

# **Chick Flicks and the Straight Female Gaze: Sexual Objectification and Sex Negativity in *New Moon*, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, *Magic Mike*, and *Fool's Gold***

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## **Abstract:**

Laura Mulvey's seminal work "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" reveals the existence and impact of the (heterosexual) male gaze in classic Hollywood cinema. Despite the prevalence of this gaze today, the binary Mulvey posits—man as subject/woman as object—is dated as it fails to account for the emerging presence of the heterosexual female gaze in contemporary Hollywood cinema. Indeed, the practice of male sexual objectification is trending and little research has been done concerning the erotic spectacle of the male body on screen. My essay examines this trend in chick flicks, which more than any other film genre are created for a heterosexual female audience. As Marcia Pally's "Object of the Game" points out, such spectacle is not necessarily negative; however, an analysis of the genre reveals that sexual objectification is often linked with sex negativity. Chick flicks like *Magic Mike* (2012), *New Moon* (2009), *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (2008), and *Fool's Gold* (2008) demonstrate that the sexual objectification of the male body actually weakens the desirability of his character. In *New Moon* and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, it is the nice guy who 'gets the girl' and the sex object who does not. In *Magic Mike* and *Fool's Gold*, the sex object does win over the woman in the end, yet the films designate the sexuality of these characters as a flaw they must overcome to achieve this aim. Case studies of these movies thus show that chick flicks increasingly indulge in male spectacle, yet condemn the practice of sexual objectification via sex negativity.

1 In her landmark article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey's analysis of scopophilia in classic Hollywood cinema reveals the existence and impact of the male gaze. The article, published in 1975, characterizes the industry as dominated by the heterosexual male's pleasure in looking. Mulvey examines how this gaze affects the gendered representations of bodies on screen. She writes:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (2088)

Here Mulvey establishes a binary: woman as spectacle and man as spectator. Her argument, which she makes in regard to classic Hollywood movies, has become fundamental to film studies and applied by scholars to a wide array of films. In so doing, however, many have critiqued the

binary Mulvey posits in “Visual Pleasure” for oversimplifying scopophilia by disregarding the dynamics of the female gaze.

2 In response to such criticism, Mulvey analyzes the role of the female spectator in her essay “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by *Duel in the Sun*.” This piece, published in 1981, describes the female spectator either as unable to identify with the (male) hero on screen or “secretly, unconsciously almost, enjoying the freedom of action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a hero provides” (70). In the case of the latter, Mulvey remarks that the female spectator will undergo a complex struggle between masculinity and femininity, one that parallels the struggle Freud describes between active and passive experienced by young girls in their early development. Indeed, Mulvey states that “the female spectator’s phantasy of masculinization [is] at cross-purposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes” (79). In “Afterthoughts,” Mulvey makes room for the female spectator, but does not address the possibility of the female gaze. She does not consider that beyond identifying, or not identifying, with the (male) hero as a subject, the female spectator might turn her gaze upon him as an object (of visual pleasure). However, film studies should consider not only the dynamics of the female as spectator, but also of the male as spectacle. As Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin point out, “Representations of men are just as socially constructed as are those of women, and need to be explored in a similar manner” (245). Benshoff and Griffin highlight a blind spot in film studies, calling for scholarship that balances Mulvey’s binary in “Visual Pleasure.” The erotic spectacle of the male body on screen is particularly important for analysis in light of the emerging trend of male sexual objectification in cinema.

3 Several scholars in film studies have noted the sexual objectification of men on screen in action movies. This genre, with its reputation for featuring guns, explosions, and cleavage, traditionally caters to the heterosexual male gaze. The sensationalization of violence and the sexual objectification of Megan Fox throughout *Transformers* (2007) are characteristic. However, more and more action movies invite the heterosexual female gaze by showcasing men’s bodies as well, such as, for example, Ryan Reynolds’s in *Blade Trinity* (2004). Other popular examples of male spectacle include the bodies of Vin Diesel in *The Fast and the Furious* (2001), Gerard Butler in *300* (2006), and Hugh Jackman in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009). Yvonne Tasker observes that “As with the figure of the showgirl that Laura Mulvey refers to in classic Hollywood films, contemporary American action movies work hard, and often at the

expense of narrative development, to contrive situations for the display of the hero's body" (79). She examines the recent shift in focus from the spectacle of the body in action to the spectacle of the body itself. Similarly, Benshoff and Griffin point out that "in action movies and Westerns [...] it has become something of a cliché that the hero's shirt will be torn open during a particularly rough fight with an opponent" (246). Along with Tasker, Benshoff and Griffin reveal male sexual objectification in the action movie genre as an increasing trend, a phenomenon that holds important implications for the straight female gaze.

4 Few scholars, however, recognize that the erotic spectacle of the male body appears in chick flick films as well. The term 'chick flick' has been used variously in the film industry. Mainly understood as a movie geared toward a female viewership, 'chick flick' is often specifically synonymous with romantic comedies. However, the genre can more generally describe female-targeted films in which romance, characterized by a 'boy gets girl' formula, composes the plot. 'Chick flick' is a relatively recent term, though it has since been applied retroactively to earlier women's movies that feature love stories. Chick flicks have been showing women falling in love with men for decades, yet only recently have they shown men as objects of erotic spectacle. Indeed, the chick flicks mentioned by Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure," such as *To Have and Have Not* (1944) and *The River of No Return* (1954), largely follow the paradigm of woman as spectacle and man as spectator she sets forth. Indeed, viewers of these movies see the bodies of their female leads revealed in low-cut shirts or fitting dresses while the bodies of their male leads are obscured by suits and ties or jackets and long sleeves. The main visual pleasure these men offer their audience members lies in admiration of their faces rather than the rest of their bodies. This pattern continues after the publication of "Visual Pleasure" and "Afterthoughts" for many decades—for example, in the 1980s with *Sixteen Candles* (1984), the 1990s with *Pretty Woman* (1990), and the early 2000s with *A Walk to Remember* (2002). The men in these chick flicks do not undergo any notable sexual objectification. However, beginning in the late 2000s, male sexual objectification occurs more systematically in the genre. This trend can be illustrated in movies like *What Happens in Vegas* (2008), *The Proposal* (2009), and *Dear John* (2010). Each of these features scenes which position the male lead's body as a source of visual pleasure for his spectators. For example, *The Proposal*, a movie that already challenges gender norms by positioning its female lead as the boss and its male lead as her assistant, interestingly inverts the cliché of the shower scene. Here we see Sandra Bullock step out of the

shower and look for a towel; instead of close-ups of her body, however, spectators see close-ups of Ryan Reynolds removing his clothing as he prepares to get in the shower. The presence of male sexual objectification in chick flicks continues to emerge, and, as it does, calls for renewed conversations about the possibilities for and implications of the gaze.

5 Research on the female gaze in film should specifically consider the objectification of the male body in chick flicks, which more than any other genre are created for a heterosexual female audience. However, most of the current conversations regarding male sexual objectification on screen focus on action movies. Moreover, analyses of the female gaze that do focus on chick flicks may not position the erotic male body as an object of the gaze at all. For example, Paula Marantz Cohen's analysis of the female gaze in chick flicks instead centers on the spectacle of the material world—the elaborate clothes, shoes, and hairstyles—offered to female viewers. She only briefly acknowledges the spectacle of the male body, writing in parenthesis that: “(Male nudity is another story, but it serves more as an aesthetic element than an incitement to lust)” (81). Cohen, among other scholars, appears to assume that since chick flicks characteristically feature stories of love, these films do not also cater to lust. Suzanne Moore addresses this silence surrounding the female gaze, observing that “to suggest that women actually look at men's bodies is apparently to stumble into a theoretical minefield which holds sacred the idea that in the dominant media the look is always already structured as male” (45). Nevertheless, the sexual objectification of the male body continues to trend in chick flicks, and, as it increasingly impacts viewers, needs to inform scholarly discussions regarding the gaze. As such, my research examines the erotic spectacle of the male body and the presence of the straight female gaze in chick flick cinema, analyzing the association between sexual objectification and sex negativity that occurs in the genre.

6 My study of contemporary chick flicks demonstrates that these movies characterize sexual objectification with sex negativity. As Marcia Pally's article “Object of the Game” points out, sexual objectification is not necessarily negative. In some cases, the object position can offer advantages, such as having the command of the room and/or the control of a captive audience. Pally explains that objectification can be an empowering and even enjoyable experience, so long as men and women do not remain trapped in subject and object positions. Despite this possibility, however, chick flicks overwhelmingly feature male sexual objectification in terms of

sex negativity. Gayle Rubin describes sex negativity as a significant facet of United States society, observing that

This culture always treats sex with suspicion. It construes and judges almost any sexual practice in terms of its worst possible expression. Sex is presumed guilty until proven innocent. Virtually all erotic behaviour is considered bad unless a specific reason to exempt it has been established. (150)

My research examines the prevalence of sex negativity as it takes place in contemporary chick flicks *New Moon* (2009), *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* (2008), *Magic Mike* (2012), and *Fool's Gold* (2008). As these films attest, the sexual objectification of the male body for the straight female gaze actually weakens the desirability of his character in the plot. Indeed, in *New Moon* and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, it is the nice guy who 'gets the girl' and the sex object who does not. In *Magic Mike* and *Fool's Gold*, the sex object does win over the woman in the end, yet the films designate the sexuality of these characters as a flaw they must overcome to achieve this aim. These case studies of the straight female gaze thus show that chick flicks increasingly indulge in male spectacle, yet condemn male sexual objectification via sex negativity.

### **Sexual Objectification**

7 Contemporary chick flicks increasingly cater to the straight female gaze by sexually objectifying their male leads, frequently more than their female ones. *New Moon*, the second sequence in the *Twilight* saga, evidences this trend in the character of Jacob Black, played by Taylor Lautner. *New Moon* is notorious in pop culture for its near-exclusive appeal to a straight female audience. In analysis of its viewer demographic, Melissa Silverstein labels the movie "guy proof," meaning *New Moon* "won't need guys to see it for it to kick some box office butt." At least part of this chick flick's popular appeal lies in the erotic spectacle it makes of Jacob's body, a spectacle especially evident due to the transformation the character undergoes from *Twilight* to *New Moon*. (Of course, male sexual objectification occurs to varying extents in each of the *Twilight* films, but particularly in *New Moon* as Jacob's character—and his body—play a central role.) Between the first and second movies, Lautner becomes more muscular, cuts his hair, and, perhaps most significantly, removes his shirt. Kristen Stewart's character Bella Swan calls attention to these changes the first time she sees him in *New Moon*, remarking "Hello, biceps. You know, anabolic steroids are really bad for you." The changes that occur to Lautner's body in this sequel coincide with Jacob's transformation to a werewolf. Elizabeth A. Lawrence

highlights the werewolf as a sexual symbol (104), also observing that “a person must remove his clothes in order to become a werewolf” (107). This proves true of Jacob, who spends most of the movie shirtless. Interestingly, *New Moon* does not often invite its viewers to gaze at Jacob’s newly sexualized body in action. Rather, it displays his body in scenes when he simply talks to Bella, such as during a conversation that takes place in her bedroom or another that takes place in the rain. In both he appears shirtless, so that his muscled shoulders and abs are on display to viewers. During a third scene, Jacob removes his shirt in order to help Bella after she has crashed a motorcycle. Note that he does not become shirtless in the process of saving her from the crash, but in order to dab the blood from her head afterward. Moore observes that “What seems to be happening is that now we are seeing the male body coded precisely as erotic spectacle but *without* the [usual] accompanying narrative violence” (53). In this way, *New Moon* takes part in a trending objectification of the male body in contemporary chick flicks which counters Mulvey’s conception of the female as the sole object of the gaze.

8 In another example of erotic male spectacle, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* bares the body of Aldous Snow, played by Russell Brand, for the visual pleasure of its heterosexual female viewers. The sensation Aldous’s body creates bears little similarity to the one made by Jacob’s since Lautner plays a muscular teen werewolf while Brand takes on the role of a libertine adult rock star. The movie relies on this rock star role to sexualize Aldous. His rocker sexuality becomes clear in the first scene Peter Bretter (played by Jason Segel) sees Aldous in person. Juxtaposed to Peter and his dorky Hawaiian shirt, Aldous—shirtless and adorned with tattoos, eyeliner, and jewelry—appears suave and sexy. Brand’s character often provokes a comedic sexual spectacle in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* not merely because of the way his body looks, but also the way his body moves. He first appears in the movie, introduced as a “lead singer and notorious lothario,” in a music video that displays him pelvic thrusting and kissing strangers. Aldous pelvic thrusts again in a scene when he sings an erotic song titled “Inside of You” to Sarah (played by Kristen Bell), and yet again in another scene when he teaches a fellow hotel guest to have sex by using a life-size chess piece to demonstrate bedroom poses. In none of these scenes is Aldous with Sarah, thus offering up his body as the sole object of pleasure for the heterosexual female viewer. *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* garners more appeal from a male audience than do most romantic comedies (perhaps because its protagonist is a man), yet still follows the “boy falls for girl, boy and girl have trouble, and boy gets girl” formula of most chick

flicks. *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* thus serves to exemplify the emerging pattern of male spectacle in chick flicks and the straight female voyeuristic pleasure it indicates.

9 Arguably more than any other Hollywood chick flick, *Magic Mike* caters to the heterosexual female gaze in the unprecedented spectacle of the male body it presents. This spectacle is made possible because the movie follows the story of a stripper and largely unfolds within a strip club. Unlike other chick flicks in which male nudity is incidental to the events of the film, in *Magic Mike* it is a central part of the plot. As such, over the course of the movie, viewers—like the patrons at the strip club Xquisite—watch a series of stripteases, including multiple group performances as well as several solos featuring Mike (played by Channing Tatum), Adam (played by Alex Pettyfer), and Dallas (played by Matthew McConaughey). Furthermore, the film eroticizes Mike’s body not only on stage at Xquisite, but in his private life as well. Indeed, one of the opening scenes of *Magic Mike* features Mike’s rear end as he gets out of bed in the morning. Though female nudity occurs occasionally during the movie, it is men’s bodies that take center stage—literally. In many ways, *Magic Mike* reverses the argument Mulvey makes about the male gaze in “Visual Pleasure,” since the film clearly signifies the presence of the heterosexual female gaze. This gaze occurs not only amongst the female spectators of the movie in theaters, but within the movie as well amongst the female spectators at the strip club Xquisite. Every scene of the men stripping on stage also shows the women in the audience watching and cheering. McConaughey’s character even explicitly references the gaze while teaching Pettyfer’s how to dance. Coaching him in front of a mirror, Dallas tells Adam: “You are the man on the stage. Thousands of women, eyes on you. You are their vision.” In *Magic Mike*, men are clearly endowed with the “*to-be-looked-at-ness*” Mulvey describes regarding women, challenging the man-as-subject/woman-as-object binary she posits.

10 Matthew McConaughey appears again as Finn in *Fool’s Gold*, a film that (like *Magic Mike*) eroticizes the male body for the straight female gaze. Although Kate Hudson (who plays leading lady Tess) appears scantily clad on the movie cover, it is McConaughey’s body viewers see most on screen. McConaughey stars in *Fool’s Gold* as a treasure hunter/beach bum sporting sun-tanned skin and sun-bleached hair. This character spends most of the movie in trouble, yet manages to do so while looking good. For instance, one scene finds him stranded in the ocean with nothing but a cooler to keep him afloat. Since the boat that will rescue him is visible in the background, the scene does not serve to demonstrate the desperation of Finn’s situation so much

as it serves to emphasize the definition of McConaughey's biceps when clinging to the cooler. Later in the film, Tess confronts Finn about how much money he owes, a conversation that occurs while he wears nothing but a towel; here the viewer watches him talk to Tess while drying water off of his chest and abs. McConaughey's abs appear on screen a great deal in *Fool's Gold* since he spends the majority of the plot in swim trunks. Though his career has recently taken a new direction, McConaughey's earlier work established him a reputation for his frequent role as an object of the gaze in chick flicks. These include *How to Lose a Guy in Ten Days* (2003), *Surfer, Dude* (2008), and *Ghosts of Girlfriends Past* (2009). Lisa Schwarzbaum affirms that "Years ago, Matthew McConaughey discovered a viable character niche for himself playing a man-tanned hero with a mushy center." Offering up the erotic spectacle of McConaughey's body to the heterosexual female gaze, *Fool's Gold* poses as no exception.

11 The movies *New Moon*, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, *Fool's Gold*, and *Magic Mike* evidence the trending sexual objectification of men in chick flicks. Different as these characters are, Jacob, Aldous, Finn, and Mike all participate in the erotic spectacle of the male body on screen. Their example demonstrates that, like women, "male stars in Hollywood have also been carefully packaged and represented for the voyeuristic pleasure of the viewer" (Benshoff and Griffin 245). Lautner's, Brand's, Tatum's, and McConaughey's roles also demonstrate the contemporary nature of the male spectacle in chick flicks since all their films were produced between 2008 and 2012. Upcoming movies including *Magic Mike's* sequel, *Magic Mike XXL*, and *Fifty Shades of Grey* suggest that this pattern will continue. This emerging trend in chick flicks, perhaps more than any other evidence, affirms the existence of the heterosexual female gaze in contemporary Hollywood cinema.

### **Sex Negativity**

12 My analysis of the gaze as it occurs in chick flicks reveals another trend: the contextualization of male sexual objectification in terms of sex negativity. In other words, not only are men increasingly objectified in chick flicks, but their objectification is consistently characterized via sex negativity. In her article "Visual Pleasure," Mulvey characterizes the (heterosexual) male gaze negatively because it denies its female object agency or power. Pally, however, counters Mulvey's assessment of the cinematic gaze as inherently negative; according to her, "As a political condition, being an object is frightful, but as part of *play* it's one of life's



charms.” Pally argues that it is possible for objectification to take place in a positive light and to imbue the objectified individual with power. Furthermore, she states, “we shouldn’t have to choose between subject and object (and God knows we shouldn’t impose such a choice on ourselves); the alternatives are false. We’ll know we’ve ‘made it’....When we can have *both*” (Pally). In chick flicks, however, many men struggle with the same problem women encounter in other genres: becoming trapped as objects of the gaze, so that they cannot, in Pally’s words, “have *both*.” This problem evidences the underlying sex negativity that characterizes surrounding cultural (and hence pop cultural) attitudes about sex, including sexual objectification. This sex negativity appears in *New Moon*, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, *Magic Mike*, and *Fool’s Gold*, either preventing or problematizing each male lead’s role as ‘the one’ so as to trap him in the role of the sex object.

13 In *New Moon*, Jacob does not play the role of ‘the one’ for Bella, despite the intimacy these characters share. The two entertain a close friendship during the movie that gives rise to sexual tension, yet this tension functions less to pose Jacob as a potential romantic interest for Bella and more to problematize the romance between Bella and Edward Cullen (played by Robert Pattinson). Indeed, *New Moon* (as well as the rest of the *Twilight* saga) makes it clear that Edward is Bella’s true love. Near the end of the movie, Bella steps away from Edward only to tell Jacob: “Don’t make me choose. Cuz it’ll be him. It’s always been him.” It is thus no coincidence that Edward, who fulfills the role of ‘the one’ in *New Moon*, is not subject to the same sexual spectacle that Jacob undergoes. Though a brief scene near the end of *New Moon* features Edward shirtless, the majority of his on-screen appeal occurs through close-ups of his brooding face. Screen shots of the face form a popular mode of visual pleasure in contemporary chick flicks—such as Shane West’s in *A Walk to Remember* or Ryan Gosling’s in *The Notebook*—that do not sexually objectify their male leads. Lautner’s character functions in contrast to these male leads: as an object of his beloved’s gaze, yet not as a subject of her desire.

14 Aldous plays a similar role in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* since he, like Jacob, serves as a foil to the character who ‘gets the girl.’ Throughout the movie, Aldous’s rock star persona stands in contrast to Peter’s nice guy character. While Aldous maintains that he can “fuck anyone, anywhere, anytime,” Peter remarks that “for me, it’s much more enjoyable to get to know somebody—if you end up sleeping with them that’s great, but I like to get to know somebody.” Accordingly, the end of *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* sees eye-candy Aldous leaving his girlfriend

Sarah in Hawaii with plans to sleep with the next woman, while sweet-rather-than-sexy Peter begins a new relationship with Rachel (played by Mila Kunis). The film does reveal Peter's body to the audience (in fact, it is his penis that appears on screen), yet does so in order to portray Peter as pitiful rather than sexy. Chris Lee quotes an interview with Segel on the subject; when discussing the nude scene, Segel observes that "When a woman does nudity in a movie, men immediately switch into a sexual mode. For women, from what I understand, it's not like that. They see a naked, out-of-shape man crying and it's funny—something weird, disturbing and disgusting we can all laugh at." Segel's nudity here functions to make his character embarrassing and thus relatable, positioning Peter as a 'boy next door' rather than a sex object. This positioning enables Peter to embody the role of 'the one,' while Aldous's 'larger than life' rock star persona remains rooted as an object of the gaze. Sensual, yet neither relatable nor reliable, Aldous is worshipped as a sex symbol rather than desired as a partner. Again, as in *New Moon*, the object of the heterosexual female gaze maintains a distance from the gazer.

15 The sex negativity in *Magic Mike* is largely revealed by the fact that Mike can only become a love interest for the female lead Brooke (played by Cody Horn) after he quits his job as a stripper. Indeed, during the length of Mike's career as a stripper at the club Xquisite, the women around him view him solely as a sex object. The first scene of the film shows Mike climbing naked out of bed after a threesome with his buddy Joanna and another woman he met the night before. Throughout the plot, Mike cannot move beyond this role as an occasional sex partner with Joanna. When he tries to learn more about her and her interests outside the bedroom, Joanna replies: "You ask a lot of questions, don't you? Little Chatty Cathy tonight, huh?" She goes on to tell Mike: "You don't need to talk. Just look pretty." Brooke's character sees Mike as an object rather than a subject as well. The two get to know each other over the course of several scenes, yet when Mike asks Brooke on a date to "get some food," she answers: "I don't know...Plus, I don't exactly sport-fuck my brother's stripper friends." Brooke automatically sexualizes Mike's intentions here because she views Mike in terms of his career as a stripper, and hence sees him solely as a sex object. While she rejects Mike, Brooke does date Paul: a character the movie does not sexually objectify, one who has a 'serious' job processing property damage insurance claims. In the characters of Paul and Mike, *Magic Mike* illustrates the either/or nature of subject and object positions within the heterosexual female gaze of contemporary Hollywood cinema. As such, only after Mike tells Brooke that he quit his job at Xquisite does

she ask him to “get some food and talk about it”—the same offer he had made her earlier. *Magic Mike* stands apart from other chick flicks like *New Moon* and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* since its sexual object does become ‘the one,’ yet the movie reaffirms the sex negativity surrounding sexual objectification by illustrating Mike either as a sex object or love interest, but not both.

16 Like *Magic Mike*, *Fool’s Gold* also sees the object of its sexual objectification win over his woman in the end; however, the film problematizes Finn as a good husband precisely due to his sexuality. The link between Finn’s talent as a lover and lack of talent as a husband is established in the beginning of the film when he and Tess get a divorce. Tess complains that Finn is not even competent enough to show up for his divorce, and her lawyer replies: “you married a guy for the sex and then expected him to be smart.” *Fool’s Gold* pits being sexy and being smart as mutually exclusive traits, though Tess herself poses as the exception. This inability to have both brains and brawn seems true of Finn, however, since (as aforementioned) he often appears the most attractive when in the most trouble. Tess articulates Finn’s aptitude for sex (and concomitant inaptitude for most else) at several points in the movie. She explains that “He is a genius at exactly three things: treasure salving, finding money for treasure salving, and one other thing”—meaning sex. Here Tess emphasizes that Finn does not possess the necessary qualities of a worthy partner. He is not, for instance, loving like *New Moon*’s Edward or sensitive like *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*’s Peter. After Finn and Tess find the treasure at the end of the movie, he tells her “I’ve learned a lot from my mistakes” and asks “Marry me?” She replies, “No, you haven’t. And yes, I will.” Ultimately, it is another object—the treasure they find—that lures Tess into re-marriage. *Fool’s Gold* performs a conventional chick flick ending by following the ‘boy gets girl’ formula, yet nonetheless problematizes Finn’s role as ‘the one’ by linking his flaws as a partner with the sexuality of his character.

17 My study of the straight female gaze in chick flicks reveals contemporary Hollywood cinema’s progress toward gender equality as it enables men and women to reverse subject and object positions. *New Moon*, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, *Magic Mike*, and *Fool’s Gold* evidence this trend as they feature the erotic spectacle of the male body for the visual pleasure of straight female audiences. The emerging sexual objectification of men on screen enriches the film industry as it expands the possibilities for the gaze, and explores new avenues of visual pleasure. As Moore notes, “This new breed of images of masculinity would not have been possible without two decades of gay and feminist politics which advocated the idea that sexuality is

socially constructed rather than god-given and immutable” (45). As seen in *New Moon*, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, *Magic Mike*, and *Fool’s Gold*, this pattern evidences progress beyond traditional gender roles by giving men the opportunity to experience the admiration garnered by sexual objectification and by giving women the opportunity to identify with the cinematic gaze. However, this heterosexual female gaze also proves problematic as it characterizes sexual objectification via sex negativity and thus prevents characters from switching between subject and object positions. Chick flicks which cast their male leads solely as sex objects dehumanize these characters and serve to reverse gender discrimination rather than effect gender equality. Instead, contemporary chick flicks need to offer viewers more nuanced media that rejects gendered binaries—Mulvey’s or otherwise—and allows characters to explore a range of subject and object positions. Indeed, progress toward parity will occur not when men become just as objectified as women, but when men and women can move freely between subject and object positions, both on screen and off.

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