to do is get in your pants whether you want 'em to or not. So you go on home and you sit in your room and you think, 'Now when and how am I ever gonna get away from this?' And now you know.

Clyde is appealing to Bonnie because she knows that without his help she will never escape her small life, waiting on truck drivers in a café wearing a pink uniform. Her life will never be exciting and she will never be famous if she remains in her mother's house. She does not have enough money to get an education, and in the 1930s, when this movie is set, she would probably have not had the opportunity as a woman to go to college. Her style of speech and career suggest that she probably never finished high school, and dropped out to support herself and her mother. She seems young and impressionable, only perhaps in her early 20s, without experience outside her hometown. Clyde is the perfect antidote to her boredom, so she follows him in a life of crime believing that she will find excitement, and perhaps love with the young, attractive gangster.

Alice Hyatt and Bonnie Parker are usually never compared when doing a study of feminism in film in the 1960s and 1970s. One critical film book compares Alice Hyatt to the lead character Erica in *An Unmarried Woman*, but otherwise Alice is usually examined alone. Bonnie Parker may live in 1930 Texas, but it is important to note that the film *Bonnie and Clyde* was made in a more liberal period, 1967. The attitudes towards women in *Bonnie and Clyde* reflect the 1960s and the sexual revolution more than the period of the piece, which was during the Hollywood Production Code that limited sexual content in film. Bonnie

and Clyde could never have been a film contemporary to its setting, because it includes elements of sex and violence that would not be permitted in Hollywood in 1931.

Alice's story takes place in the mid 1970s and was written in the same time. Although it was not written by a woman, but by a relatively unknown author named Robert Getchell. It is a sincere woman's story, about women for women, but without the sappiness of what later became known as "chick flicks." Some critics consider this film to have a quality of "grit" and realism that is not usually found in a woman's story. Alice Hyatt leads a hard life, not a charmed existence, and has to work hard for everything. Disappointment and sadness have long been a part of this woman's psychology, even when she was a small child singing on her family farm in California.

Ellen Burstyn in many filmed interviews has acknowledged her own identification with the character of Alice Hyatt and her struggles in life. Burstyn had recently been divorced from her own husband before making this film, and used her own experience to portray the character. Burstyn also had a wealth of creative license in terms of the production of the film and actively recruited and collaborated with director Martin Scorsese. Her experience came from playing the wife/mother character Chris McNeil in *The Exorcist* (1973) and the mother character Lois Farrow in *The Last Picture Show* (1971).

The importance of the films *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and *Bonnie and Clyde* to feminist film criticism is that they show two strong women in lead roles. These women are not without flaws, but they both have a realism element that the Hollywood New Wave movement was known for in terms of script and acting. Bonnie Parker shows the world that women can have a sexual element to their being, but also be assertive and intelligent. Bonnie writes poetry and schemes how to evade the authorities during her crime spree, showing that despite her lack of formal education and limited career opportunities she is in fact more

intelligent than she first appears. Alice Hyatt represents the plights of strong single mothers in the 1970s, at a time when showing single motherhood onscreen was still largely taboo. Although she does get involved with a number of unsuitable men during her journey to California, she ends up finding out that she cannot be subordinate in a relationship. Her equal romantic partnership with cattle rancher David shows that she has grown in her relationships. Other women in the world were facing the same battles as Alice and Bonnie when these films were released, and even in the modern world.

Another significant point to be made about both these films is that both Faye Dunaway and Ellen Burstyn were nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actress in their respective roles. This meant that these films were not only box office successes, but the actresses who portrayed the roles had also received critical acclaim for their acting abilities. Dunaway lost the 1967 nomination to Katharine Hepburn for her role in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* but her costar Estelle Parsons who won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. Ellen Burstyn won Best Actress for *Alice* in 1974, beating out Faye Dunaway for her role in *Chinatown* in the same year. Burstyn also won the British Academy Film Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role for the same film.

Awards aside, the roles of Bonnie and Alice are interesting because they share a common bond. Both Alice and Bonnie come from working class backgrounds and both work as waitresses at some point in their lives. Both women wear pink waitress uniforms, which can also be read as a symbol of a waitress job being “women’s work,” a mostly female profession much like nursing and teaching. What does the waitress motif tell us about these women? It tells us that they both have been subservient to men in their jobs, serving men food, day in and out as well as serving men in a more emotional sense in their personal lives.

A particularly significant point made by Wood is the fact that Alice Hyatt was a working class woman, who grew up without the trappings of money, and finds herself even worse off financially when her husband died. “It is simply too easy to make a film about the liberation of an upper class career woman in a lucrative position,” says Wood. Perhaps the audience of middle and working class American women identify with Alice’s struggles because they themselves struggle with money because of a lack of formal career training or college education. They needed feminism to help pull them out of this patriarchal world, and to live a life free of these societal restrictions.

“Working class women need feminism,” says actress and comedian Roseanne Barr in the documentary *Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class*. When people usually discuss the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, working class women do not always come to mind. Wealthier women who had time to protest and speak out at rallies usually were the faces of feminism, as well as well known actresses, authors, artists, and musicians. If you are not in a position of authority or influence, you usually cannot affect change. Working class women needed to work; they needed their jobs in order to support their families, especially if they were single mothers.

“One of the most tenacious [belief] is the widely held belief that feminism in the United States has been an exclusive and elitist movement, narrowly focused on the needs and desires of white middle- and upper-class women” (Orleck 1). Indeed, Orleck goes on to chronicle the importance of labor feminists and their struggles for equalities in unions across the job market. Waitressing is part of this working class, and it usually does not come with benefits for single mothers such as health insurance and dental. Waitressing is dependent on tipping, not a regular paycheck and can be a very unpredictable career. Working women with families, such as Alice Hyatt, needed opportunities with higher paychecks and more stability,

but with her lack of job training and experience she only had few opportunities to make money

Female editors edited both *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and *Bonnie and Clyde*. Dede Allen edited *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967, when few women were involved in the crews of major Hollywood productions. Allen died in April of 2010, after a six-decade career of editing such films as *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), and *The Hustler* (1961). Her work has been nominated for the Academy Award on three separate occasions, and in three different decades. Marcia Lucas, at the time the wife of *Star Wars* creator George Lucas, edited *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* in 1974. Lucas later edited *Star Wars* (1977) as well as two of its sequels, and won an Academy Award in 1977 for her editing work. *Alice* additionally had two female producers, Audrey Haas and Sandra Weintraub. Some women were involved in the production and editing process of these two films, which may be one way to explain their realistic portrayal of female characters onscreen.

Bonnie and Alice are important characters because they are real women with all their faults and struggles and shortcomings. Each is haunted by their past and make their own future by making radical change in their lives before it is too late. For *Bonnie* in the end, her life is extinguished when she is young and beautiful and happy which may perhaps have been better than when she was aged and bored with her surroundings. Each takes a journey in both the emotional and physical sense, in order to make her own independence. The happy conclusion does not prevail in these films, but learning about women's roles in the 1960s and 1970s is equally important to a Hollywood "riding into the sunset" ending.

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