

**Awareness or Spectacle: Reconstructing the Representation of
Rape in Film and Media**

by

Ember Sheffer

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Sponsor: Rachel Fabian

Second Reader: Brian Paccione

Normalized sexual violence against women within culture and media, otherwise known as rape culture, has been a prevalent topic more so than ever in the past few decades. Tanya Serisier, a feminist legal scholar defines rape culture as “[a term] frequently used to describe the various ways in which Western societies normalize, deny, and excuse sexual violence against women and children” (Serisier, 16). As time has gone on these issues were brought up more directly through the medium of film, instead of seeping through the cracks of the strict rose colored glasses of Hollywood. Though this is not a new topic within cinema studies, there are avenues which can further the conversation of rape in film and media. This paper uses feminist perspectives, analysis, and film theory to discuss the way spectators, and on a larger scale, society engages with the portrayal of rape and the importance or non-importance of its place within rape culture. This is a conversation that is constantly evolving because as long as cinema exists, there will be something to say about rape culture through film.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how rape is depicted in film and relate it to my own film, *You're So Shy*, and my internal process. Drawing on feminist film theory and debate on “ethical spectatorship” in cinema studies, this paper will address how my approach to *You're So Shy* challenges existing portrayals of rape and offers a new strategies for addressing the perspectives of survivors.

First, I will bring attention to feminist scholars who have studied this topic and found it necessary to bring forward the issue of on-screen rape for cinema studies. This will work as a base for understanding some of the concepts of spectatorship that were a part of feminist critique of rape depicted in film. For example, Sarah Projanky and Tanya Horeck bring this topic to the forefront, and their theories and analysis of films or other media enable me to approach *You're*

So Shy in a way that breaks stigma and rejects the counterproductive outcome when representing rape in film. Grouped in with feminist scholars, the scholarship of Timothy Shary will be mentioned to discuss virginity in Hollywood filmmaking. His perspective importantly emphasizes how coming-of-age or teen films have historically offered both critical as well as sensationalized portrayals of sexual assault. As Shary discusses, the 1990s serves as an especially concerning moment in which virginal frustrations are being played out in highly disturbing ways, making specific mentions of *Kids* (Larry Clark, US, 1995) which is known for its notorious rape scene.

I offer an analysis of the rape scene in *Kids* using Nikolaj Lubecker's book *The Feel-Bad Film* to discuss the techniques used and the effect that these techniques have on the viewer. The film not only contains non consensual sex, but the aesthetic choices used for these scenes are important for discussing rape in film and how these choices impact the spectator's ability to take an ethical stance. This film and, more specifically, the end rape scene, is an inspiration for *You're So Shy* to use "feel bad techniques" and other aesthetic choices in a way that produces an opposite effect from that of the scenes in *Kids* in order to maintain a certain ambiguity around rape in film.

Representation of Rape in Film & Feminist Film Critique

Sarah Projansky's section titled, "Representational Strategies" in her book, *Watching Rape* is a section that discusses representing rape as an antirape strategy and the challenge it brings and questions it raises within the conversation of rape education and rape culture. Within this section, Projansky is calling attention to particular modes of representation with the goal of an antirape, antiracism, and antisexism message, which can inadvertently reinscribe rape, racism, and sexism. Projansky writes, "My hope is to identify sometimes insidious representational practices that appear in numerous programs and that can inadvertently undermine those very perspectives and goals" (Projansky, 215). Her analysis consists of devising alternative experiences of portraying sexual assault. She looks at the severity of the content, where the spectator is within the film, aesthetic choices made, and how all of these things can affect the end result for the viewer.

In the first section, there is a focus on where the viewer's perspective is within different types of films. For instance, the strategy in which a film or other modes of media shows a violent and disturbing example to talk about or represent rape (in an antirape context) in order for the viewer to become uncomfortable. She writes that this strategy "uses explicit representations in order to convince an audience that rape exists, that it is horrific, and that "something must be done" (Projansky, 215). Though Projansky is not saying this portrayal is wrong and should not be made, she is pointing out the dangers of these representations. She goes on to talk about the point of view and how it changes the perception and can work in a counteractive way. For example, she notes that the 1970s-80s horror film strategy for addressing rape places the viewer in the perspective of the rapist. When the viewer identifies parallel to the rapist, it strengthens the emotional state which adds to the vulnerability and victimization women face. To this she writes,

“Nevertheless, this representational strategy also encourages the spectator to arrive at that awareness by increasing an experience of fear either for one’s self as a woman or for women generally” (Projansky, 217). Placing the survivor on the opposite end of the viewer’s perspective adds fear in a general way. The viewer isn’t identifying with the woman being raped, or with the rapist (in the sense that the viewer is rooting for the rapist), which in the end only serves the purpose of causing fear, suspense, and angst, which is used in a horror film for entertainment, not for creating a critical understanding of violence against women.

Projansky also discusses films that put the viewer in the point of view of the woman being raped and how the spectator is affected by this. By taking the emotional side of the survivor, the viewer is no longer identifying with the “watch out, here I come” point of view, rather the other side saying “Oh no, here he comes” (Projansky, 117). Though identifying with the survivor could help lead to a deeper understanding of that experience, it only creates a heightened fear for the spectator, similar to the horror film tactic. Projansky writes, “Instead, these sequences augment the violence and power of the rapist and intensify the victimization of the woman he assaults” (Projansky, 118).

The point of view of the spectator is important in discussing the experience of rape in film, but Projansky’s main concern revolves around devising alternative representations of rape and the (at-times) counterproductive outcomes of these alternatives. For example, she discusses a series from the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults against Women and the 1992 ABC TV Special *Men, Sex, and Rape* to discuss the use of erotic images that were delayed to argue against sexual violence. These examples, though aiming to explain that women who wear revealing clothes and flirt are not asking to be raped, in fact reproduce the very myths they

critique. As Projansky points out, Sut Jhally's experimental short *Dreamworlds* (US, 1994) uses sexualized images from MTV footage and music videos and intercuts them with the rape scene in the Hollywood drama *The Accused* (Jonathan Kaplan, US 1988) to say these sexually available women that are portrayed in MTV music videos for example, "might cultivate attitudes that could legitimize rape" (Projansky, 218). Projansky's concern and critique points out that Jhally and other alternative filmmakers struggle to "identify a source of a particular rape myth without reducing that myth to a true and false dichotomy" (Projansky, 118). She brings up the male gaze and how it is invited in these types of antirape statements which is counteractive to the point that Jhally and others are trying to make about objectifying women. Portraying rape in alternative ways is one thing, but how it's done and what makes it potentially dangerous is another, and that is what Projansky brings to the conversation of the representation of rape in film and media.

While Projansky focuses on the different modes of media and how these affect the viewer differently when it comes to rape culture, Tanya Horeck discusses Hollywood's film *The Accused* to critique the limitations of Hollywood's approaches to portraying rape. Her writing, "They did worse than nothing': Rape and Spectatorship in *The Accused*," discusses the real events that inspired this film and how the portrayal and spectatorship affects the story, viewer, and overall message.

On March 6, 1983 a woman came out of a bar half naked and screaming for help. She had been raped for two hours in a bar by a group of men while people watched, cheered, and held her down. The story exploded across the media and would soon become infamous with the 1988 release of *The Accused*. Horeck focuses on the court case that was dramatized for film, a double

spectacle, which works in a completely different way than something like *DreamWorlds*, the example Projansky uses, especially because legal and civic accountability is at question. Horeck writes that this film is key to a feminist outlook because while the goal is to raise consciousness about rape, it is problematic because of the negative Hollywood tradition of making a spectacle of the victimized female body. Similarly to Projansky, Horeck points out the misreading of key scenes in the film that some feminists have interpreted as progressive.

Horeck analyzes the true events and how the media and courtroom go about the case. A big debate about the case was about the ability for the public to watch the trial. She brings up a strong point made by Carol Smart about the spectator's positioning with regard to the survivor testifying on the stand, noting the ways in which "it becomes a pornographic vignette." By this she is talking about how everyone physically looking at the survivor interprets and replays the sexual assault, especially when not everyone is on the side of the survivor. Horeck writes, "The judge, the lawyers, the jury, and the public can gaze on her body and re-enact her violation in their imaginations." (Horeck, 6) For the purpose of her essay The film's investigation of a real rape case bring up questions about the spectator of the original case as well as now in the context of the film. In this way, Horeck is involved in examining a double spectacle. The spectator is watching the film, the rape, and the case, identifying with the diegetic court audience and witnessing the case testimonies, revealing the details of the rape.

To fully discuss the spectatorship of *The Accused*, Horeck finds it necessary to talk about what was left out of the original case and what was added to the film. This is important to mention because it is only natural to wonder why the filmmaker changed the real events and how that may have affected the viewer differently. This film is a wish for justice generated from the

case, more specifically, the spectators of the rape. While discussing the similarities between the film and crime shows that promote the action of citizens, Horeck brings up the term “conversion cinema.” This term means an attempt to shock the viewer into ethics (Horeck, 9). With this film the shocking factor is the rape and the active bystander works as the ethical inspiration.

However, this is the reason why the debate around this film is so strong. The producer of the film stated, “If anyone thinks this film is anti-feminist I give up” (Horeck, 9). She goes on to say that because of how horrific it is, people will now know how bad rape is and hopefully lead people to make social strides. The producer is explaining that the purpose of a disturbing rape scene is to get the viewer to understand that rape is a real thing; yet this scene causes problematic contradictions. The scene is placing the spectator in the shoes of the enabling bystanders during the rape, not an active bystander. Identifying with the bystanders, who were actually never brought to justice, works against what that the producer is claiming as a positive. This lines up with the idea of conversion cinema which correlates with the way people digest the film.

Something that is common with a film like *The Accused* is the idea that “films about social problems help solve those problems” (Horeck, 10). This film ends with justice, which leaves the viewer feeling good and as if they have helped in some way. By seeing the film they are helping or advocating for rape survivors and helping to fix the problem for showing support in that way. This makes things a bit more complex, seeing as how the events were skewed for the film. For instance, the fact that none of the spectators were brought to trial makes the viewer wonder why they chose to fictionalize that part of the case.

“What does it mean for an audience to spectate a gang rape on film?” (Horeck 7). Not only that, but what are they taking away from this spectacle? No film has a guaranteed spector

response because film is more subjective than not, but the differences among the reactions to this film is why it is important to discuss when talking about rape shown in film. For example, Horeck includes a report of young men who were watching the film and cheering right alongside the men in the bar during the rape scene. This not only shows how diverse reactions can be, but the double spectacle that one has to point out when it comes to talking about spectatorship and how this can lead to more problematic reactions.

There are many angles to Horeck's analysis on *The Accused* that shows how only one film can be so controversial within the conversation of spectatorship and rape in film. She touches on the real case, the spectatorship of that, what was left out or added to the film, the feminist perspectives, the idea of conversion cinema, and all around the diverse interpretations of the film and what it offers to the public.

A perspective that adds another dimension to this conversation is that of Timothy Shary. In his essay "Virgin Springs: A Survey of Teen Films' Quest for Sexcess" he discusses teen sex and the virgin trope and how hollywood has incorporated these things into film. The importance of discussing this critique or idea in general, is the important consideration that Shary is giving to the spectators of these films. The main topic of the writing is given in the title; it is about teen films where the plot relies on the quest for sex, whether that has to do with losing one's virginity or not.

The article starts off with the mention of the production code to remind the reader that the quest for sex was not a respectable topic for hollywood for quite some time. One way to ignore this topic was to focus on younger kids who would not be running into these issues, such as Shirley Temple. Even with the production code working as a shield, the portrayal of woman

characters needed to push the negative outlook on sex. For instance, the femme fatale would accommodate this example of the dangerous woman who uses her body and sex appeal to manipulate men and cause harm to others. Shary writes, “depicting teenagers as lascivious and even dangerous, especially the “loose” girls of the flapper era in the 1920s who supposedly threatened male standards with their more open sexuality” (Shary, 55). However, this topic was going to make it into the lives of Americans sooner or later, and when it was a part of a film’s plot, it was only displayed in a negative light to show the dangers of sex. For example, the film *Lolita* (Stanley Kubrick, US, 1962) was brought up because it is about a young woman who explores her sexual curiosities with older men, one being her stepfather and one being a suitor. Ultimately, it leads to the demise of both men which contributes to the influence of teenage sexual exploration being dangerous (Sharym 56). Another extreme example is the 1969 film *Last Summer* (Frank Perry, US), where a group of friends end up raping a newcomer to the group. Shary’s reading of this states, “the film explicitly suggests that the swelling sexual pressure among the teens leads to violence and degradation, with no salvation in sight” (Shary, 57). This is a shocking and extreme depiction of what teenagers would do with their unresolved sexual and virginal frustrations.

With a rise in youth pregnancy and the new and developing knowledge of aids, films that dealt with youths quest for sex disappeared until the mid 1990s. A film that is analyzed a bit more in depth in Shary’s article is the film *Kids* (1995). He refers to it as a “reactionary revision of the teen sex quest story” (Shary 62). Telly, the main character is actually on a quest to have sex with as many virgins as he can. In fact the film starts off with him convincing a very young girl to give her virginity to him. Shary brings up the racially charged and misogynistic

perspective of the film and how other scholars like bell hooks have critiqued the film for that perspective. “The main, if singular, consequence of sex in *Kids* is the potential spread of HIV. . . . Telly’s (Leo Fitzpatrick) habitual deflowering practice is left on the moral surface” (Shary 62). No matter where the social circumstance lays at the time, the loss of virginity or sexual exploration in general will find a way to the screen. The question of what the storyteller is trying to tell the viewer, is likely to cause debate among spectators and scholars.

The Feel-Bad Film & *Kids*

Nikolaj Lübecker’s book *The Feel-Bad Film* takes a look at different films and analyzes them through the lense of a feel bad film, a term he created for the sake of his scholarship. The concept of the feel bad film is worth adding to the conversation of the depiction of rape in film because it adds to the question of creating an unpleasant spectacle, the why, how, and why now, that Lübecker looks into with the feel bad film. A feel bad experience is when the film creates a spectatorial distress but denies a cathartic release. For example, the micro example he uses is from Todd Haynes’ *Safe* (US, 1995). There is an overwhelming amount of sound going on in the opening scene; the vacuum, the radio, the telephone, Carol (Julianne Moore) yelling. This overstimulation sensation is done on purpose to trigger the spectator and their desire for the noise to stop. Another trait of the feel bad film is the confrontational method that directly links to the spectator and their reaction; “These films appear to be about the spectator”(Lübecker 3). His interest depends greatly on the spectator of these films and what the films do, how they do it, and

why it is something a filmmaker strives for. Feel bad films also produce the spectator to wonder where the film is going and what the intentions are; seeing as how these films lean far more on the side of an art film, these thoughts raise questions about ethics, politics, and society in general. “Most critics are more inclined to explain, rather than challenge, the value of provocation” (Lübecker 5). Lübecker is interested in questioning the ethics of provocation which is the main goal in a feel bad film.

For the purpose of this paper, the film *Kids* (1995) is going to be analyzed and used to discuss Lübecker’s feel bad film to expand upon the depiction of rape in film. *Kids*, although not classified as an art film per se, uses a quasi-documentary style to create a disturbing realism that takes on non traditional filming techniques. The rape scene that takes place at the end of the film is one of the most uncomfortable scenes in the film that speaks to many aspects of the feel bad film. It is important to thoroughly analyze this scene in order to speak about the aesthetic techniques and how these choices affect the spectator, especially because that is where Lübecker’s interests lay in his scholarship.

One aspect that contributes to the effectiveness of the film's shock factor and realism is the mise-en-scene. The rape scene opens up with a young child sleeping on a couch. Already, this gives the viewer a sense of the uncomfortable atmosphere, with the help of knowing that a party took place the night before. The natural lighting that is cast into the room gives off a late morning tone and adds to the realistic style because it isn’t highly cinematic, it’s harsh in some areas and uneven. Casper (Justin Pierce) sits next to Jennie (Chloë Sevigny) who is passed out on a couch. A larger sense of atmosphere is given to the viewer when Casper scans the room. The detail in this shot gives the viewer information, while also adding to an uncomfortable realism.

One girl is laying with a bra on next to a shirtless guy, there is another shirtless guy with a girl's hand in his pants, and among the bodies are two younger boys sleeping on a chair. The trash, bottles, mismatching cups and plates, cigarette butts, and small wrappers are the details that make this scene as realistic as it is. Casper moves his hand which is in his pants and turns to Jennie and leans in closer. While she is unconscious he starts to rub her body and takes off her pants.

The entire rape scene is filmed in a claustrophobic way. Beginning the scene with a close up of a sleeping boy, it is already setting the tone of the room Casper is entering. The camera tracks Casper as he walks in front of the sleeping boy over to Jennie where he sits next to her in a tight medium two shot. Everything is tightly shot which gives the viewer a sense that this scene is through the eyes of Casper. Overall, the cinematography is simple, the handheld camera is gentle and the cuts are almost unnoticed until the point-of-view shot. The point-of-view shot gives off an anxious mood because it's the only shot that's out of the ordinary; it also solidifies the viewer's identification with Casper in this scene. The camera starts to push in as Casper starts to touch Jennie who is passed out and unable to give consent to his actions. The camera tracks Casper's hand on Jennie. This is adding to the identification with Casper, making the viewer aware of what it is doing. The camera doesn't move when Casper gets up to remove Jennie's pants, which is one of the only times the camera focuses on Jennie. In a tight medium close up the camera moves up and down between Jennie's feet in the air and Jennie's face. There is a cut to a close up of the young boy sleeping in the background, using Jennie's feet and Casper's body as a frame within a frame. Towards the end, the camera pans to the boy sleeping, mimicking the same shot from when Casper walked in. This scene is extremely suffocating with the camera

choices, there is no escape with the tight shots which adds to the anxiety and discomfort. These techniques relate to Lübecker's concepts behind the feel bad film. The camerawork reflects a feeling of no escape, which creates a spectatorial desire to do the opposite- escape. The true outcome of the feel bad film, which is to create a desire from the viewer and then block it, shows in this rape scene. A rape scene in the film *Dogville* (Lars von Trier, Denmark, 2003) is mentioned in Lübecker's chapter one. He mentions the camera and how the sequence is made up of close up shots using a handheld camera, noting that "the intimacy is unbearable" (Lübecker 36). Unlike *Kids*, the rape scene in *Dogville* switches shots during the assault, placing the viewer away from the action which provokes intellectual engagement, but still holds an emotional charge (Lübecker, 36). Von Trier uses this as a way to manipulate the viewer into ethical thinking. It is clear that the suffocating rape scene in *Kids* is different because the viewer is identifying with Casper. In *Dogville* the rape scene uses those cuts because it is about the community around Grace (Nicole Kidman). Both techniques used in these films are used to provoke ethical questions for the viewer, yet the motives are very different, which only leads to more questions about the depiction of rape in film.

Just as there was little to no variation with the cinematography, the minimal edits add to the intentions of the filmmaker. There is only one cut away from the rape and only two cut aways in the entire scene, beginning with Casper walking in. The decision to have a long take during the rape was a strong choice when it comes to a realistic and shocking experience. There is no escape from what is going on in this scene and when there is a brief break, it is the close up of the boy sleeping right next to this disturbing scenario. This gives the scene a very realistic feeling because in reality there is no escaping or cutting away from an unpleasant situation like

this. If the filmmaker decided to cut away and escape the situation, it would have reminded the viewer that this is a film and it's escapable. Another aspect that adds to this feeling is the sound.

The sound in the scene is extremely minimal, which also plays into the discomfort of the situation. The only thing that is heard is the ambient sound in the room and the New York City street outside. The quietness of the scene makes the rape even more impossible to ignore. The sound of Jennie's body on the leather couch moving back and forth is deafening against a completely silent room filled with people. Casper speaks a few times to reassure her that it's him on top of her.

You're So Shy

You're So Shy is a narrative short film that I have written and will be directing. The film is about Reyna, a seventeen year old girl who comes to terms with the fact that she was raped. While dealing with this internal conflict, she uses cheer practice as a tool to process the violation and take the first steps towards healing. The film is about her experience, navigating trauma, her growth, community, and healing. This film works to enhance the feminist perspective and strives to maintain an ambiguity around rape in film. I am going to break the film down the same way that *Kids* was broken down with mise-en-scene, cinematography, and the use of sound. By doing this I will also have the chance to discuss both films and what they have to offer to the conversation of rape in film.

The entire short film takes place during two cheer practices. The mise-en-scene consists of a high school gym, cheerleaders, mats, backpacks, and anything else that is strewn about in the space of an after school practice. For these aesthetic reasons, the mise-en-scene is very minimal. Instead, the film is focused on Reyna because it is all about her internal conflict and her ongoing process. However, the mise-en-scene works as a way for Reyna to digest the trauma that she has been through. For example, the flashbacks she has while running the routine is a direct link to the action in the scene, the tumbling, stunting, dancing. She is triggered from these actions and sounds, which leads her to have flashbacks of the rape. Another example of how the mise-en-scene works to enhance the theme, is the injury she gets in the first scene. Reyna falls from a stunt and twists her ankle. She doesn't mention the injury and ignores it even after Maya, her closest friend, brings attention to it a few days later. The physical injury she is ignoring works as a direct parallel to her emotional pain she is dealing with internally. It is clear that she is ignoring the fact that she was raped, she hasn't told anyone, and she is suffering in silence and that is the same thing she is doing with her ankle. She is shown limping, trying to hide bruising with tall ankle socks, and completely brushes it off when it is noticed. Her ankle is a clear part of the mise-en-scene when it comes to the theme of the film. Two other physical elements that tie into the theme and the experience Reyna is going through, are the teal bows and shirts that the team gets for a sexual assault awareness walk. These items are shown a few times throughout the film and create a tension within Reyna who is forced to face the truth that she so badly wants to ignore. Right before the team runs the routine where she has the flashbacks she encounters the rapist in the hallway. This is the biggest piece of mise-en-scene when it comes to facing her trauma. If not triggering enough, this moment sets her up for the flashbacks and ultimately

causes her to break. Her breaking point happens after she falls from her tumbling pass and all eyes are on her. The mise-en-scene that brings the film back to the theme of opening up and healing is when Megan, a girl on the team, comes up to Reyna after practice and asks about her ankle. This is a big moment in the film because it is a big moment for Reyna. She is skeptical, but she opens up to someone about her pain which is the most important takeaway from this film.

Because the rape scene is experienced in brief flashbacks, the mise-en-scene is simple. Reyna's face is the focus of the flashbacks and as they keep coming, more of the surrounding will be shown up until there is a clear view of a guy on top of her. The mise-en scene that will be used for the first flashback will be Reyna's face and her reacting. The second, will be of her hands being held down. The third will be Dan's hands on her and her reaction to what is happening. Finally, the fourth flashback will be Dan on top of Reyna in a wider shot. This technique works as a way for the viewer to piece things together while keeping the spectacle of rape away from the takeaway of the film.

The cinematography of *You're So Shy* will consist of long takes on Reyna and quick shots when it comes to the action of cheerleading and anything that has to do with the action of the rape. Close ups of Reyna are going to work to gauge her emotion throughout the film. For example, at practice when Megan volunteers to talk at the sexual assault awareness walk. This is a big moment in the film because Reyna is watching someone who is openly going to talk about sexual assault. Using a longer take in this moment will add to the emotion of what Reyna is thinking about. The camerawork will also consist of hand held shots; steady during the internal emotional scenes, and more hectic when it comes to cheerleading and external reactions from Reyna. For the most part, the only close ups will be of Reyna, up until the end when Megan and

Reyna have a moment of connection. This will help link these two characters together in an emotional moment of mutual understanding and it will get the message of the film across.

The element of sound is a big part of the film and understanding the underlying theme. The film relies on dialogue for getting a full picture of what's going on with Reyna internally. The off screen sound of Dan's voice, the way Reyna deflects, shakes things off, and takes blame, the talks and mentions of the walk for awareness, and the connecting conversation at the end are all huge parts of the film. The biggest use of sound for the film links directly to the most important use of mise-en-scene, the visual representation of the rape. The flashbacks correlate to the motions and noises Reyna is hearing during cheer practice. When they are running the routine, the first trigger of a flashback is when someone groans when they are loading into their basket toss. There is a match cut of the sound, and in the quick flashback of the rape Reyna groans in discomfort. The same thing happens when someone says "ow" in the routine. There is a cut to Reyna saying "ow." The same thing happens when someone says "stop" and pulls someone to their spot, and when someone says, "no" and the group doesn't do their stunt. Each sound relates to Reyna's experience with Dan. When she hears the sound of Dan's voice saying, "Don't be so shy" she falls on her back and there is a flashback of Dan on top of her. Again, these choices are made to draw attention away from a possible spectacle and towards Reyna's personal experience.

The analyses of the rape scene in *Kids* is not just about understanding the feel bad qualities, it is about understanding the style and approach that I will be taking when working through my own creative process with *You're So Shy*. The feel bad film is all about confrontation and creating discomfort by either withholding catharsis, or granting catharsis with a "was that

really what you wanted?” attitude. *Kids* attests to the concept of withholding catharsis. The viewer is expecting something after Jennie is raped, especially because of the way it is shown. Instead, there is only Casper breaking the fourth wall saying, “Jesus Christ, what happened?” This isn’t the only scene that had me shocked and left me questioning my responsibility in relation to the spectatorial relationship with the feel bad experience and rape in film. There are also the scenes of Telly convincing young girls to have sex. This film was made for shock value in order to inspire the viewer to think about HIV. The rapes were used as a “normal” part of this particular New York City coming of age experience. The rape scenes were made to be disturbing because rape is disturbing, yet it was not a central theme or something mentioned at all. Because of this, the film is doing a disservice, and that is part of the inspiration I had for my film. It’s limiting the possibilities for a rape narrative and that is something that inspires *You’re So Shy* to use feminist film critique to further the film and shy away from a schopenhilic portrayal used for shock value.

Kids and You’re So Shy

The inspiration for my film comes from rape culture and the way it is appropriated in film. One of the biggest inspirations was *Kids* because of the “feel bad” qualities that it had, and how it draws upon the teen film and the way films, TV, and other forms are perpetuating rape culture. Overall, there is a drive for my film to work towards maintaining an ambiguity around how to represent rape and sexual assault in film while still working within the teen film genre.

Unlike *Kids*, or any other film that uses feel bad techniques, my strategy for exploring the dark theme of rape is much different. Instead of leaving the survivor and leaving the viewer to come up with their own interpretation, this film works as a reminder that there are ways to bring political feminist theory into film while still caring about the survivors in the film. That is the fine line between the spectacle of a rape scene and the socio-political commentary on it. My inspiration comes from the spectacle aspect, but also from feminist readings of films that deal with rape. For instance, my film intends to oppose the way filmmakers excuse the action of rape, whether they mean to or not. My goal is to take *Kids* and shed light on the limitations that it has and how feminist film theory can expand Lubecker's framework of "feel bad" aesthetics to account the ways in which withholding catharsis has specific implications for representing rape.

Feminist Film Critique and *You're So Shy*

The importance of bringing feminist film critique to discuss *You're So Shy* works in many ways. All of the specific critics mentioned in this paper, bring something different to the table in terms of using media as a tool to discuss and portray rape. Not only is this discussion about how these feminist theorists and critics help to push *You're So Shy* into new aesthetic territory, but it is about how this feminist film theory is reinscribed with new critique.

Looking at Sarah Projanksy's *Watching Rape* she focuses on different modes of representation and the affects these choices have on the viewer. Through this exploration she looks into the concept of where the spectator is within the film which is extremely important to consider when constructing a film like *You're So Shy*. Projanksy looks at how identifying with

the survivor in the film and depending on how it is shot, can cause fear, but in an exciting way that the brain enjoys, like the way a horror film does. The aesthetics are extremely important in this way. My goal is to avoid causing fear and anxiety for an entertaining thrill because as Projanky is saying, this will not create the response to rape \that is trying to be conveyed. For instance, a rape revenge film is usually set up in the style of a thrilling horror film. Though these films do thematically focus on rape, it is more focused on the chase and revenge rather than on the woman or her experience. This is one of the reasons *You're So Shy* is strictly about Reyna's experience and emotional development. The film is about her, not about the rape or about revenge which many filmmakers focus on. To make sure the viewer is identifying with Reyna, the cinematography is focused on a lot of long takes and close ups. The quicker shots and edits are focused on the rape scene and the action shots of cheerleading. These choices are going to center the film on Reyna, while also engaging the viewer to understand what's going on in her mind. The cheerleading factor is the only wanted spectacle to subconsciously contrast with the rape scene, in other words, "this (cheerleading) is entertainment and this (the rape) is not." *DreamWorlds* is an example Projanky uses which brings up a point about the male gaze. In contrast to the invited male gaze in *DreamWorlds*, my film works hard to disengage with the use of the male gaze so it does not hold the same dangers of attracting a rape myth. When considering aesthetic choices, Projanky's work has made an impact on the way I want to portray the theme and action of rape on screen in order to maintain a respectful ambiguity.

Tonya Horeck's article on *The Accused* ties into the making of *You're So Shy* in a few key ways in relation to feminist film critique. Firstly, Horeck focuses on the true story that the film was based off because of the spectacle of the trial, and the fact that they didn't include all of

the details. This is noted because in the real case, there wasn't even a trial for the spectators who cheered and watched the rape. Horeck is pointing out that *The Accused* is a film about a false justice and that's why she mentions conversion cinema. When making a film about an issue in the world whether social or political, it is a fine line between a film that provokes change and a film that elicits the viewer to feel that they helped solve the problem. When it comes to my film, all of the feminist perspectives and facts about the film bring me to think about the ethical choices of the film. The way *The Accused* bends the facts of the real event brings up the question of the filmmaker's moral and ethical duty to the subject matter. *The Accused* is a film talked about for the same reason *Kids* is talked about. What sticks out to the viewer is the disturbing and shocking rape scene, not the survivor. *You're So Shy* is taking the topic of rape and processing it through the eyes of Reyna by using her community around her. I am not creating a situation where the viewer is going to walk away feeling as if they have helped put an end to rape.

Conclusion

You're So Shy is a short film intended for high school students and young adults. This age range is extremely important for this film because it deals with a subject that teen films or coming of age films don't give enough attention to. This film is about showing that rape is a real issue and that it needs to be discussed, especially within this age range. The intended audience is made to connect with this film because it is about a highschooler who is processing the fact that she was raped, and has to find a way to release a building up tension inside of her. It's important

to bring this film to a younger audience for young women and people in general to understand that communicating and opening up about this topic is so important. Reyna, the main character finally opens up at the end of the film. Though she doesn't come out and say that she was raped, this first step shows a big change within her. Sometimes it takes years for a woman to come to terms with the fact that she was raped, or say anything about it at all. This is why this film is so important; if young women see this film or relate to this film, it can inspire them to take the first steps towards healing. The sexual assault awareness walk in the film is physically and symbolically related to the community that is out there bringing this topic out into the public sphere.

Not only is this film about shedding light onto rape and continuing the conversation through film and not letting this topic fade away, it's about how different this film addresses the issue of rape and rape culture. There are problematic aspects within all of the films mentioned by Projanksy, Horeck, Shary and Lubecker and that is why *You're So Shy* is taking a stand against the counterproductivity of rape depicted in film. When it comes to portraying rape in film the choices that a filmmaker makes can change everything and that is why they have to be considered through all angles. That is why these scholars push this conversation with a feminist perspective through the aesthetics. *You're So Shy* is a film that considers all of these elements in order to maintain an ambiguity around rape in film; and by tailoring this film to the desired audience of young adults, it positions itself with a new perspective in order to discourage the acceptance of rape culture through film.

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Ember AutumnSkye
Production Bible
You're So Shy

1. Concept Statement & Short Premise

Concept Statement:

- You don't have to go through a hard time alone.
- Advocating for yourself is just as important as advocating for someone else.
- Healing is a process that doesn't have to be completely internal.

Short Premise:

-A highschool girl is constantly reminded of a recent assault and processes her emotions through cheerleading practice where her community pushes her to confront her trauma and take the first steps towards healing.

-A highschool girl struggles to cope with a recent sexual assault alone up until her community gives her courage to process and advocate for her pain.

2. Expanded Premise:

You're So Shy is a film about a highschool girl who is processing a recent traumatic event through cheer practice. She is pushed to confront her pain and advocate for herself while also realizing that she does not have to be alone throughout the process. This is a short film directed towards highschoolers and young adults with a runtime of eight minutes.

This narrative film revolves around a girl in highschool, more specifically, during two cheer practices. This is the only location that is used because it is through that community that a sixteen year old sophomore is able to process the fact that she was raped. This film takes form as a

coming of age day in the life film. It takes place during the month of April, which is significant because it is sexual assault awareness month. This is an important element to the story because the cheer team is participating in a walk for sexual assault awareness, which complicates the inner conflicts. This high school student uses these aspects in her life to find strength and open up to a teammate and take the first steps towards healing.

This film is focused entirely on Reyna and her inner conflict and her journey over the course of a few days. Reyna is a girl who always has a smile on her face. Some people would mistake her as shy, but she really just needs time to warm up because she is afraid of rejection. She has a few close friends who like to go out on the weekend, but Reyna prefers to stay in and watch movies or practice her cheer skills to be the best she can be. One Saturday night, Maya, one of her best friends convinces her to go to a party, where her life is changed forever. The film begins on the following Monday, where Reyna's character is completely changed. She is dissociated from the world around her, experiencing flashbacks from the weekend which catch her off guard. During practice, she twists her ankle which is something she keeps to herself. The physical pain she is dealing with mixed with her emotional trauma is continually building; especially when Maya sees the bruised ankle and confronts her about her pain. With mention of the sexual assault awareness walk, Reyna finds it even more impossible to ignore something she doesn't want to face. She finally breaks down when she runs into the guy who raped her and is then immediately thrown into the routine. As she goes through the routine, the sounds and actions around her trigger flashbacks from that night. Reyna opens up and admits to having pain when a girl on the team asks her about her ankle. The two girls share an intimate moment, where Reyna confronts her pain, which is the first step when it comes to healing.

Production design for *You're So Shy* is aesthetically constructed in every aspect, because it's a short film, these elements have to come forward to resemble the overall theme and feeling of the film quickly and effectively. This film will be shot in a traditional hand held style with a color pallet that resembles the cheer team's colors, red and white, while also speaking to the emotion of the characters.

The cinematography will consist of long takes when identifying with the main character and with intimate moments of the film. Short takes will be used for the action of cheerleading and for the flashbacks of the rape scene. The handheld camera is going to add to the mood of the scene with change of movement depending on the scene and where tensions are. For more emotional moments, it will be very steady, and for action and the flashbacks there will be much more movement to show the emotion of the scene. Close ups of Reyna will be used often, as well as having the camera stay on her for the majority of the time. This is because the film centers on her internal process.

The film's mise en scene is quite simple. The location is a high school gym which will allow for a minimal set. The only thing in the room will be cheerleaders, mats, and backpacks and water bottles. This is going to help center the film on Reyna and what's going on in her mind. The action of cheerleading and the people and relationships in that room are what should be illuminated. There are three major pieces of mise-en-scene that are needed for the practice scenes. The sexual assault awareness bow and shirt are two props that create tension within Reyna. These also help tell the viewer what's going on in the film. Her ankle is another part of the mise-en-scene that is highlighted. This physical injury is a parallel to her emotional pain

which will be used as a way to understand Reyna as a person as well as how she is coping with a traumatic event.

The colors in the film are going to be used to draw the viewer in, but more importantly, for a symbolic representation. The team colors are red and white, but for costumes the girls will be wearing red tops and black shorts. For Reyna to stand out she will be in all black which also represents her emotion. Under the black sweatshirt she's going to wear will be her red shirt, which will show during scenes where she is confronted about things like her ankle, or her feelings about the party. Colors are going to be played around with for purposes like this, to enhance the story and underlying theme.

Healing is a process that doesn't have to be completely internal. *You're So Shy* explores the traumatic affects of sexual assault with a focus on the importance of advocating for oneself. Reyna tries to conceal her pain and hide from something she doesn't want to face. As a young woman who already struggles to advocate for herself, she is at a loss when dealing with this huge violation. This film is about advocacy, it's about the importance of speaking up and talking to one another. This film is directed at young women to inspire communication around this topic, because it can not get lost. With a focus on an internal process that begins with suppression and ends with connecting, this film will give a new face to films that deal with sexual assault.

3. Detailed character bios and plans for casting/working with actors

Reyna

Reyna is an anxious fifteen year old high school girl. Some people would mistake her as shy, but she's a cheerleader and just needs time to warm up to show who she really is. She was born October 7th, 1998 with brown hair and wide brown eyes. The name Reyna comes from the Latin "regis," meaning royal and "reina" meaning queen in Spanish. As a highschool sophomore, Reyna is 5'3 on a good day, adding to her innocent appearance. Her slim figure is outlined by a red and white cheer uniform that becomes her daily attire for a few days out of the week.

Reyna's habit of twirling her hair is a tell tale sign that she is holding something in, whether it's stress for an exam, or something much more serious. For the most part, Reyna always has a smile on her face, she is extremely positive and respectful towards everyone. Though she finds it easy to care for others, she struggles to consider her own feelings or take time for herself. She has a small group of friends, but for the most part avoids the party scene, unlike her best friend Maya. When she finally accepts Maya's invitation to come to a party, things take a dark turn. When seperated at the party, Reyna is raped and left to acknowledge this traumatic event on her own -or so she thinks.

Reyna's character is drastically altered and when Monday cheer practice rolls around, where we first meet Reyna, this is evident. Reyna is unattached to reality; she sits alone and cannot leave her hair untouched. Adding to the discomfort in her disorientation life, she twists her ankle during practice. A character trait that is consistent, is Reyna's lack of consideration for herself, thus ignoring the physical pain of her ankle. She wants the pain in her life to disappear.

The disregard she has for her ankle and neglecting the rape shows that she doesn't think she deserves to advocate for her pain. She is a girl who takes several vitamins, probiotics, drinks apple cider vinegar, and eats clean, all for maintaining good health, yet she struggles to advocate for herself in all other aspects of life, and that is her main internal conflict. Pushing Reyna further towards acknowledging what has happened to her, the cheer team is participation in a walk for sexual assault awareness. One of the girls on the cheer team volunteers to talk at the event, which strikes Reyna's attention. This is a moment where her internal conflict is triggered. As time goes on, her emotions build up until she cracks during practice. This is the pivotal moment that shows that bottling this up isn't working, though she still doesn't know where to go with these feelings. She admits to having pain in this moment, referring to her ankle which leads to the biggest moment in the film. Reyna finally opens up to Megan, the girl who volunteered to talk, and they share an intimate moment. In this moment Reyna realizes that she can let someone in, she can talk about her pain, this is the first step toward healing.

Maya

Maya is an 18 year old girl who balances opposite personalities, one being an outgoing party animal who isn't afraid to stir the pot, and the other being a responsible, poised, well spoken woman. She is a highschool senior who is truly a caring person, but can get lost in her own personal life which leads her to get distracted from things that are right in front of her. Though caring, Maya struggles with conflict due to coming from a broken home, she is always trying to find the good in things, even if she's accidentally ignoring a conflict. She can pick up on emotions quickly, especially from her closest friends like Reyna. However, she can be a bit naive in certain situations. Maya is a pisces, born on the cusp of aries, which leaves her with an

interesting balance of personalities. For the most part, this leaves Reyna to be a perfect match for a great friendship. Reyna is a few years younger than Maya, so she tries to take her under her wing and be a good role model, yet tries hard to find a balance where she isn't always coming off as a momma bird.

When Maya finds Reyna in the gym alone, she is skeptical of her energy. She confronts her and asks if she's mad about the party and how they got separated. Reyna tells her that she isn't mad at her, but there is still clearly something wrong. Trying to balance the protectiveness and fun loving side to her, she tries not to pry, but picks up on certain things. During the second practice, she notices Reyna's ankle and tells her that she has to tell the captain. Again, she doesn't want to overstep so she lets Reyna make her own choices. After Reyna breaks down in front of the entire team, Maya is shocked. This is something that Reyna would never do. Though she wants to go up to her and talk about it, Maya feels that Reyna should speak with her first, because she doesn't want to push her away. Her distraction also plays a part in this because when the girls are given their shirts for the walk, she gets into conversations with some other teammates.

Plan For Working With Actors

- This film is all about relationships so building a good foundational relationship for Reyna and Maya, and even Megan because that is where an intimate, personal and emotional scene comes from. The lines in the film are very important, but it's really riding on how they are delivered. I think something that would enhance the actors performance would be rehearsing a good amount of times before shooting. This wouldn't be so much to get the lines nailed, but to get to know each other and to work with the vibe that each player

is giving off at certain times. It's important for these girls to be comfortable with each other, and that has to be believable on screen.

- Sexual assault is the main topic of this film, so it is important for everyone to understand to the best of their ability what is going on in Reyna's mind. The plan is to share information and make sure people are getting real facts about sexual assault to not only help with emoting and understand Reyna's character, but to convey how important this topic is. Sexual assault awareness is something that needs attention, and I need my actors to understand why. This can only help inspire the cast and crew.
- Channeling emotion is something that needs to happen when acting in this film, especially from Reyna. The actress who is playing Reyna is my sister, which brings such a rare opportunity to make this character just as she needs to be. Connecting with my sister on a personal level is extremely helpful for this film. It allows me to work with Sage one on one more often to get her to understand her character. It's also going to help pull things from personal experiences she has had that bring up similar emotions to help bring her best acting forward.

4. Script

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1gbGuiHwuavLkx0stEJ3RRsFoUo4wRcHi>

5. Proof Of Concept Video

<https://youtu.be/BcBeSSw79h4>

6. Production Influences



1.) *Riverdale* - American TV Drama (2017)

Creator: Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

Director: Rob Seidenglanz

The color pallet here is something that I am striving for. The natural lighting in the back creating that washed out tone and the colors that are all matching and pulling the viewer in.



I love the change in natural lighting and the power it has to change the tone of this set. A specific section that I see *You're So Shy* reflecting is Season 1 Episode 18:08



2.) *Cheer* - Netflix American TV- docu series.
Director: Greg Whiteley

The colors here are visually something that I'm going for, as well as in the picture from *Riverdale*. Because it's a doc, this is a real gym where they practice which really immerses the viewer.



The cinematography keeps on intimate moments on one girl, keeping on her to see her emotion and identifying with her)



3.) *But I'm a Cheerleader* (2000) American film.

Director: Jamie Babbit

The production design here is very stylized which I'm striving for because it brings the viewer into their world.



4.) *The Florida Project* (2017) American film.

Director: Sean Baker

This film does a great job at building emotion and using their environment and location to really get connected with their lifestyle and situation. This really inspires me to create a world that reflects a real space.



5.) *Mean Girls* (2004) American film

Director: Mark Waters

The lighting they use in this film mixed with the color pallet brings a washed out look to it, with the pop of color and contrast.



6.) *Clueless* (1995) American film

Director: Amy Heckerling

Production design reminds me of *Mean Girls* with a similar use of color and lighting. These early 2000s and mid 90s films are a big influence for my film.



7.) *American Horror Story* - American TV series.

Season 3, episode 1

Director: Bradley Buecker

The lighting, colors, everything goes into making this scene and the pieces leading up to it extremely uncomfortable. This style would be used for the rape flashbacks.



8.) *The End of The F***ing World* (2017) British TV series.

Director: Jonathan Entwistle

This color palette and design of the entire show is a big influence on production design. This image here would be used as influence for the rape scene in *You're So Shy*.



9.) *The Shape of Water* (2017) American Film

Director: Guillermo del Toro

This is another highly stylized film. The palate is very prominent. This is definitely an inspiration for me and the goal for the rape scene, especially with the colors.