



2008

Pretty in pink

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Recommended Citation

Harthcock, A. (2008). Pretty in pink. In C. Mitchell & J. Reid-Walsh (Eds.) *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. Available from: digitalcommons.butler.edu/ccom_papers/24

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PRETTY IN PINK. *Pretty in Pink* is the coming-of-age film of a girl from the “wrong side of the tracks” who finds herself romantically entangled with a boy at the top of the social ladder in high school. Molly Ringwald plays only child Andie Walsh, a creative high school student with her own sense of style in both clothes and friends who becomes romantically involved with wealthy Blane McDonnagh (played by Andrew McCarthy).

Directed by John Hughes and set to a backdrop of 1980s alternative music, Andie’s styling and fashion and the film’s soundtrack leave an indelible impression on the viewer. The eclectic **recycled clothing** look and fashion risk taking by Andie and her friends led teenage girls around the country to scour secondhand stores in efforts to re-create the vintage look sported by Andie. In addition to the film’s emphasis on fashion, its soundtrack also plays an integral role. Emblematic of 1980s’ college radio, the soundtrack features many alternative artists, including the Psychedelic Furs, Suzanne Vega, Echo & the Bunnymen, the Smiths, INXS, and New Order. Although they had already achieved success underground, these artists were afforded exposure to the broader general audience after being featured on the *Pretty in Pink* soundtrack.

Fashion and the color **pink** rule Andie’s world. Her father, Jack (Harry Dean Stanton), is a down-on-his-luck, likable alcoholic who is still reeling from his wife’s having abandoned him and Andie. Although he puts on a strong front, it is mostly teenage Andie who serves as the parent for much of the movie. Other members of Andie’s makeshift family include Phil “Duckie” Dale (Jon Cryer), a fellow odd duck in the society of high school; and Iona (Annie Potts), the owner of the record store where Andie works, who also serves as Andie’s mentor, quirky fashion guide and surrogate mother.

Andie seems relatively at ease with her life until she is asked out by rich kid Blane. Blane takes Andie to a social event with “his” crowd, where he leaves her repeatedly feeling like an outsider, ashamed of her style and life. Likewise, when Andie invites Blane to hang out with her friends—Iona, Duckie, and Simon (Ringwald’s then real-life boyfriend, Dweezil Zappa)—Blane is left feeling like the outsider. Despite these complications, Andie remains enamored with Blane and accepts his invitation to the **prom**.



Andrew McCarthy (as Blane McDonnagh), Molly Ringwald (as Andie Walsh), and Jon Cryer (as Phil “Duckie” Dale) star in Howard Deutch’s 1986 film *Pretty in Pink*. (Courtesy of Photofest.)

Later, Blane’s “friend” Steff (James Spader) asks why he is interested in quirky Andie. Under Steff’s watchful eye, Blane tells Andie he forgot he had already asked someone else to prom before he asked Andie. Crushed, she yells that Blane should admit he thinks he’s too good for her. Ever-loyal Duckie defends Andie’s honor in a school-hall fight with Steff, who had been gloating over his influence.

Despite her disappointment, Andie decides that she will not allow Blane and his crowd to humiliate her publicly, and she prepares to attend prom alone. Her father, who has cleaned himself up and landed a steady job, gives Andie a used pink prom dress. From this dress, along with Iona’s donation of her own high school prom dress, Andie crafts an original

dress in her characteristic style. She arrives at the prom hesitantly, but when Duckie appears to serve as her wingtipped escort, she enters the prom with head held high.

Blane stands up to Steff, shakes hands with Duckie, and tells Andie he always believed in her, but not in himself. He then leaves the prom. Duckie, recognizing that his unrequited love for Andie will remain plutonic and that Blane is not such a bad guy, tells Andie to go after him. Andie catches up with Blane in the parking lot and they kiss. By the end of the film, each character has gone through his or her own coming-of-age experience, and has learned to move past tragedy to grow into a better, stronger young man or woman.

Pretty in Pink was the final film in a trilogy of collaboration between Hughes and Ringwald, which also included *Sixteen Candles* (1984) and *The Breakfast Club* (1985).

Further Reading

Bernstein, Jonathan. (1997). *Pretty in Pink: The Golden Age of Teenage Movies*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

ALLISON HARTHCOCK

PRINCESS PLAY. Although the figure of the princess has a long history that predates her appearance in the folktale collections published by Charles Perrault in the eighteenth century and the Brothers Grimm in the nineteenth century, the princess did not assume a predominant position in girls' popular culture until the end of the twentieth century. Despite assumptions about the primacy of the princess fantasy in girls' lives, pretending to be a princess remained an intermittent form of play until the Disney Company and other producers crafted highly profitable princess product lines. The subsequent commercialization and commodification of princess play among preschool and elementary school girls fueled debate among adults about whether princess "mania" is a blessing or a curse.

A History of the Princess in Girls' Popular Culture. Despite the widespread assumption that pretending to be a princess is a "timeless" and inherently "natural" form of girls' play, there is no evidence that girls from the colonial period through the Victorian era regularly engaged in princess play. Even after the nineteenth-century appearance in children's books of the figure of Pocahontas as a princess—along with fairy tales such as "Cinderella," "Sleeping Beauty," and "The Princess and the Pea," among others—pretending to be a princess was not among the many forms of play cataloged by child psychologists and documented by historians.

It was not until the early years of the twentieth century that the figure of the princess appeared more prominently in children's books. This occurred with the publication of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905), which was a revised and expanded version of her serialized novella, *Sara Crewe* (1888), and with publication of Frank Baum's *The Lost Princess of Oz* (1917). Yet girls were not encouraged to dress up as Indian princesses at summer camps until the more widespread appearance of Native American princesses in American print culture (e.g., in lithographs) during the 1920s. Although Disney produced a short cartoon about Cinderella in 1922, it was not until the Great Depression that the princess appeared more widely. Aiming to distract children from life's harsh realities with mythical fantasies, Disney produced the animated *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), Shirley Temple starred in a remake of *The Little Princess* (1939), and the Madame Alexander Company created a "Princess Elizabeth" doll (1937) based on Britain's Queen Elizabeth as a girl.