

Gender and Class Performativity at the Prom: An Analysis of *Pretty in Pink*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of the prom in the assumption of gender and class identity, specifically examining the protagonist's preparations for, and participation in, the prom in *Pretty in Pink* (Dir. Howard Deutch, 1986). The prom remains under-examined within academia despite its ubiquity in the Teen Movie, and Amy Best's revealing ethnographic work elucidating the event's significance for high-school age girls. Taking up Judith Butler's work on performativity alongside close textual analysis, the paper proposes that the prom constitutes a key locus of heteronormative gender and class interpellation. Observing Andie's idiosyncratic fashion sense, the paper also examines work on subcultures and discusses the relationship between minority identities and Butler's heterosexual matrix. The resulting analysis creates a mutual feedback loop between her work and the film with the result that the theory is not only instantiated but also complicated by the textual analysis. Reading *Pretty in Pink* through Butler's work reveals how Andie's subcultural identity, gender performance and relationship to the prom both accommodates and resists the heterosexual matrix. In turn, the film problematises Butler's account of gender interpellation and demonstrates how performativity might be extended to class analysis.

KEYWORDS

Judith Butler, *Pretty in Pink*, gender, Teen Movie, prom, subculture, class

Introduction: Performativity and the Prom

Written and produced – though not directed – by John Hughes, *Pretty in Pink* (dir. Howard Deutch, 1986) forms part of the small corpus of Teen Movies associated with Hughes which continue to define the genre's reference points today (see De Vaney, 2002: 201-216; Shary, 2002; Shary, 2005). Starring Molly Ringwald, *Pretty in Pink* centres on Andie Walsh, a working-class scholarship student attending a private high-school. She has a distinct personal style and is devotedly pursued by a fellow student with similarly idiosyncratic tastes and class background, Duckie, who she rejects in favour of Blane, one of the “richies” at the school. The pairing of Blane and Andie receives widespread hostility, particularly from Blane's friends Steff and Benny, who disapprove of his association with a lower-class girl. Eventually Andie and Blane are reunited at the high-school prom where the film ends.

Alongside close textual analysis, I will take up Judith Butler's work on gender in order to explore the significance of the prom as an idealised site of gender interpellation. Though Amy Best notes the prom is ‘iconic... in American culture’ (Best, 2000: 2), the event

continues to receive little attention from academics. Proposing both to read the film through Butler's work and to use the film to reflect on gender and class performativity, the analysis provides a mutual feedback loop between the two. To that end, this paper closely examines key scenes in *Pretty in Pink* in order to elucidate the film's representation of gender and class at the prom. Although the prom occurs only at the film's conclusion, the dance itself, as Best notes, is merely the footnote of a 'series of events, practices and relations' (Best, 2000: 12) that build towards the event itself. Consequently, I will demonstrate that the prom's influence informs and permeates the narrative throughout.

Before the analysis can begin, we first need to define our terms. Celebrating the conclusion of high-school education, the prom as we know it today stemmed primarily from late nineteenth-century legislation requiring compulsory state-funded schooling, which in turn gave rise to the growing role of public schools in the socialisation of American youth. Intended as a 'democratised version of the debutante balls' (Best, 2000: 12), the prom assimilated an upper-class ideal of female coming-of-age, where a young woman's "coming out" was taken to indicate that she was 'ready for marriage and physically capable of reproduction' (Kearney, 2002: 126). From the beginning, the rite of passage represented by the prom was also bound up with compulsory heterosexuality, an area Butler underscores in her work.

Indeed, in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), the theorist elaborates the heterosexual matrix principally as a means of conceptualising the discursive network of power relations that work to ensure the production of binary gender, such that only a certain configuration of sex, sexual practice, desire and gender appears naturalised. Importantly for Butler, gender is performative since 'acts, gestures and desires *produce the effect* of an internal, organising substance on the surface of the body' (Butler, 1990: 182, my emphasis). She further proposes that (performatively constituted) subjects are continually called into, or interpellated into their gender roles. Taking up Lacan's mis-recognising subject in the mirror phase (Lacan, 1949, in Storey, 2006: 291) alongside Althusser's work allows Butler to observe that such gender interpellation 'may be refused... ruptured, or forced into a re-articulation' (Butler, 1993: 122) of the power operations that hail the subject. Butler is thus able to highlight areas of parodic slippage, where seemingly normative citations are revealed as undermining that norm to which they purportedly refer.

The analysis will both demonstrate how *Pretty in Pink* is elucidated by Butler's work, while also allowing for a reading which enables us to develop on Butler's work in new ways. The film thus demonstrates the instantiation of performativity, while making apparent the limitations of the concept. Further, though Butler and other critics who have taken up her work have addressed race – 'a product of racialisation which invokes the iteration and reiteration of speech acts' (Butler, 1997, in Jagger, 2008: 117) – class, as a similarly central pillar of subject construction remains overlooked.¹ In *Pretty in Pink*, Andie's lower class status propels much of the narrative. Importantly though, the film does not infer lower class status simply by a below-average household income – the terms by which socioeconomic

stratification analysts understand class – but by Andie’s poor tastes and lack of cultural knowledge; that is, by cultural capital. This cultural production of class disparity then offers the potential for a reading which develops a performativity of class.

Examining the relationship between Butler’s account of gender interpellation and the prom, it is evident that as much as a high-school prom celebrates the end of compulsory education, it also functions as a dual gendered and classed gateway to adulthood, requiring both attendance as a heterosexual pair and the acquisition of a particular, gendered outfit.

Problematising Butler’s account of gender interpellation, which occurs and recurs repeatedly, we can propose that the prom provides a privileged instance of gender interpellation where the stakes are higher and a stricter adherence to an idealised gender norm is required. The trope of the high-school prom highlights the possibility of constant repeated acts that are punctuated over time by significant rituals where gender norms are re-cited and consolidated.

Reading *Pretty in Pink* through Butler’s work foregrounds the accommodation with and resistance to, the heterosexual matrix which occurs throughout the film. Certainly, Andie’s self-actualisation is achieved through a transformative heterosexual romance. However Butler’s heterosexual matrix cannot adequately account for Andie’s sense of class shame and her performance of ‘middle-classness’ (Moseley, 2002: 405) through her sartorial choices, and coded dialogues with Duckie. Her gender and class identity is revealed as a complex negotiation between the requirements of the heterosexual romance narrative, her drive to transcend her class background through work, and an excessive, potentially subversive citation of ‘middle-classness.’

The analysis explores firstly Andie’s status as daughter, before turning to the subculture comprised of Andie, Duckie and Iona, and the spaces they occupy discussing whether their excessive performances of ‘middle-classness’ represent a significant challenge to discourses governing respectability and heteronormativity. Thirdly, we will observe Andie’s preparations for the prom, discussing whether she can be regarded as a postfeminist heroine (see Bleach, 2010). Finally, we will assess the prom itself as a privileged space of gender interpellation and heteronormative narrative closure.

Daughterhood and the Prom

Indicating the primacy of the father-daughter relationship in the film, *Pretty in Pink* opens by introducing us to Andie and her father, Jack. In these scenes, Andie wakes her father, brings him coffee and playfully but firmly cajoles him to search for better-paid employment.

Through close textual analysis of their discussion of the prom, we will examine Andie’s role as daughter, how this positions her in terms of Butler’s heterosexual matrix and the extent to which her subject position is confined to, and resists, domesticity. As will become clear from their discussion, for Jack, his daughter’s participation at the prom is an indicator of her successful socialisation into idealised femininity.

Opening crane shots depict a bare, unpopulated street, centred on an industrial vehicle as it passes slowly in front of the houses and railway that runs alongside. The focus on industrial equipment and the absence of cars on the street invites the spectator to infer that this is a low-rent residential area. These scenes are followed by lingering close-ups of various parts of Andie's physicality – hands, arms, legs, ears – which fetishise her body and the acts of selecting and putting on clothes. The disparity here between Andie's ostentatious clothing and her surroundings provides a juxtaposition of class signifiers, indicating from the start her hybrid identity. Butler's work allows us to perceive the scene as rendering apparent the work of assuming a gender identity under the heterosexual matrix, Andie's relationship with which, as we shall observe, is neither entirely resistant nor fully compliant.

A medium-long shot depicts Andie's age and demeanour, reinforced by the Psychedelic Furs song, 'Pretty in Pink'. Once again, her apparent age contrasts starkly with the pearls and floral patterns on her clothing, more commonly associated with older women. Her cry, 'Daddy! It's seven-thirty!' is likewise indicative of an oscillation between childhood and adolescence, infantilising her in the use of the term 'Daddy', while placing Andie in the role of responsible parent providing encouragement and support for her indolent father in his search for better paid employment. Further, Andie's name, itself a feminisation of a common male name, attests to the film-maker's intent to portray the girl's somewhat uncanny gender identity. Turning back to the scene, as Andie enters her father's bedroom, another medium long shot follows her in, allowing us to observe the cluttered interior. The size of the bedroom and Jack's rumpled sheets - indicative of a disturbed sleep – signify his lowly economic status, presenting Jack as a failed patriarchal figure, unable to provide adequately for his child.

As Jack and Andie begin to discuss their respective days ahead, he enquires how 'things are going at school.' Since he probes no further to Andie's response that 'it's okay', and that his following questions relate to the prom, we can assert that Jack is more interested in his daughter's social position at the school than in her academic performance. Reading the dialogue in the light of Butler's work, Jack's reinforcement of the social demands of the prom constructs him as a central agent of the heterosexual matrix. As Andie reveals she has not yet found a partner and in shame turns her head from her father, close-ups of Jack's face reveal his bewilderment and concern. Jack's questions can be read in a further two ways. Firstly, in showing his concern for his daughter's social welfare, the dialogue could merely serve to construct him as a caring father. Alternatively, having been deprived of his power by Andie's doting efforts, his observation of her poor social position could be a way of re-asserting his depleted authority as the symbolic Father over his daughter as heterosexual subject. Andie's compliance with her father's requests to 'turn' – in order that he might examine her outfit more fully – certainly bolsters the second point of view.

The sequence of the discussion, from the prom to an exposition of Andie's clothing, demonstrates the connections between the event, gendered clothing and gender identity. Further to the opening sequence, where Andie's clothing is lovingly shot in lingering close-

ups, Jack's interest in her clothing once again emphasises Andie's dress-making skills since she states that she had made most of her clothes and bought only the shoes second-hand. Whether Jack's evident admiration, shown in close-up, lies in his pleasure at his daughter's thrift and sewing expertise, what Rachel Moseley describes as 'the feminine ideals of the past' (Moseley, 2002: 405), or with the finished article itself, remains unclear. Nonetheless, the scene leaves the viewer with the impression that Andie's personal appearance meets with her father's approval, and that meeting those expectations is important to her. A contradiction remains however: Andie's assimilation of traditionally feminine skills should signify the character as normatively feminine in accordance with the heterosexual matrix. However, the absence of an invitation to the prom signifies Andie's gender identity as indefinably at odds with the compulsory heterosexuality instantiated by that event.

Andie's subcultural allegiances, hinted at here not only by her clothing but also by Deutch's non-diegetic soundtrack provides an answer to the complex negotiations at play. As a former director of music videos, and so particularly invested in pop music, the director's non-diegetic soundtrack – 'Pretty in Pink' by the Psychedelic Furs – is potentially significant. Played to accompany Andie's pink clothing, car and bedroom, the spectator is encouraged to associate the song with the appearance of this character. Eschewing successful mainstream artists of the mid-1980s, such as A-Ha, The Bangles and Lionel Richie, Deutsch selected a hitherto little-known British post-punk group to provide the title song for his mass-market teen film. Deutsch's taste for the alternative continues into the rest of the soundtrack, where tracks from The Smiths, New Order and INXS appear, most of which did not reach the top 10 in the charts when released as singles.ⁱⁱ The song depicts 'Caroline', a casually used sex object. According to the lyrics,

All of her lovers
All talk of her notes
And the flowers
That they never sent
And wasn't she easy
And isn't she
Pretty in Pink...

This description bears little relation to the chaste Andie who we see devotedly looking after her father before rejecting Steff's aggressive advances at school. Deutsch's unusual choice of signature music may signal Andie's belonging to the distinct subculture comprised of herself, Iona and Duckie, whose difference from the mainstream is represented by the spaces they inhabit, their behaviours and their distinctive clothing. This initial conversation between Andie and her father provides an overview of the value systems at play in the film and demonstrates the tensions of the domestic space, where the requirements of Butler's heterosexual matrix are negotiated, before being resolved later at the prom.

Subcultural Identity and Performances of Respectability

The first sequence of *Pretty in Pink* introduces us to the portrayal of the tension between subcultural and mainstream identities. This section observes how this tension is carried through the film through close analysis of the clothing worn and spaces occupied by the subculture formed of three of the film's characters: Andie, Duckie and Iona. Their subcultural difference is interplayed with assertions of the continued power of the mainstream, and by extension, the heterosexual matrix, through discussions of the prom and scenes from Steff's house party.

Moseley argues firstly that in *Pretty in Pink*, difference is allowed for and celebrated, through 'attention paid to spaces [Andie] inhabits and details of her dress' (Moseley, 2002: 405). In style of dress and preferred use of space, Andie, Duckie and Iona as a group are certainly distinct from the demeanour and mores of the mainstream elite represented by Blane, Steff and Benny (though the latter two, like Andie and Duckie share the distinction of distinctly androgynous names). The group's hostility towards their wealthier peers is demonstrated when Blane is seen to infiltrate their spaces, such as at the concrete hang-out where Blane asks Andie on a date, and in the bar she takes him to. The group can then be seen to conform to Dick Hebdige's definition of a subculture, which forms an opposition to the mainstream (Hebdige, 1979 in Gelder and Thornton, 1997: 82).

Arguing against Hebdige, Sarah Thornton cautions against taking contrarian youth discourses too literally (Thornton, 1995, in Gelder and Thornton, 1997: 201). Observing the group's distinctive clothing in *Pretty in Pink*, we can see that the group's expressed distaste for the mainstream is demonstrably more complex than mere contrarianism. Indeed, through what Ken Gelder describes as 'anachronistic self-fashioning,' (Gelder, 2007: 92) and Kaja Silverman simply as 'retro,' (Silverman, 1986 in Modleski, 1986: 150) their clothing reappropriates fashions of the past, and so refutes the perpetual compulsion toward the conspicuous consumption associated with mainstream fashion. As the film's opening scenes demonstrated, Andie's clothing is comprised of thrift-shop finds interplayed with her own creations accessorised by copious jewellery. Though her pearls, smart jackets and dresses evoke conventionally respectable feminine dress, they are also marked as excess by the clashing colours, patterns and layers that contribute to Andie's 'volcanic ensemble'.

Duckie's clothing demonstrates his similar fondness for plunder and *bricolage* from past fashions in his unusual combinations of smart blazers and trousers, juxtaposed with the overt display of braces, for instance. Duckie's clothing both references smart adult male attire of the past and wilfully mocks a look commonly worn by financial services workers around the same period – and epitomised by Michael Douglas' performance as Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street* (Dir. Oliver Stone, 1987). Though comprised of fairly conservative pieces (as in Andie's ensemble), Duckie's clothing is accessorised to excess, perfectly demonstrated by his wearing more than one watch on the same wrist.

It is then through the manner in which Andie and Duckie wear their clothes, rather than the clothes themselves, which leads to the potential subversion of Butler's heterosexual matrix. Silverman argues that wearing such clothing 'denaturalizes the wearer's specular identity,' (Silverman, 1986, in Modleski, 1986: 150) and so potentially responds to Butler's call for a 'genealogy of gender,' (Butler, 1990: 186) which highlights gender's contingent, performative structure and lack of ontological foundation. Moreover, through clothing and behaviour that both quotes on and subverts conservative upper class norms, the group are seen to engage in what Butler describes as 'the parodic inhabiting of conformity', (Butler, 1993, p. 121) which undermines the authority it otherwise purports to uphold. That is, recalling Althusser's notion of being 'hailed' into subjecthood, Andie and Duckie are shown both to *appear to* attempt to cite the norms of the gender identity into which they are interpolated, while implicitly mocking those norms by donning those totems of conservative gender polarity to excess.

The group's simultaneous accommodation with and resistance to the mainstream is apparent in their relations with consumption. For instance, thrift shops from which the three claim to have purchased many of their clothes depend for their existence on a thriving consumer culture where the use-value of clothing outlives its desirability. In *Pretty in Pink*, this ambivalent relationship is expressed through Andie's job at Trax, where Blane's record purchase is met with distinct hostility as she asks if he might pay with 'an American Express platinum card maybe?' Like the group's clothing, the record shop is dependent on disposable youth income even as their clothing and actions remain hostile to mainstream consumer culture. A similar double-bind occurs in Butler's work, where the gendered subject may – through intent or misappropriation, produce an incorrect gender performance. This performance must always nonetheless occur within the heterosexual matrix.

For these three characters, the double bind is most obviously expressed by their attitudes towards the prom. From the dialogue with her father at the beginning of the film, we know that Andie does not yet have a prom date, and indeed that this is a source of angst for her. When Andie tentatively broaches the possibility of not attending the prom to Iona (Andie's employer and a mentor of sorts), Iona states that while nobody enjoys the prom, participation in this particular high-school ritual is essential. Interestingly, the distinction is made here between what Andie terms a 'requirement' – such as the timetabled classes she reprimands Duckie for not attending – and the socially mandated, but no less essential events to which, as Iona asserts, 'you have to go'. The prom is signified as a privileged space of gender interpellation, which all students must attend.

Iona's status as a countercultural figure is significant here: though she is happy to defy sartorial and behavioural norms, she nonetheless attended the prom herself, indicating that this is an ideological imperative that transcends subcultural distinction. Her safeguarding of the dress she wore on the night likewise affirming the defining importance of the event. In a further effort to persuade Andie that she should go to the prom regardless of her potential enjoyment of it, Iona recounts the story of a friend who had not attended, and who, twenty

years later still feels something missing. Iona, filmed in medium-long shot, surrounded by the chaotic wares of her record shop performs and voices the actions of her friend as she ‘checks her keys...counts her kids, before she realises nothing is missing’. She then turns to face Andie as the camera cuts to a medium close-up of her face, which has now resumed a deadpan, sarcastic expression as she finishes with ‘she decided it must be side-effects of not going to her prom.’ Iona’s melodramatic performance indicates that her intonations are not to be taken too seriously, and that most likely this “friend” does not exist. The message transmitted remains intact, however; that regardless of students’ counter-cultural pretensions in other areas of their life, this traditional ritual is all-encompassing and compulsory; a key vehicle of interpellation into the heterosexual matrix.

It is the prom’s central role in teen’s gender and class interpellation which allows us to reflect on the event’s potential to complicate Butler’s work on gender interpellation (see particularly Butler, 1993: 121-122): though the theorist conceptualises the subjects’ ideological hailing into gender as a constantly iterative process, the cultural weight placed on achieving idealised masculinity or femininity at key rites of passage such as the prom highlights the need to re-conceptualise the process in a more nuanced manner. Perhaps instead then, Butler’s iterative interpellation is punctuated at varying points over a subject’s life by significant rituals. This is not to undermine the stakes involved in assuming idealised gender in day-to-day life, a state, according to the theorist, the subject is never fully able to embody. Rather, my re-conceptualisation acknowledges the significance of certain gendered requirements. More significantly, since Butler’s theorisation deals only with idealised *adult* masculinity and femininity, my proposal highlights the potential for a performativity which recognises the development of gender identity that necessarily occurs as an individual shifts into adulthood.

In contrast to Andie’s scenes with Duckie and Iona, where her subcultural identity is accepted, scenes at Steff’s house party compromise her ambivalent opposition towards the mainstream, since in this instance she wishes to blend in with the other characters. As Andie and Blane walk through the house, the camera is positioned behind them enabling spectators to observe the scrutinising gaze of the other students. One girl they pass, riding piggyback on another student, accosts Andie and remarks ‘Hey, aren’t you the girl in my art class?’ As Andie nods, the film cuts to a medium close-up of the girl on piggyback who taunts ‘Nice pearls – this isn’t a dinner party, honey.’ The girl’s comment both highlights Andie’s references to middle-class respectability through her choice of jewellery, but missed the subversive elements of her clothing. Patterns from Andie’s paisley ensemble are echoed in the soft furnishings of Steff’s home, indicating that the ironic distancing effect intended by Andie’s retro clothing does not work in this environment. Indeed, these patterns are nowhere to be found on the other party guests, whose clothing is studiously plain.

The implications of the scenes at Steff’s party are twofold. Firstly, Andie’s valiant efforts to conform and become acceptable to Blane and his peers, and their spiteful rejection of her in turn can be read as an affirmation of Butler’s bleakly comedic assertion that gender performances always fail to measure up to their regularised fictitious ideal (Butler, 1990:

189). Secondly, the scene confirms that no value system is absolute, since the interpretations of Andie's style vary according to her audience. For her friends, thrift-shop styling may well constitute an ironic rebuke to the persistent re-significations of mainstream fashion. For Steff's party guests however, her clothing appears simply odd and inappropriate.

Importantly, the two audiences for Andie's clothing set up competing ideals of femininity, a concept which in itself substantially complicates Butler's heterosexual matrix. Taking up Lacan's Symbolic as its structuring mainframe, Butler's work constructs idealised masculinity or femininity as notably singular, not allowing the possibility of multiple gender identities. Portraying Andie's citation of idealised femininity (idealised femininity in the context of her subculture) alongside that of Benny (idealised femininity among Steff's friends) allows us to see how subcultural analysis is able to complicate Butler's work on gender by demonstrating how multiple femininities might co-exist under the heterosexual matrix.

Interestingly, at Steff's party it is not Andie's gender identity but her lower class position that is presented as problematic. The complex construction of respectable gender and class in *Pretty in Pink* provides the opportunity to develop on Butler's work on performativity in terms of class, since, like gender, class identity too is the effect of repeatedly articulated power relations. In the next section, we examine Anthony Bleach's contention that *Pretty in Pink* is postfeminist in its representation of class and labour, looking specifically at Andie's gendered labour in re-fashioning her prom dress.

Class, Labour and the Prom

Bleach's study takes up Angela McRobbie's widely-cited definition of postfeminism, as 'feminism taken into account,' (McRobbie, 2004: 255 in Bleach 2010: 27) such that 'the feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s come to be undermined' (McRobbie, 2004: in Bleach, 2010: 27). Importantly, this is described not as a linear progression from feminism, but as a cyclical process, valorising the freedom of individual women's choices, but undermining their collective voice which might lead to wider structural reforms. Bleach contends that postfeminism is most distinct from feminism in its treatment of class; indeed, whilst feminism tackles social ills leading to women's exclusion, postfeminist culture links female liberation to individual transformation through aspiration and consumption. Bleach is surely right that the celebration of Andie's individual class ascension through her romance with Blane allows little scope to question the social division encountered in the film. Likewise, when Andie encourages her father to find employment, the film encourages us to believe his failure to do so is the result of Jack's personal problems – that his interest in doing so has been crippled by his wife's abandonment – than a question of social exclusion or external factors beyond his control such as a weak economic outlook.

The film's treatment of both paid and unpaid labour, and Andie's relationship with it, reveals the tensions between those individualist, consumptive strategies for transformation valorised

in postfeminism, and Andie's ability to construct her gender identity through thrift and creativity. As we shall see, such tensions are apparent in Andie's construction of her prom dress. "Work" here is understood as paid labour, such as that which Andie undertakes in Iona's record shop. As the film is centred on full-time high-school students however, work should also be understood as the study toward compulsory public exams necessitated by the education system. Butler's work allows us to conceptualise "work" in a third way; as the continual, repeated process by which subjects strive to achieve gendered normativity. Examining firstly paid labour, Bleach asserts that such work is seen only as important for financial gain, not as a means of self-expression (Bleach, 2010, p. 41). He illustrates his argument with a scene in the record shop, where, as Iona admires her work in decorating the ceiling she declares it a waste as none of her customers will notice her efforts. When Andie disputes this, since she is skilled at interior decoration, Iona responds sharply: 'If I'm good in bed should I be a whore?' Iona then, views her creativity as entirely separate and distinct from her means of financially supporting herself.

Moreover, Bleach contends that the treatment of work in *Pretty in Pink* is postfeminist, arguing that Andie's studies and Iona's small business are subsumed by their romantic interest in men, whose higher class position promises to lift the two women out of their lower status (Bleach, 2010: 43). Indeed, Andie is interrupted writing her essay by Blane's computer trick, which erases her work and places photos of the two side by side on the screen. For Bleach, this sequence and Iona's new relationship with the pet-shop owner highlights the film's postfeminist treatment of work: *Pretty in Pink* takes feminism into account by portraying Iona as a successful business owner, but undermines her economic autonomy in the portrayal of work as only temporarily empowering, as Bleach puts it, a way of 'marking time until Prince Charming comes to [the] rescue' (Bleach, 2010: 43).

Andie's portrayal however disputes Bleach's understanding of the importance of work in the film. Certainly, working part-time at Iona's record shop has utilitarian ends; the car (presumably) bought with her earnings allows her freedom of movement and provides her with the means to access parts of town otherwise off-limits to her. Her work also provides a narrative function, linking Andie to youth culture and the traditionally masculinised space of the record shop. Both paid and unpaid work is nonetheless portrayed as bearing transformative qualities for the film's characters. Andie's dressmaking skills allow her to go to the prom and, throughout the film, to express her gender identity on her own terms. Likewise, Jack's new found job leads him to dress in tailored shirts and trousers by the end of the film - an index of increased status and enhanced well-being having finally found employment.

To assess the relationship between work, postfeminism and the prom, we will closely examine the sequence which depicts Andie designing and making her dress for the prom. The scene begins in Iona's flat, where she has just given Andie her prom dress. The camera then zooms to a close-up on Andie's face, as the non-diegetic soundtrack fades in, conveying her sudden inspiration, immersing her so completely that her attentions are no longer focussed on

the action around her. The film next cuts to a long-shot of Andie's room where, walking quickly into the frame, she wears a baseball jacket over a crochet dress. This incoherent outfit underscores her sartorial freedom, which, in her work to create a conventionally feminine dress, she will now lose. In Butler's terms, we could infer that Andie's actions demonstrate the necessary, melancholic loss incurred in appearing to assume a position under the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990: 85). She does not mourn this loss however, as she distractedly throws her clothes onto her bed so as to focus on the task ahead of her. The long-shot allows us to see the various styles available to her in Andie's idiosyncratically-decorated room, whilst the position of the camera at the back of the wardrobe looking out into the room such that two items of clothing frame the shot underscores the importance of her sartorial choices to the continued formation of her subjecthood.

The film next cuts to a medium close-up of the two dresses laid out on the bed, as Andie examines their different fabrics and textures. Since one dress is provided by her father and the other by Iona, each dress represents a different alliance for Andie. Whilst Jack's dress represents her status as daughter, and therefore the requirement to maintain her father's lineage through heterosexual coupling, Iona's dress signifies their friendship and shared subcultural allegiance. Close-ups and medium close-ups portray Andie's work in creating the dress, at times sketching designs on her notepad, at others ripping apart seams, sewing others and scrutinising the dress in a full-length mirror. In Butler's terms, Andie's work to merge the two dresses demonstrates her attempts both to accommodate and subvert the gendered requirements of the heterosexual matrix. Indeed, she at once accepts her position as perpetuating her father's patriarchal lineage, even as the angularity of the resulting dress and subcultural allegiance with Iona disputes its primacy.

Several cross-cuts in the sequence provide a reflection on the film's portrayal of work, inviting comparisons between Andie and other characters as they make their preparations for the prom. The scene's first cross-cut depicts a medium close-up of her dog's face, as he silently watches her work. Andie's concerted effort contrasts with the enforced confinement and indulgence of her pet, setting the tone for the scene's later cross-cuts, where characters are shown in a similar state of inactivity. Indeed, after two further close-ups showing Andie's efforts, the film next cuts away to a medium close-up of Duckie, sitting scowling in his own bedroom. Contrasted with her friend's unproductive anger, Andie's labour is now represented as an effective means of overcoming Blane's earlier humiliation of her, when he retracted his earlier invitation to attend the prom with a cowardly lie. Andie's next flurry of work, shown only by her hands in close-up, foregrounding her effort and skill, allows Deutsch to provide an effective visual match as we cut to a close-up over-shoulder shot of hands turning over Andie's mother's picture and placing it in a drawer. The visual match here signifies the familial tie, as we observe these hands, being older and male, belong to Andie's father. From this brief shot, it appears that Jack has finally accepted his wife's departure, and has resolved to find employment. In the two above cross-cuts of Duckie's and Jack's contrasted activities, work is signified as a way of overcoming emotional disquiet.

The final cross-cuts of the sequence showing Blane's and Steff's preparations for the prom, are most significant in terms of the film's portrayal of work and consumption. The two activities are figured as a mutually exclusive dichotomy in the film, that is, those who work do not consume; those who consume do not work. This dichotomy is effectively shown in the record shop, where positions behind and in front of the counter occupied by Andie and Blane respectively portray the difference in the two characters' class backgrounds. Here, in contrast to Andie's increased urgency, signified by ever more rapid editing, the film cuts to a static, medium-long shot of Blane lounging on a bed wearing casual clothes, sipping from a mug. The film next cuts to a medium shot of Steff preening himself in front of a mirror as he smokes. A Butler-informed analysis provides a reading of the scene as a moment of anxiety, as Steff attempts to assume a posture of idealised masculinity which he will perpetually fail to embody.

Disputing Bleach's thesis that the Hughes-Ringwald films foreground consumerist, acquisitive behaviour, reading the film through Butler's work on performativity reveals that all subjects – even the elites represented here by Steff and Blane – must constantly work for their gendered and classed acceptability. Certainly, Andie is shown to have to work harder to achieve normative femininity; but what she believes is the innate gendered and class status of her wealthier peers is revealed to be the result of similar labours – of fraught discrimination among a vast array of consumer choice. The division constructed between work and consumerism in earlier scenes is spurious, since consumerist behaviour is shown to be another form of labour, through which subjects achieve gendered and classed acceptability under the heterosexual matrix.

In contrast to Bleach's argument that the film's postfeminism subsumes work in favour of individualistic consumerism, paid and unpaid work are portrayed as both transformative and universal. Indeed, Andie's work to design her prom dress replaces the purchase she contemplated in the mall. Read through Butler's work, the sequence showing Andie's dress-making collapses the contrast set up earlier in the film between working and consuming characters since both can be regarded as gendered and classed labour under the heterosexual matrix. Further, if performativity is a repeated set of actions which creates the illusion of a cohesive whole, then viewing Andie constructing her own gendered identity through dress-making portrays its genesis thereby undermining the illusion of naturalness on-screen. Foregrounding the labour required to participate in the event, the film disrupts the prom's conventional reading as the final result of a fairytale-like transformation.

The Prom

The prom is invoked from the very beginning of the film as a significant and inevitable rite-of-passage. In requiring students to attend as heterosexual couples, and necessitating the purchase of particular clothing, the event acts as a dual gatekeeper of heterosexuality and class status, even as it purportedly celebrates the end of compulsory education and the onset of adulthood. This section analyses the representation of the prom itself in *Pretty in Pink*,

firstly examining Andie's dress, before performing a close textual analysis of the prom itself. Finally, we will evaluate the role of the prom as the film's narrative closure – as trite erasure of the other issues at stake, or as showing a couple forming on their own terms.

Given the significance of Andie's clothing throughout the film and the effort taken to show her designing the dress in earlier scenes, Andie's prom dress certainly warrants closer inspection. Kearney and Best observe how the prom draws from the previous debutante *cotillions* where a girl's "coming out" heralded their marriageability (Kearney, 2002, in Pomerance and Gateward, 2002: 126; Best, 2000: 7). As a result, typical prom dresses have tended to incorporate an "hourglass" silhouette – wide at the shoulders and tight around the waist with a full skirt – emphasising a typically feminine figure whilst signifying reproductive ability and fertility. Narrow at the neck and slim-fitting to the knee, Andie's dress however refutes the typical aesthetic in favour of a 1980s avant-garde look, problematising the otherwise straightforward presentation of a girl attending her prom. Having witnessed Iona wearing it earlier in the film, we know that she gave Andie a traditionally-designed dress, which would have been suitable without alteration. The decision to radically change the dress therefore impacts on our perception of her gender identity. Arguably, the dress is the culmination of a series of contradictions apparent throughout the film: she is clad in pink, signifying heteronormative girlhood, belying the androgynous cut of her dress. She attends the prom, signifying compliance with the heterosexual ideal, yet in designing the dress herself, Andie asserts a singular autonomy over the production of her gender identity.

Examining the prom itself, we are first presented with a static medium close-up of the back wall of the hall where the prom is taking place. On that wall is a monochrome photograph of big band musicians in identical black and white suits. As the camera zooms out and cranes over the hall, we can see another, much smaller collection of musicians at work, administering to synthesisers and a backing track. Importantly, among the crowd of teens dancing in male/female pairs, the males are uniformly clad in the black and white jacket and trousers seen in the old photograph, signifying the prom as a timeless rite-of-passage essential to the socialisation process of all young adults.

Though music tastes, and technologies might change dramatically, the requirement for subjects to undergo this heterosexual socialisation ritual remains intact. In Butler's terms, the prom potentially provides a privileged instance of gender interpellation. Indeed, though the theorist argues that gender interpellation is a constantly iterating process, the prom constitutes an instance where gender performatives are more strongly policed, as is demonstrated by the rigidity of the dress codes, and the heterosexual coupling demanded as pre-requisites for attendance. As the prom simultaneously signifies the end of compulsory education, and for many, a departure from the family home as they depart for college, the event can be regarded as a gateway to adulthood. This interpretation echoes the subtext of Iona's advice – that although attendance is not formally enforced, there remains a confluence of power relations that demand compliance to the regulatory gender and classed ideal.

Occurring at the end of *Pretty in Pink*, the prom, and Andie's reunion with Blane provides the film's narrative closure. Moseley argues that the film's ending is 'too easy, almost trite' (Moseley, 2002: 406). This view is echoed by Roz Kaveney, who argues that Blane never fully repents for his earlier humiliation of Andie, making her sudden forgiveness leading to their final coupling 'problematic' (Kaveney, 2006: 32). Here, we are reminded of Schatz's work on narrative closure in genres of indeterminate space (Schatz, 1981: 29), where the synthesis of the two characters' value systems in forming a couple occurs at an emotive, climactic event, so minimising their loss of autonomy in becoming part of an idealised heterosexual unit. Likewise, the film's rush to pair Duckie off with an attractive female prom-goer at the end of the film seems forced; a bid to ensure any traces of ambiguous, or unfulfilled sexuality are purged from the narrative. The film's conclusion then arguably foregrounds the omnipresence and force of the heterosexual matrix by foreclosing any possibility of alternative desiring, questions regarding the suitability of the coupling itself, or indeed an interrogation of class disparities and social exclusions.

Kaveney's view that 'the character whose identity is most under threat in *Pretty in Pink*... is Blane' (Kaveney, 2006: 32) reveals an alternative interpretation however. During their short relationship together, Blane reveals that his parents are considered 'corporate royalty', and jokingly refers to himself as the 'Crown Prince of Denver Electric.' His invocation of "royalty" is revealing, since it implies a particularly rigid form of patriarchal lineage that depends on successful heterosexual couplings for its continuation. Later, Steff threatens to tell Blane's parents about his relationship with Andie, implying firstly that Blane has kept Andie's lower class position a secret from them, and secondly, that Blane's parents would react badly to this information. Blane's dismissal of Steff at the prom – a cipher for the expectations of his class background – to pursue Andie, suggests his will to defy those expectations.

The couple are reunited in the car park where the film ends as they kiss, affirming their successful reunion. Appropriating what Marc Augé describes as a 'non-place' for action that would normally be associated with the prom (Augé, 1995: 78), the film invites the possibility that Andie, with her idiosyncratic, and Blane, who has selected a partner outside of his class, have coined their own value system within this non-place. If so, this is a potential progression from Butler's work, where all value systems are ultimately subsumed within the heterosexual matrix. Looking back on their nascent romance in previous scenes, the relationship is seen to flourish only in the street, and alone in Hunting Club's stables. The continuation of the diegetic soundtrack between the ballroom, where the prom is taking place, and the car park complicates this view however, since the beginning of the scene has shown us that the two spaces are located far apart. The soundtrack's continuation encourages us to see the non-space of the car park as an extension of, rather than an alternative to, the prom. The potential radicality of their gesture is undermined, since the characters are seen to participate in the event as intended. In Butler's terms, the privileged site of interpellation constituted by the prom is reinstated as all-pervasive, even for those who sit on its margins.

Conclusion

Overall then, Butler's work contributes to an analysis of the prom in *Pretty in Pink*. In turn, we have observed how the prom in the film both instantiates and complicates the theorist's conceptualisation of performativity and the heterosexual matrix.

The resulting feedback loop has the following implications. Firstly, for our understanding of *Pretty in Pink* specifically, and the prom in general, Butler's conceptualisation of performativity reveals the labour involved in assuming a position under the heterosexual matrix. When read through Butler's work, Andie's preparations for the prom and sequences highlighting the investment of herself in her clothing throughout the film refute the post-feminist ideological rejection of work in favour of a transformative romance narrative. Further, by rendering apparent the performative structure of gender in the film brings out the different, though no less culturally-mandated, work undertaken of Blane and Steff in assuming idealised, upper-class masculinity.

Reading *Pretty in Pink* through Butler's work demonstrates the ambiguity in assuming a position under the heterosexual matrix; throughout, Andie is seen to negotiate a complex set of gendered and classed discourses in order to attend the prom. In attending the event, she complies with the heteronormative coming of age ritual. Andie's angular, avant-garde dress however implicitly refutes the gendered and classed compulsion instantiated by the prom, just as its bright pink colour continues to signify heteronormative femininity.

Turning to the implications for Butler's work, we discussed how the prom, as an evident site of gender and class interpellation, complicates the theorist's conceptualisation of this ideological practice. Indeed, the analysis of the prom here points towards a new model of interpellation which punctuates Butler's iterative model with significant rituals at which the subject's assumption of gender is more strictly policed. Importantly too, we observed how Andie's class identity is at least as contentious as her production of femininity. Steff's party, where class is figured as a constellation of cultural knowledge and expectations, then opens the possibility of considering class as performative, where, like the idealised gender that no subject can embody, an idealised class identity remains equally unattainable.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its reputation as Hollywood's uncomplicated commercial mainstream, the Teen Movie provides significant interest for gender and film scholars hoping to unpick the complex ideological mechanisms that see the prom as the inevitable, happy conclusion to adolescence.

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ⁱ For further examples of Butler extrapolating performativity to critical race theory, please see J Butler, 'Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia, in R Gooding-Williams, Ed., (1993), *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*. London: Routledge, 15-22. For examples of critics who have taken up Butler's work in relation to race, please see V Bell, Ed., (1999), *Performativity and Belonging*. London: Sage

ⁱⁱ Source: US Chart data, <http://www.billboard.com/#!/album/original-soundtrack/pretty-in-pink/65041>, [accessed 11.11.2010]